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Postcolonial France? The Problematism of Frenchness  
Through North African Immigration: A Literary Study of  
Metropolitan Novels, 1980-2000

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## Abstract

This thesis undertakes a literary study of contemporary novels published by metropolitan French writers between 1980 and 2000, and analyses their representation of the changing relationship between France and North Africa. The study's original contribution, in a field dominated by sociological studies and research into Francophone and 'beur' literature, is to investigate how writers from metropolitan France have responded to France's new status as a nation in the post-colonial epoch, and to the perceived challenges to French identity posed by immigration from North Africa. Given the intensity of political debate which has taken place in France concerning issues of immigration – debate which was heightened during the course of this study by the riots of November 2005 – the need for research on literature which views these issues from the perspective of the *métropole* is all the more important.

The aim of the study, then, is to view contemporary France through the prism of North Africa, and assess what literary representations might have to offer. It begins by analysing the specificity of the situation in France, arguing that this is largely due to the functioning of the French Republican tradition, which equates inassimilable difference with inferiority. Consequently, France's former colonies represent a privileged site of the Republican relationship with difference. This is particularly acute in the case of Algeria, by virtue of its former status as an integral part of the French Republic, and as a result of the large population of Algerian origin resident within France. It therefore offers a useful perspective from which to assess the extent to which French identities and systems of representation have been problematised in the post-colonial era.

The thesis adopts a two-pronged approach to these issues. Part One, which consists of two chapters, examines contemporary French attitudes towards the wider Maghreb, including examples from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Drawing on traditions which extend back to Montaigne and Montesquieu, it considers contemporary updatings of Orientalist traditions within which French writers have



explored other countries as seen from the Hexagon. It finds that although colonial attitudes towards France's former Other persist, in some cases these form the basis for a de-centring of the Hexagon, and the creation of new and nomadic forms of identity. Part Two consists of three chapters, which concern the singularity of Algeria's relationship with France. Drawing on Kristeva's work, the first of these concerns the hostility and aggression directed towards the French citizen of 'foreign' origin, whose presence threatens to blur the borders which constitute national and individual identity, and considers possible avenues of resolution.

The final two chapters examine the role of memory in shaping contemporary realities, first through the emergence of a national narrative which selectively incorporates aspects of France's colonial history. By focusing on a case-study – representations of the Paris massacre of 17 October 1961 – the thesis draws wider conclusions about the way in which attitudes to the Algerian War are changing, and the key role potentially played by literary and other artistic representation. The final chapter looks at recollections of life in Algeria in the work of two women writers, Marie Cardinal and Hélène Cixous. It concludes that their early experience there of conflict and otherness was fundamental in shaping the development of their writing project, and that their literary memories destabilise notions of a unified 'Frenchness'.

In the Conclusion, the thesis considers avenues for future research, and offers some final conclusions. Having noted the limited influence of postcolonial theory within France, it nonetheless finds that metropolitan novelists are engaged in exploring the potential ambivalences which underpin postcolonial theory, albeit in a literary rather than theoretical mode, and that consequently, at their best, the texts examined offer readers a de-centred vision of the Hexagon. Drawing on the work of Derrida and Attridge, the study concludes that, because literature is open to new forms of invention and creativity, it represents a privileged site of the encounter with otherness and, as such, offers one potential means for achieving Kristeva's aim of 'une éthique du respect pour l'inconciliable'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), p. 269.

## Introduction

This thesis is concerned with issues of French identity, during the contemporary period 1980-2000. It considers this within the intellectual framework of postcolonial theory and, more specifically, through the prism of France's evolving relationship with its former colonies in North Africa. From the height of colonization until the mid-twentieth century, French military domination ensured that the relationship between France and the Maghreb was that of colonizer to colonized. However, throughout that period, and increasingly during the post-war era, this relationship has been put under strain by the perceived consequences resulting from the arrival in France of large numbers of workers from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, often followed by their families. As one of the most significant social changes in a period of pronounced social change within France, the question of North African immigration, with its subsequent issues of integration, has therefore reframed the old relationship between the French State and its dependent colonies.

The majority of existing literary research in this area has concentrated on the issues of marginal, formerly colonised groups. This includes the ways in which the North African Periphery has begun to establish its own identity as a series of independent entities, expressing resistance to the influence of old paradigms. Equally, research has focused on the challenges facing the marginal communities of Maghrebi origin within France as they seek to form and express their cultural identity within a Hexagonal location. This study focuses on an area neglected by existing research: it analyses how writers from metropolitan France have responded to France's new status as a nation in an era after colonisation, and investigates how they frame and express France in relation to North Africa, and in response to the challenges to French identity posed by immigration from North Africa. The need for a study which investigates these issues from the perspective of the *métropole* is all the more pressing given the continuing debate around issues of integration. This thesis, then, views contemporary France through the prism of North Africa, and assesses what literary figurings of these contemporary political issues might have to offer.

In his book, *Nous et les Autres*, Tzvetan Todorov traces the historical development of French attitudes towards the inhabitants of other countries.<sup>1</sup> Together with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Todorov's work forms the backdrop to Chapter One, which looks at the evolution of French discourses of exoticism which have been and are directed at North Africa.<sup>2</sup> However, the dichotomous colonial relationship between Self and Other suggested by Todorov's title has been challenged in recent years by the large numbers of immigrants arriving from North Africa. Their presence within France, and the status of their descendants as French citizens, demonstrates the arbitrary and illusory nature of such a constructed opposition, and bears witness to a postmodern society which is characterized by fluidity and the breakdown of fixed categories of identity.

However, the immigrant presence has also been perceived by some sections of French society as a threat to national identity and the existing balance of power. The increase in social tensions has been accompanied by the rise, during the 1980s, of 'beur' activism, and national controversies such as 'l'affaire du foulard'.<sup>3</sup> On a political level the issue of immigration has sparked debate over French nationality laws, whilst the increase in immigrant numbers has been accompanied by a rise in support for the politics of the Far Right, which led to the unprecedented success of the Front national (FN) in the 2002 presidential elections. This thesis focuses on the period 1980-2000, since this is the period during which issues regarding immigration began to enter the wider French political debate, largely as a result of the success of 'beur' involvement in politics and literature. However, the riots which took place across France in November 2005, during the course of this research, signalled continued frustration and discontent amongst the second and third 'génération beur', and the sporadic outbreaks of violence which have occurred since then suggest that, on a social level at least, certain issues remain unresolved.

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<sup>1</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les Autres: La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London and New York: Penguin, 1995 [1978]).

<sup>3</sup> The term 'beur' is a slang, or 'verlan', term derived from the French word 'Arabe'. Coined during the 1970s by Parisian youths of Maghrebi origin as a term of self-designation, it was soon appropriated by mainstream medias, whereupon it became problematised as a pejorative term. I use it where necessary in inverted commas, in the absence of an acceptable, succinct alternative.

## Conceptions of identity

Few areas of scholarship have received as much attention in recent years as the subject of identity, making it necessary to problematize the use of the term even as it is introduced. The previous section referred to ‘issues of French identity’, and declared the existence of an historical binary between the Centre and the Periphery, the colonizer and the colonized. On one level, the use of such ‘hard’ terms is difficult to sustain: since Freud invoked the existence of the unconscious, any kind of unified individual identity has come to be regarded as illusory, whilst on a collective level the notion of group identity, whether it be based on gender, nationality, ethnicity or other variables, has been seen as at best ‘imagined’, at worst essentialized or artificially homogenized.<sup>4</sup> This is evident in the image of the model individual associated with the phrase ‘French identity’, which perhaps invokes Republican notions of a white, male, active (therefore monied) citizen. Taken at the most basic level, then, ‘French identity’ excludes women, those citizens who inhabit the Départements d’Outre-Mer, or the descendants of former French colonies in Africa. Indeed, being arguably Paris-centric, it raises questions about the place occupied by regional identities (Breton, Catalan, Corsican and Alsatian, amongst others). Given this breadth of diversity, the notion of a unified France and its model citizen is therefore difficult to locate, even within the Hexagon.

Indeed, on closer inspection, even the apparent centrality of the Hexagon has been exposed as illusory, as Frederick Cooper argues:

Much recent scholarship has exaggerated the centrality of the nation-state in the ‘modern’ era, only to exaggerate its demise in the present. Post-Revolutionary France [...] cannot be understood as a nation-state pushing into colonies external to it [...] This complex, differentiated empire, expanded into continental Europe by Napoleon, did not produce a clear and stable duality of metropole/colony, self/other, citizen/subject. Political activists in the colonies, until well into the 1950s, were not all

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [1983]); *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990); Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

intent upon asserting the right to national independence; many sought political voice within the institutions of the French Empire while claiming the same wages, social services, and standards of living as other French people. If one wants to rethink France from its colonies, one might argue that France only became a nation-state in 1962, when it gave up its attempt to keep Algeria French, and tried for a time to redefine itself as a singular citizenry in a single territory.<sup>5</sup>

Cooper's deconstruction of the binaries attributed to post-Revolutionary France serves to underline the illusory nature of any identity category, but it also points to the revisionist nature of contemporary French attitudes which, post-1962, have served to sustain the notion of a unified France. As the later section on the French Republican tradition will show, late twentieth-century French political and intellectual discourses have sought to re-appropriate aspects of the Revolution in the interests of presenting a version of the Hexagon as essential and unchanging. Within this intellectual tradition, and drawing on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, it is possible to speak of metropole/colony, self/other, citizen/subject binaries in a way that is meaningful to a broad constituency of contemporary French society – regardless of whether this is representative of post-Revolutionary France.

French attempts to control and redefine the limits of 'French identity' are exemplary of the contradictions inherent within the usage of the word 'identity', according to Cooper:

Much recent scholarship on identity uses the same word for something that is claimed to be general but soft – that is, everybody seeks an identity, but identity is fluid, constructed, and contested – and for something that is specific and hard, that is, the assertion that being 'Serbian', 'Jewish', or 'lesbian' implies that other differences within the category should be overlooked in order to facilitate group coherence.<sup>6</sup>

In the general emphasis on the fluid, constructed nature of identity, there is a tendency for academics to overlook the fact that 'hard', essentialist versions of identity have proved remarkably resistant in political and media discourses. This is evident not only within the extremist rhetoric of the FN, but in more mainstream debate, as Jacques Chirac's 1991 speech concerning 'le bruit et l'odeur' of

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, p. 9.

immigrants, or Nicolas Sarkozy's 2005 references to the youth of the *banlieue* as 'racaille' suggests. Since the questions asked by this thesis are generated by the political realities of contemporary French society, it is therefore necessary to take as a starting-point the terms and discourses being employed within France in order to unpack and understand the social forces at work, albeit acknowledging that these discourses must immediately be problematized. As Bill Marshall observes, "'Nation" and "identity" are ever provisional, historically contingent, ceaselessly elaborated constructions, and yet at some level they are inescapable'.<sup>7</sup> He goes on to model the ongoing tension between discourses of the nation and the everyday, performative practices of constructing provisional identities with reference to language theory:

We must imagine, therefore, a constant tension between forces of homogeneity and heterogeneity, between the centripetal and centrifugal. (I am drawing here on Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the forces in language between an inert unitary form and the plurality and movement of 'heteroglossia': 'Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear.') It is this tension that creates and that is the 'national allegory'.<sup>8</sup>

One of the concerns of this thesis is the attempt to understand the ways in which this tension of the 'national allegory' operates between discourses of a single, fixed 'French national identity', which is defined in relation to an equally homogenized North African otherness (neglecting the specificities of Arabs, Berbers and *harkis*), and performative practices in which alternative forms of 'Frenchness' are enacted in daily life. The investigation begins with the dominant discourses, which have created the perception that members of the community of immigrant origin are in some way different and so represent a threat to 'our' way of life. The aim in assuming such rhetoric as a starting point for the thesis is not to reinforce the binary assumptions and fixed notions of identity that it involves, but to acknowledge that such perceptions, however fallacious, persist within French society, and continue to influence the daily attitudes and actions of large sections of the population. At the same time, the study explores the notion that influences from North Africa, and

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<sup>7</sup> Bill Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Marshall, *Quebec National Cinema*, p. 3, quoting Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 270-72.

Algeria in particular, have played an important and often unacknowledged part in contemporary constructions of 'Frenchness', and that consequently the field of 'French identities' extends far beyond the Hexagon. While much postcolonial theory has emphasised the role of concepts of 'creolization' and 'métissage' in constructions of new identities, this thesis takes a position closer to that of the work of Paul Silverstein, who sees the relationship between the French nation and Algerian immigrants, not as an example of cultural hybridization, but as a dialectical relationship within which the two countries form a single, mutually influential, space.<sup>9</sup>

### Immigration and French society

The sociological issues related to the 'beur' community within France have been much studied, and they are not the focus of this research although inevitably they form part of its context.<sup>10</sup> However, given the persistence of discourses that claim that 'hard', unified French identity is under threat, and that France is being colonised by invading barbarians, it is helpful to review briefly some of the research that has been conducted in this area, in an attempt to disengage the issues from the emotive rhetoric which surrounds them. Alec G. Hargreaves highlights a disconnection between perception and reality when he says, 'It has become commonplace to assert that unlike earlier minority groups, who came mainly from Europe, those of Third World origin are difficult if not impossible to incorporate into French society'.<sup>11</sup> He points to the prevalence of this notion not only amongst the public and politicians of both the Left and the Right (including, of course, the extreme Right) but amongst various academics.<sup>12</sup> This belief underpins resentment

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> For details see *Race, Discourse and Power in France*, ed. by Maxim Silverman (Aldershot: Avebury, 1991); Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism and Citizenship in Modern France* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992); and Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. xiv.

<sup>12</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity*, p. xv.

towards immigrants from the Maghreb, and particularly the Algerians who make up the largest immigrant group in France. A number of surveys conducted between 1980 and 2000 have attempted to quantify the extent of this resentment. The perceived inability of recent immigrants to assimilate is viewed as a threat, with a 1985 poll finding that 66% of those questioned felt that France was in danger of losing her national identity if nothing was done to limit the foreign population, a figure which rose to 75% in a similar 1989 poll.<sup>13</sup> Attitudes have been further hardened by the worsening economic situation, which is seen to negate the primary reason for having an immigrant presence in France, that is, the need for unskilled labour.

It has been widely recognised that the impact of economic slow-down has negatively affected attitudes towards immigrants on every occasion since the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Whereas when the economy is performing well, immigrants are seen as performing useful tasks, a weak economy leads to the view that immigrants are a burden on society. In turn, this leads to an increase in those thinking that the integration of immigrants is impossible.<sup>15</sup> As further evidence of the anti-Third World trend,<sup>16</sup> in surveys ranking the degree of integration of various nationalities, European immigrants top the findings while Algerians are consistently least well viewed.<sup>17</sup> The proximity of Europeans, with their shared Christian faith and history of empire, means that they are regarded as being more similar, culturally, to the French. On the other hand, it appears that, for many, the developing world remains a site of poverty and backwardness, with the religion of Islam symbolising a different world-view.

Such popular sentiments may be established as common-sense truths, yet the perception is not supported by the evidence. Numerous sources suggest that the European immigrants who today are viewed as the very model of successful

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<sup>13</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity*, p. 151.

<sup>14</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), p. 54; Gérard Noiriel, 'Français et étrangers', in *Les Lieux de mémoire: vol. 3, tome 1, Les France*, ed. by Pierre Nora, 7 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992), pp. 274-319 (p. 283); Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity*, p. 156.

<sup>16</sup> Terms such as 'Third World' and 'developing world' have been problematised by theorists such as Arturo Escobar. For details, see Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity*, p. 155.



integration were considered equally inassimilable when they first arrived in France.<sup>18</sup> Immigrants from countries such as Italy and Belgium arrived at the end of the nineteenth century and were joined in the inter-war period by immigrants from Spain and Russia. Large numbers of Poles also arrived, only to be forcibly repatriated by the French authorities during the slump of the 1930s. The widespread negativity towards them increased during periods of economic depression, erupting sporadically in racist violence. One of the worst incidents was an assault against Italian workers which occurred in 1893 at Aigues-Mortes. While official records refer to the deaths of eight Italians, with fifty injured, Noiriél notes that *The Times* reported fifty deaths, with 150 injured.<sup>19</sup> Guillaumin points to this as evidence that the current situation is not “new”, but she also acknowledges that the French public is generally oblivious to the facts of the past.<sup>20</sup> Her explanation for this is that, although families may remember certain foreign individuals, in general the shortness of collective popular memory has not preserved an awareness of immigrants in French history. In support of this view, Noiriél argues that, in contrast to the American nation, in which immigration forms an aspect of the U.S. myth of origins, the foreigner was excluded from the founding myths of the Republic.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, he claims that immigrants have been excluded from national memory, allowing history effectively to be rewritten in the popular imagination. Noiriél argues that the absence of immigrants from the national narrative explains the French assumption that European immigrants are inherently more assimilable – an assumption which belies the hostility experienced by nineteenth- and twentieth-century European immigrants.<sup>22</sup>

Public concern has led successive governments to introduce increasingly tough measures in an attempt to control immigration. Yet evidence suggests that the popular perception of the threat from North Africans is not justified. Research conducted with young Muslims, and published in 1988, found that nine out of ten

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<sup>18</sup> Colette Guillaumin, “Race” and Discourse’, in *Race, Discourse and Power in France*, ed. by Maxim Silverman (Aldershot: Avebury, 1991), pp. 5-13 (p. 7); Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism and Citizenship in Modern France* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 72-3; Noiriél, ‘Français et étrangers’, p. 283; and Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’, and Ethnicity*, xv.

<sup>19</sup> Noiriél, ‘Français et étrangers’, p. 286.

<sup>20</sup> Guillaumin, “Race” and Discourse’, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Noiriél, ‘Français et étrangers’, pp. 276-83.

<sup>22</sup> Gérard Noiriél, ‘Immigration: Amnesia and Memory’, *French Historical Studies*, 19.2 (1995), 367-80.

expressed a strong desire to be integrated into French society, compared with eight out of ten from Catholic immigrant backgrounds.<sup>23</sup> Research also suggests that while Islam, frequently a source of French anxiety, remains a strong cultural symbol for young Maghrebis, this remains at a cultural rather than religious level with at least one respondent able to state that he was ‘a Muslim atheist’.<sup>24</sup> In another survey, conducted in 1993, seven out of ten young Maghrebis said they felt closer to French culture than to that of their parents.<sup>25</sup> These figures are consistent with the attitudes of earlier immigrant groups who are seen as having successfully integrated, and suggest that the aspirations of young Maghrebis lie in the direction of integration.

However French mainstream perceptions are quite at odds with this: in a 1990 poll less than 30% of French people surveyed saw second generation Maghrebis as mainly French, whilst half viewed them primarily as Arabs.<sup>26</sup> Eight out of ten thought it would be difficult or impossible to integrate young Maghrebis born in France – despite the fact that they are already officially French.<sup>27</sup> Added to this is the fact that while two-thirds of the mainstream population said that there are too many immigrants in France, a similar proportion had had no significant personal dealings with immigrants.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that media reports and stereotypes contribute more to the image of immigrants than does direct personal experience. In light of these findings, Hargreaves concludes that ‘the principal obstacles now blocking the social incorporation of immigrants and their descendants lie not in their cultural particularities but in the unfavourable conditions prevailing in the labour market and the exclusionary attitudes found among the French themselves’.<sup>29</sup> While it is perhaps time to revisit this conclusion, drawn in 1995, through new research conducted in the light of changing socio-political realities, Hargreaves’s work is timely and pertinent to the period of this study.

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<sup>23</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’, and Ethnicity*, p. 148.

<sup>24</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’, and Ethnicity*, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’, and Ethnicity*, p. 148.

<sup>26</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’, and Ethnicity*, p. 159.

<sup>27</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’, and Ethnicity*, p. 159.

<sup>28</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’, and Ethnicity*, p. 158.

<sup>29</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race’, and Ethnicity*, p. 159.

## Specificities of the French situation

Immigration and the issues arising from the integration of immigrants are, of course, far from being solely a French concern: since 1945 most European states have seen, and indeed often welcomed, an increase in immigration, especially where this was necessary for post-war reconstruction. In many cases, the increase followed decolonisation, with large numbers arriving from the Indian sub-continent in the case of Britain, in a parallel to North Africa's relationship with France, or arriving as a result of historical ties between countries, such as Turkey and Germany. However, there are a number of factors which contribute to the specificity of France's situation. The first of these is France's Republican tradition. Hargreaves points out that, unlike other nations such as America, for whom immigration was an intrinsic element of the process of nation-building, in France 'the central myths of national identity were thus in place before the rise of large-scale immigration into France during the nineteenth century'.<sup>30</sup> These myths date back to the revolution of 1789, and form the cherished framework of the modern French nation. The Revolution is credited with notions such as universalism, assimilationism, and secularism, although the terms themselves in some cases were not employed at the time. Most notably, the Revolution swept away the structure of the *ancien régime*, replacing hierarchy with laws made by a single legislature which articulated the will of the sovereign people. All members of the nation were proclaimed equal before the law, and no intercessory element was permitted to exist between individual citizens and the State. The nation was defined as indivisible, and no special interest groups were accorded particular rights on the basis of, for example, their faith. Although influenced by the thinkers of the American Declaration of Independence, the Rights of Man proclaimed in 1789, and the Constitution which followed it in 1791, established a distinct view of the French nation. This notion of a social contract has been contrasted often with the Germanic

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<sup>30</sup> Hargreaves, *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity*, p. 5.

tradition of the *Volksgeist*, which is based on ties of blood, soil, and what Julia Kristeva refers to as 'esprit populaire', and which is exemplified by Herder.<sup>31</sup>

However, commentators were not slow to note the tensions inherent in the Republican tradition. Rousseau was the first to note the contradiction in the title of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, whereby some rights belonged to all of humanity, whilst others, notably participation in the exercise of political power, were restricted to the citizen – and to the 'active' citizen at that, since women and poorer men were excluded.<sup>32</sup> The tension extends to the concept of assimilation, which aimed at the promotion of cultural uniformity. As Silverman points out, from a political perspective, it appears universalist and egalitarian, whilst in cultural terms it is particularist and intolerant.<sup>33</sup> In theory, it underpinned France's colonial *mission civilisatrice* and, in return for the adoption of French norms and values, it appeared to offer equal political rights to the indigenous peoples of France's colonies.<sup>34</sup> In practice this was far from being the case, since it would have destroyed France's colonial authority; indeed, numerous commentators have pointed out that to guard against this possibility, complete assimilation was impossible. To paraphrase the Portuguese theorist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'to be assimilated is *emphatically* not to be [French]'.<sup>35</sup> Only a tiny number of indigenous elites were granted access to either education or political rights, a factor which was to influence the growth in nationalist feeling in many of France's colonies. Even in Algeria, which, rather than being a colony, officially constituted part of metropolitan France,

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<sup>31</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir* (Paris: Rivages, 1990), p. 23. See also Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-69), 4 vol., tome 1, pp. 248-9.

<sup>33</sup> Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, pp. 19-33.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

<sup>35</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-identity', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 39.2 (2002), 9-44 (p. 14), emphasis in original. Gyan Prakash makes a similar point with reference to the equivocal figure of the Western-educated, English-speaking Indian, encouraged to become civilised and Western ('be like me'), yet fixed in perpetual otherness ('don't be like me') by a particular lack (the Indian's inability to ride horses was used to keep him out of the covenanted civil service). Gyan Prakash, 'Can the "Subaltern" Ride? A Reply to O'Hanlon and Washbrook', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34.1 (1992), 168-184.

the majority of Algerians held the status of French subjects rather than French citizens.<sup>36</sup>

Within both the colonial and postcolonial context, therefore, France's policy of assimilation has been a source of resentment for those peoples who have lived its effects as an imposition. Within the Franco-French community, the attitude has been one of adherence to old norms, with Barlet noting the inability or unwillingness to imagine 'accepting a shift in our own identity, enriched by the experience of others and the confrontation with other cultures'.<sup>37</sup> The unwillingness to countenance an evolution of identity is symptomatic of French attitudes towards difference, which Silverman argues is represented in the colonialist urge to 'civilise' by assimilation, absorption or neutralisation or, within racist discourse, to 'fix' them in 'otherness', insisting on difference and expulsion.<sup>38</sup> The result of this, he concludes, has been the failure of the policy of assimilation to overcome French hostility to North African immigration. Todorov takes a similar view of French conceptions of difference, in what he refers to as 'les deux figures élémentaires de l'altérité'.<sup>39</sup> According to this logic, the Republican tradition views the Other either as equal and therefore as the same or identical ('égalité-identité', the logic of assimilation), or a view that sees them as different and therefore as unequal or inferior ('différence-inégalité', the logic of slavery and massacre). Difference which cannot be assimilated – and in practice this applies to all difference, at least in colonial terms – inevitably equates to inferiority.

It might be argued that the other factors responsible for the specificity of France's contemporary relationship with the Maghreb result from the Republican tradition and, more specifically, the consequences of its policy of assimilation. The historian Benjamin Stora has traced French attitudes to Algeria through the colonial era to the Algerian War and beyond, from the refusals to allow Algerians either

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<sup>36</sup> This was complicated by the fact that Algerian Jews were granted French citizenship by the 1870 *décret Crémieux*, a decision which increased tensions between the various communities within Algeria. We will return to the implications of the arbitrary nature of citizenship in Chapter Five.

<sup>37</sup> Olivier Barlet, *Les Cinémas d'Afrique noire: le regard en question* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), p. 134.

<sup>38</sup> Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation*, pp. 19-33.

<sup>39</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique: la question de l'autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 48.

political representation or full citizenship, through to the lasting French bitterness and humiliation at losing the war:

Près de quarante ans après l'indépendance de l'Algérie en 1962, la répétition des situations vécues pendant cette histoire coloniale semble de plus en plus présente dans l'actualité française. Par-delà le processus qui a vu la séquence guerre d'Algérie s'enraciner dans le débat franco-français [...] c'est en fait l'ensemble du déplacement de valeurs, habitudes et sentiments élaborés au temps de la longue période de l'Algérie française (132 ans) qui doit être analysé.<sup>40</sup>

He concludes that historical events have influenced contemporary attitudes towards immigrants and their descendants, and are directly responsible for the increase in French racism towards North Africans.

Introducing her study of francophone literature of the Maghreb, Valérie Orlando supports this view, and claims that the two main issues for the Franco-Maghrebi relationship are the persistent neo-colonial stereotyping which is the residue of French colonialism, and *refoulement*, or France's refusal to engage with memories of the Algerian War.<sup>41</sup> Since the question of the extent to which colonial discourses and practices towards the Maghreb persists in France today forms a facet of the main thrust of this thesis, I will not examine it here, but allow the evidence of the novels throughout the following chapters, but particularly in Chapter One, to be presented. The question of *refoulement*, which the references to Stora have already introduced, will be examined in more detail in Chapter Four. However, Orlando's claim that the residue of colonialism, and refusal to engage with the process of Algerian decolonisation are the defining issues of the contemporary Franco-Maghrebi relationship begs a question: given that postcolonialism provides the intellectual framework for this thesis, to what extent can France be said to be a postcolonial country?

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<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Stora, *Le Transfert d'une mémoire: de l'Algérie française' au racisme anti-arabe* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Valérie Orlando, *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), p. 2.

## Postcolonial France?

The notion of treating France as a postcolonial country is somewhat unconventional, and requires both justification and definition. The Portuguese theorist, Santos, is representative of many academics in his attitude towards the postcolonial:

Postcolonialism must be understood in two main senses. The first one concerns a historical period, the period that succeeds the independence of the colonies. The second one is a set of (mainly performative) practices and discourses that deconstruct the colonial narrative as written by the colonizer, and try to replace it by narratives written from the point of view of the colonized. In the first sense, postcolonialism translates itself into a set of economic, sociological, and political analyses of the construction of new states. In the second sense, postcolonialism is part of cultural, linguistic, and literary studies, and privileges textual exegesis and the performative practices to analyze the systems of representation and the identity processes.<sup>42</sup>

His emphasis on ‘the construction of new states’, and ‘narratives written from the point of view of the colonized’ appears to exclude imperial powers such as France or Britain from any definition of ‘the postcolonial’. Yet the countries that were formerly imperial powers cannot but participate in the historical period that is post-colonialism, and, as this thesis will argue, their writers and intellectuals do not stand aside from engaging in practices and discourses that deconstruct the colonial narrative, although they are differently located. In their theoretical work, Derrida and Cixous have shown that the kind of binary opposition exemplified by the colonizer/colonized relationship is ultimately restrictive and sterile for both terms.<sup>43</sup> It is therefore logical that individuals from the former imperial power would engage in the deconstruction of narratives which are out of date but which continue to exert a malevolent influence within French culture.

To assume that postcolonialism does not extend to the former colonizers is to assume, as Santos does, that French colonialism was succeeded, unequivocally, by a

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<sup>42</sup> Santos, ‘Between Prospero and Caliban’, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Et le mouvement par lequel chaque opposition se constitue pour faire sens est le mouvement par lequel le couple se détruit. Champ de bataille générale. Chaque fois une guerre est livrée. La mort est toujours à l’œuvre.’ Hélène Cixous, *La Jeune née* (Paris: Union Générale d’éditions, Collection 10/18, 1975), pp. 116-7.

monolithic French neo-colonialism. Referring to 'European colonial powers', he says:

The end of colonialism was a moment of Prospero inasmuch as the colonial powers, facing the inordinate political costs of maintaining the colonies, looked for a new and more efficient form to reproduce domination over them in the recognition of their independence. This became known as neo-colonialism.<sup>44</sup>

While this may be true at a certain policy level, to assert that it as a general truth would appear to oversimplify the complex play of discourses at work in any cultural relationship. Indeed, Santos, acknowledging the work of Fanon and Memmi, recognises the ambivalence at work in the link between colonizer and colonized, which is both dialectically destructive and creative.<sup>45</sup> This ambivalence is perhaps most evident in the work of Homi K. Bhabha, where the stereotype is shown to contain both negative elements, and the opposite of those negative elements, so that the negro is at once the savage and the dignified servant, the figure of bestial sexuality, but also the childlike innocent.<sup>46</sup> A similar ambivalence is manifested with regard to the feminine, which has simultaneously been conceptualised in negative terms of lack and absence, and valorised as a source of nurturing and redemptive goodness. Nancy Hartsock draws attention to the similarities in the way in which the colonised and women are constituted by dominant discourses;<sup>47</sup> it is therefore hardly surprising that the feminine as an expression of the ambivalence of otherness appears as a recurrent theme throughout the present study.

Bhabha draws attention to the complexity of power relations at work in Orientalism when he says, 'There is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser, which is an historical and theoretical simplification'.<sup>48</sup> If this degree of ambivalence can be accepted within the

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<sup>44</sup> Santos, 'Between Prospero and Caliban', p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Santos, 'Between Prospero and Caliban', p. 13; Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961); Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur et d'une préface de Jean-Paul Sartre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

<sup>46</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Nancy Hartsock, 'Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories', in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, ed. by Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 21-22.

<sup>48</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,' in *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976 – 84*, pp. 210-29, ed. by



colonial relationship, it would seem to be a mistake to dismiss contemporary relations as simply and unproblematically ‘neo-colonial’. Since Santos uses the term ‘postcolonial’ to refer to ‘systems of representation and identity processes’,<sup>49</sup> and given that this thesis takes as its subject the contemporary production of such systems and processes within the Hexagon, one of the aims of my research will be to consider the ways in which French conceptions of North Africa have evolved, and to ascertain the extent to which France can be said to have become ‘postcolonial’. Following convention, I will differentiate between contexts by using ‘post-colonial’ to refer to the period which follows colonialism, and ‘postcolonial’ in the sense developed above, to reference practices and systems of culture and representation which work against colonial narratives.

Whilst this study is concerned with the production in France of systems of representation and identity which constitute the postcolonial, it should be noted that postcolonial theory has met with little interest within the Hexagon.<sup>50</sup> This is despite the intellectual debt owed by postcolonial theorists to francophone writers such as Fanon and Memmi, whose work was instrumental in the development of postcolonial thought, and more generally, to French theorists of alterity including Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Kristeva, and others. Charles Forsdick offers the following explanation for this apparent paradox:

The ‘postcolonial’, often perceived in France as an Anglo-Saxon invention emerging from an obsession with the ‘politiquement correct’, is held at bay, however, despite – or even as a result of – the potential illumination it offers to the culture and institutions of contemporary France. Ideological attempts to exclude the other range from the radical centralization of Republicanism to the desire for ethnic homogenization on the Far Right, but Frenchness has never successfully been constructed as a core, seamless identity. However, the postcolonial problematic rarely emerges from the French discourses of politics or culture.<sup>51</sup>

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Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen and Diana Loxley (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 158.

<sup>49</sup> Santos, ‘Between Prospero and Caliban’, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> A notable exception to this is Jean-Marc Moura, who is one of the few French critics to have engaged with postcolonial theory. See Jean-Marc Moura, ‘Francophonie et critique postcoloniale’, *Revue de littérature comparée*, 1 (1997), 59-87; and *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> Charles Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures: The Persistence of Diversity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 35-6.

A discussion of the postcolonial in the French context inevitably involves comment on the contribution of the Republican tradition, and its policy of assimilation in particular. While a debate is currently taking place over whether the Republican tradition can provide the solution to France's social problems, or whether it forms part of the difficulty, the centrality of Republican values is perhaps one reason for the lack of interest that has hitherto been shown by French theorists in postcolonial theory.

### Scope of the thesis

The thesis therefore examines representations of contemporary France seen through the prism of North Africa. It is evident that in doing so, any assessment of French society will necessarily be partial and limited in scope. It does not, for example, investigate the effects of other forces which are powerfully at work in shaping contemporary France. These forces include the effects of France's relationship with other European nations, to which de Gaulle turned in the aftermath of the Evian accords, having concluded that France's time as an imperial power was coming to a close, and that her future lay in influencing the future of what was to become the European Union. The success of France's renewed relationship with (West) Germany, which was the frustration of successive British Prime Ministers because it allowed the two countries to influence decisively the direction of the European Union, is indisputable. However, the ability of the political elites to sell their project of closer economic and political integration to the French people has been called into question, first by the 1992 referendum on the Treaty of Maastricht, which was carried by the slimmest of margins, and more recently by the embarrassing rejection, in 2005, of the proposed European Constitution. Furthermore, the decisiveness of French influence within Europe is threatened by the momentum of EU enlargement, which saw the number of countries in the EU rise from fifteen to twenty-five in 2005, and which will increase further with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, while discussions about Turkey's membership remain ongoing. While the rejection of the Constitution means that the

question of national vetos is currently on hold, reform of EU governance appears inevitable in order to meet the practical needs of running a club of more than twenty-five countries. This can only lead to a reduction of French influence, to the benefit of larger new countries such as Poland. Indeed, Kristeva identifies the impact of the enlarged Europe, together with the influence of immigration on French values, as one of the two-fold humiliations experienced by France today.<sup>52</sup>

Another factor which significantly affects French self-perception, but which remains outside the scope of this thesis, is the growing influence of globalization, and in particular, American culture. The effects of this are felt at all levels of French society, from multinational business, to cultural expressions such as cinema, and the evolution of the French language. In the majority of these cases, the French State has adopted a defensive attitude, maintaining protectionism in French businesses where possible, and using its influence in Europe to ensure the survival of French farmers through the preservation of the Common Agricultural Policy. The continuation of socialist policy on matters such as employment law and social security has been one means of guarding French workers against the effects of globalization, whilst quotas on English-language films and music, supported by the rulings of the Académie française, have been part of a rear-guard action against the increasing prevalence of English as a global *lingua franca*. The result of this has been the fetishization of certain elements of French culture, which are portrayed as emblematic of French identity, thereby lending credence to the notion of a single essential and authentic concept of Frenchness. It is another example of the reluctance noted by Barlet on the part of certain French institutions to embrace the evolution of national identity which is encouraged by the interaction of cultures in today's global village.

The defensiveness of the French reaction to the emergence of non-French culture arguably suggests a fear of being invaded and overwhelmed by foreign forces. The perceived encroachment of American culture is the most potent example of this latter-day, virtual, colonisation for, as Alice Kaplan says, America is 'the

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<sup>52</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'What of Tomorrow's Nation?', in *Nations without Nationalism*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 36. The article was written specifically for this English-language volume, and no French-language version has been published.

imaginary space that most haunts postwar France'.<sup>53</sup> America represents the seductive yet threatening advance of consumerism, brilliantly analysed in Kristin Ross's study of the decade which followed defeat at Dien Bien Phu, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*.<sup>54</sup> In light of this, it is possible to see France, as Santos has seen Portugal, as the colonizer colonized.

The identity of the Portuguese colonizer does not simply include the identity of the colonized other. It includes as well the identity of the colonizer as in turn himself colonized. The Portuguese Prospero is not just a Calibanized Prospero; he is a very Caliban from the viewpoint of the European [here, American] super-Prosperos.<sup>55</sup>

As Chapter Four will discuss, since the loss of empire France is reluctant to assume its historical identity as colonizer.<sup>56</sup> Its defensive attitude towards cultural colonisation suggests that certain French institutions see France, if not exactly as Caliban, then as a valiant yet vulnerable seat of cultural civilisation under threat from the vast tide of cultural homogenization. In the face of advancing globalization, there are signs that sections of the French public therefore consider the nation to be in danger of being colonized, rather than as former colonizer.

Ironically, while American culture may be the single strongest influence in the global mix of cultures, in practice it does not mean that the French fear of cultural homogeneity is inevitable:

Cultural experiences, part or present, have not been simply moving in the direction of cultural uniformity and standardization. This is not to say that the notion of global cultural synchronization is irrelevant – on the contrary – but it is fundamentally incomplete. It overlooks the countercurrents – the impact non-Western cultures have been making on the West. It downplays the ambivalence of the globalizing momentum and ignores the role of local reception of Western culture – for example the indigenization of Western elements. It fails to see the influence non-Western cultures have been exercising on each other. It has no room for crossover culture – as in the development of 'third world cultures' such as world music. It overlooks the fact that

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<sup>53</sup> Alice Kaplan, 'Book Review of Kristin Ross's *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Re-Ordering of French Culture*', *Modernism/Modernity*, 2.3 (1995), 169-171 (p. 170).

<sup>54</sup> Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Re-Ordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> Santos, 'Between Prospero and Caliban', p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> France's propensity to view herself as victim rather than as aggressor will be developed in Chapter Four. It is evident in historical attitudes towards the Second World War, which emphasises her suffering-as-martyr through episodes such as the 1944 SS massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane, rather than her part in Vichy collaboration and the deportation of the Jews. For more details on Oradour see Sarah Bennett Farmer, 'Oradour-sur-Glane: Memory in a Preserved Landscape', *French Historical Studies*, 19 (1995), 27-47, and for the uses of memory, see Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 1998), pp. 55-6.

many of the standards exported by the West and its cultural industries themselves turn out to be of culturally mixed character if we examine their cultural lineages.<sup>57</sup>

This view again supports the need for a detailed and nuanced analysis of the cultural forces at work in the post-colonial era. Nonetheless, the fear of colonization by the potent forces of American culture is arguably one of the factors which has led the French State to its current defensive attitude, where it refuses to acknowledge the multi-directional effects of transculturation, and insists on the maintenance of a mythical, unified concept of Frenchness.<sup>58</sup> The result of this is a lack of hospitality towards other peoples and cultures, seen in the distrust of both immigrants and foreign cultures. Hospitality has been a much-researched term in recent research; the following definition is by Derek Attridge:

Hospitality towards the other – whether a person, a group, or a not-yet-formulated thought or formal possibility – implies a willingness not just to accept the other into one's own domain, but to change that domain, perhaps radically, in order to make the other welcome.<sup>59</sup>

Jacques Derrida and Mireille Rosello, amongst other critics, have done valuable research both on the theoretical basis of hospitality, and on its functioning within the French context.<sup>60</sup> This thesis is only concerned with a small area of that research, namely the linguistic hospitality offered by language and accepted by the writer, and the readerly hospitality offered when a reader is open to the singularity and alterity of a creative text. I will return to this point in a later chapter.

Of the remaining forces at work within French society, the constraints of space dictate that most must necessarily be neglected by this study. One additional factor worthy of mention is the move towards regional identities in areas such as

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<sup>57</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 'Globalization as Hybridization', in *Global Modernities*, ed. by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 45-68 (p. 53).

<sup>58</sup> 'Transculturation' is a term used by Mary Louise Pratt in the title of her study, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) to reflect the multi-directional influence of culture. It is opposed to the assumption of the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized that (cultural) power resides only in the dominant term: as Bhabha has shown above, this is far from being an accurate portrayal of power relations.

<sup>59</sup> Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 152, n. 25.

<sup>60</sup> See Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *De l'Hospitalité* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1997); Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: Galilée, 1997); Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

Brittany and Catalonia. This evidence of regionalisation is the other side of the coin of globalization, in which supra- and sub-national bodies are emerging at the expense of the nation-state. However, since this thesis is concerned with the contemporary development of French identity in relation to the external and relational forces acting as a result of the post-colonial period, it will not focus on regional developments, significant as they are.

## The singularity of Algeria

Early in this Introduction, I argued for the specificity of France's experience during the post-colonial period, resulting from her Republican tradition, and the legacy of the Algerian War. This section argues that, because Algeria has historically been considered as part of France, it has a particular relation to France in the post-colonial period. I suggest, therefore, that Algeria has acted, and continues to act, as a source of otherness and of irreconcilable difference for France, and that the specificity of France's relationship with Algeria therefore has ramifications that permeate French society beyond the political and economic strata occasioned by decolonisation. The starting point for this is the assertion that encounters with difference have formed a subject of enquiry for French theorists throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. The exact form assumed by difference has varied across linguistics (Derrida, Cixous), gender (Kristeva, Cixous, Irigaray), class (Lyotard, Althusser, Macherey), ethnicity (Fanon, Memmi, Todorov), and psychoanalysis (Lacan, Kristeva), to name but the more obvious fields of research; nonetheless difference has proved to be a common strand running through these writings.

To take only one example, Lyotard writes of the encounter with intractable difference, which he calls 'l'intraversable', in his 1988 article 'A l'insu'.<sup>61</sup> For him, 'l'intraversable' is located in a space set apart from politics but, nonetheless, he links it with the need to challenge capitalism. However, as Winifred Woodhull points out, in

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<sup>61</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, 'A l'insu', *Le Genre humain: Politiques de l'oubli* (Autumn 1988), 37-43.

two articles, 'L'insu', dedicated to the victims of the Paris massacre of Algerians on 17 October 1961, and an author's note to an edited collection of his earlier essays, entitled 'Le Nom d'Algérie', Lyotard explicitly links the question of bearing witness to intractable difference to the memory of the Algerian War.<sup>62</sup> In the latter, Lyotard attributes the revolutionary energy of the Algerian struggle for independence to this difference, referring to it in the following terms: 'Sous les noms d'"inventivité", "créativité", "auto-gestion", avec le principe d'une autonomie déjà là dans le concret de la lutte de classes [...] le secret d'où toute résistance tire son énergie'.<sup>63</sup> However, in the years following the Algerian War, it became clear to Lyotard that Marxism was destined to fail in the face of globalized capitalism:

tout indique que c'en est fini du marxisme comme perspective révolutionnaire (et sans doute de toute perspective vraiment révolutionnaire), alors que la voix intraitable ou de l'intraitable ne se fait plus entendre, dans les sociétés occidentales, sur le canal du social et du politique.<sup>64</sup>

The end of the Algerian War, for him, signals the end of irreducible difference within the political sphere of Western societies; indeed, it will shortly be followed by the end of the grand narrative of Marxism, which Lyotard sees as the end of politics. In closing, therefore, he offers his article as a witness to 'cet intraitable qui, un temps, porta le nom d'Algérie, et qui persiste'.<sup>65</sup>

Whether or not we accept Lyotard's assessment of the end of politics (and in the light of events since 11 September 2001 it is difficult not to see announcements of 'the end of history', 'the end of politics', or even 'the death of God', as premature), his writings demonstrate that the Algerian War was the catalyst for a reassessment of attitudes amongst French intellectuals to the question of difference. By locating irreducible difference in revolutionary Algeria, he also raises questions which are key to the current enquiry.

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<sup>62</sup> Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonisation, and Literatures* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xiv. Jean-François Lyotard, 'Le Nom d'Algérie', in *La Guerre des Algériens: Ecrits 1956-1963*, ed. by Mohammed Ramdani (Paris: Galilée, 1989), pp. 33-39.

<sup>63</sup> Lyotard, 'Le Nom d'Algérie', p. 35. A similar recognition of the revolutionary potential operating within Algeria, both during and following the war, occurs in Marie Cardinal's *Au Pays de mes racines* (1980), which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>64</sup> Lyotard, 'Le Nom d'Algérie', p. 37.

<sup>65</sup> Lyotard, 'Le Nom d'Algérie', p. 39.

Algeria occupies a singular position in the history of French colonialism, since it was the only territory to be claimed, not as a colony, but as an integral part, a 'département', of metropolitan France.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, Algeria functioned as a unique instance of France's policy of assimilation, whereby the land was entirely appropriated within the 'indivisible' Republic, whilst the millions of native inhabitants were excluded from political participation, replaced in the French imagination with a 'European' population of *pieds noirs* (which also included the problematically placed Jewish communities). At the level of geography and discourse, therefore, Algeria was integral to the Republic; it was subsumed within the Self. Simultaneously, however, the indigenous population's rejection of their conquerors, from the resistance of Abd-el-Kader to the eventual success of the FLN, together with French disinterest in the Arab and Berber populations, ensured that *Algérie française* also represented difference and otherness.

Since even the *pied noir* community developed a certain specificity, in practice, however, Algeria's population represented a hybridity that was incompatible with Republican notions of homogeneity. The tension in this dichotomy of Algeria as both Self and Other reached breaking point in the later stages of the war, when it became apparent that the French assimilationist experiment in Algeria had failed. Within the French imagination, Algeria was a site of irreducible otherness, and the legacy and results of the experiment would linger over the next fifty years, as immigration brought this otherness into the heart of the Centre.

The singularity of Algeria has ensured a lasting legacy of ambivalence within France. Memories of Algeria conjure nostalgia and fascination at the same time as bitterness and humiliation, providing a unique site in which to probe contemporary attitudes towards sameness and difference. At the same time, the specificity of Algeria poses a challenge for research which examines France's contemporary relationship not only with Algeria, but with other countries of the Maghreb, Morocco and Tunisia. Immigration originating throughout North Africa arguably poses one of the most significant challenges to French identity today, and while Algerians constitute the largest component of this new population, the descendants of

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<sup>66</sup> Guadeloupe and Martinique only became 'départements' in 1946.



immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia are subject to many of the same perceptions on the part of the French mainstream population, as Hargreaves's work on recent surveys showed above. This is because it is often unclear whether 'beurs' are of Moroccan, Tunisian or Algerian origin (a lack of clarity which is arguably irrelevant in any case, since the 'beurs' hold French nationality). However, since Algerians form the largest proportion of immigrants from the Maghreb, there is a tendency – what marketing theorists such as Han have referred to as a 'halo effect'<sup>67</sup> – for Algerian origins to be imputed to any Arab-looking individual. As a consequence, youths of Moroccan and Tunisian origin are often subject to the antagonistic attitudes which Stora identifies as being a legacy of bitterness from the Algerian War. They therefore share by extension in the consequences of Algeria's history.

There is therefore a sense in which contemporary relations between France, and Morocco and Tunisia, are to an extent mediated through France's past relationship with Algeria, through the halo effect of the Algerian War. At the same time, French perceptions of Algeria, although shaped by specificities of Franco-Algerian history, are influenced by Orientalist tropes associated with the larger Maghreb, that is, tropes of the desert, exoticism, odalisques and harems. This interconnected flow of influence has been taken into account in the structuring of the thesis, which is divided into two parts. Part One consists of two chapters, which examine contemporary French attitudes towards the wider Maghreb, including examples from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. It considers contemporary updatings of Orientalist traditions within which French writers have explored other countries as seen from the Hexagon. It is important to state that these traditions, which date back to Montaigne and Montesquieu, are not specifically related to the Maghreb, but have been used to represent other countries, such as Egypt, Persia and the Far East. However, in the contemporary era it can be argued that these traditions, which are based around France's relationship with the Oriental Other, have become overdetermined by the residue of the Algerian issue, and that it is this which has led authors to locate their rewritings of these traditions within the context of the Maghreb, which is now the pre-eminent example of France's Other.

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<sup>67</sup> C.M. Han, 'Country Image: Halo or Summary Construct?', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 26 (1989) 222-29.

These literary traditions are based around two directional strands. The first of these, which dates back to Montaigne, and may be termed colonial or exoticist, focuses on French movements out from the Centre. Chapter One therefore looks at texts which look outward from France to the Periphery to produce contemporary figurings of the North African Other, and considers the ways in which the exoticist tradition functions in a postcolonial context which sees the exotic Other transported to the Centre. The second strand, which is the subject of Chapter Two, reverses the directional focus, and concerns movements from the Periphery to the Centre. Working within the tradition of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, the chapter analyses texts which effectively borrow the eyes of a North African character to defamiliarise and critique aspects of contemporary French society. Since both exoticism and what may be termed defamiliarisation have historically been associated with a range of far-flung lands, these first two chapters analyse the ways in which the post-colonial context has drawn the literary focus onto the countries of the Maghreb.

Part Two narrows the focus onto the unique relationship which exists between France and Algeria as a consequence of their specific colonial relations, the manner in which these came to an end through the war of independence, and the volume of immigration, with accompanying issues of integration, which followed. Chapter Three focuses on an instance in which contemporary France and Algeria intersect, through the figure of the Algerian 'foreigner' within the boundaries of the French nation, and begins to make a case for the singularity of the Franco-Algerian relationship. Chapters Four and Five explore French memories of Algeria, and argue that Algeria represents a site of irreducible difference for France. Chapter Four investigates collective memories of France's Algerian past, and in particular the repression and bitterness which is the legacy of the Algerian War, through a case-study of literary representations of the Paris massacre of Algerians on 17 October 1961. The final chapter looks at the personal memories of two women writers, Marie Cardinal and Hélène Cixous, born in Algeria. It examines the way in which they reconstruct childhood memories of Algeria, and argues that the memories of their experiences in Algeria are fundamental to their writing project. Through this structure, the thesis both acknowledges the commonalities in the way in which

French writers have perceived the Maghreb, and identifies the singularity at work in the Franco-Algerian relationship.

## Literary figurings of the Maghreb

As will by now be clear, considerable research has been carried out on the context within which this thesis asks its research questions. Unlike most previous research, however, the methodology for this study is literary. This section will briefly review the existing literary research in this area, and consider the potential contribution which literature can make in mediating the changing relationship between French Self and Maghrebi Other.

Particularly within the Anglo-Saxon academy, the interest in postcolonial studies has led to the emergence of hitherto under-researched areas of literary study. Within Anglophone studies, this was led by critics such as Partha Chatterjee, Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, whose chosen area of interest was frequently India.<sup>68</sup> As indicated by Santos, the aim, broadly speaking, was to replace the colonizer's narrative with narratives written from the point of view of the colonized. The 'Subaltern Studies' group, led by Ranajit Guha, provided some of the earliest work on this perspective.<sup>69</sup> Influenced by this work, scholars of French working within Anglo-Saxon institutions have undertaken similar research within a francophone context, which has resulted in a new focus on the literary and artistic expressions of the peripheries, and the emergence of areas of specialism on francophone literature of the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Maghreb, amongst others. While Charles Forsdick and David Murphy point out that

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<sup>68</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Book, 1986); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, M.A.: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); *The Spivak Reader. Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. by Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>69</sup> *Subaltern Studies vol. 1, Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. by Ranajit Guha (Delhi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

postcolonial theory has had a limited impact within France itself,<sup>70</sup> the postmodern fascination with difference and marginality already identified among French intellectuals has provided ample theoretical material which has been borrowed by scholars of the postcolonial. Consequently, the enthusiasm for the marginal amongst Anglo-Saxon scholars of French, coupled with a lessening in the scholarly attention devoted to more canonical authors, has led to a situation in which, whilst for many years overlooked, the peripheries of 'la Francophonie' are now at risk of being (re)colonized by First World academe. It is this tendency which the current project seeks to address, by focusing on the metropolitan response to postcolonial issues.

Within the francophone North African sphere, the majority of research has focused on two primary bodies of literary expression: francophone literature of the Maghreb, and 'beur' literature. Authors belonging to this first grouping, francophone literature of the Maghreb, write either in North Africa, or in self-imposed exile in France. They form a loose group which began in the 1950s with writers such as Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib and Driss Chraïbi, and which continues now through the work of Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Malika Mokeddem.<sup>71</sup> While the earlier authors were concerned to develop a nationalist literature which would reflect the struggle for independence, contemporary writers treat the identity issues resulting from their emergence into a postcolonial order. Although this research shares many common concerns around the mediation of identity, with the event of independence their focus has turned away from the Hexagon, making their work less directly relevant to the questions of contemporary French identity which are the subject of this thesis.

The other main focus of literary research has been works by immigrants or writers of immigrant descent. Interest in the literary aspect of North African immigration was slow to develop, largely due to the limited education of those North

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<sup>70</sup> Charles Forsdick, 'A Persistent Concept: Exoticism Today', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 2.3 (2002), 101-110 (p. 102), and David Murphy, 'De-centring French Studies: Towards a Postcolonial Theory of Francophone Cultures', *French Cultural Studies* 13 (2002), 165-85.

<sup>71</sup> For examples of recent publications on contemporary francophone writers of the Maghreb, see Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006); Priscilla Ringrose, *Assia Djebar: In Dialogue with Feminisms* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); Valérie Orlando, *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999); Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonisation, and Literatures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

African men who first answered France's call for a labour force in the years following the Second World War. With the exception of a few early texts often drafted in collaboration with French ethnographers, it was not until the 1980s that a range of published texts, usually by second generation writers, first emerged. Since then the range of artistic expression from this group has grown to encompass film, music (raï and rap in particular) and *bande dessinée* as well as novels, attracting increasing attention from researchers.<sup>72</sup> In the literary field, Hargreaves has complemented his sociological studies with a comprehensive review of the output of the 'beur' generation, texts which frequently use the autobiographically-inspired, realist genre.<sup>73</sup> Many of these texts deal with the Republican dichotomy of the private family space dominated by Maghrebi cultural references, and the public social space of French culture, a dichotomy which in reality is porous, challenging Republican assumptions, and which faces 'beur' subjects with the need to resolve repeated and conflicting demands.

Hargreaves, along with Charles Bonn, has also considered whether 'beur' writing might constitute what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as 'minor literature', concluding that 'in practice their writings are far removed from this separatist model'.<sup>74</sup> However, because his work is confined to 'beur' writers, defined as the children of Maghrebi immigrants either born or brought up in France (or Belgium), he excludes writers of mixed Franco-Algerian parentage such as Leïla Sebbar and Nina Bouraoui, whose texts provide a valuable complement to those of the 'beur' generation. Moreover, because research on 'beur' texts focuses on the specificities of their status as a community caught between the norms of French and Algerian culture, ethnicity, and nationality, the existing work in this area, although valuable, does not consider the majority French response to the emerging cultures and

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<sup>72</sup> For examples of research on non-literary subjects, including cinema and music, see *Post-colonial Cultures in France*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (London: Routledge, 1997); Carrie Tarr, *Reframing Difference: Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*, ed. by Phil Powrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>73</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction: Voices from the North African Immigrant Community in France* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

<sup>74</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Resistance at the Margins: Writers of Maghrebi Immigrant Origin in France', in *Post-colonial Cultures in France*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 226-239 (p. 227); *Littératures des immigrations: un espace littéraire émergent*, ed. by Charles Bonn (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), p. 28.

identities which they represent. Indeed, in his review of 'beur' texts, Hargreaves identifies the absence of a comparable study of contemporary 'French fiction' (his term) dealing with the issues raised by Maghrebi immigration.<sup>75</sup> It is this absence which the current research seeks to address.

While I am grateful to Hargreaves for identifying the gap in existing research, his work, and in particular, his reference to 'French fiction', highlights a tension which runs throughout this thesis, and which recurs each time a reference is made to 'France'. When speaking of 'France' and 'the French mainstream', or someone who is 'Franco-French', my intention is to refer to the majority population, that is, those who are not immigrants, or of immigrant origin. Yet, as was evident in the opening section of this Introduction, which considered the issues around questions of identity, there is a difficulty inherent within such terminology, just as there is in referring to 'North Africa', which encompasses the diversity of Arab, Berber, Jewish and *harki* groups. It assumes a unity of identity and of attitude which sits well within the discourse of French Republicanism, but which postmodern theory has conclusively exposed as illusory. With each reference to 'metropolitan France', or 'the Hexagon', I am therefore aware that the question arises: which France? Who is speaking? The question is all the more pertinent given my own 'outsider' location, as a non-French European woman looking at issues of a history and culture that are not my own. The strengths and issues that this brings are not for discussion here, save to say that they highlight the tension, which inevitably remains unresolved, in references to an unproblematised 'France'. However, given the difficulties inherent in defending references to 'French identity', some attention to the selection of the literary corpus which this thesis proposes as representative of 'French fiction' is required.

## The literary corpus

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<sup>75</sup> 'There has as yet been no systematic study of French fiction dealing with the immigrant community'. Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction: Voices from the North African Immigrant Community in France* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), p. 4, n. 7.

The primary texts examined in this thesis were selected according to three criteria. Firstly, the texts treat issues regarding what Silverstein refers to as the ‘transpolitical’ space which covers France and North Africa, and within which individual or collective relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean are played out. Within these broad parameters all genres were considered, in order to reflect as widely as possible the literary modes selected by writers to represent their concerns. As a result, the genres vary widely, from the anti-colonial novel (*Désert*) to the polar (*Meurtres pour mémoire*), passing by the autobiographical (*Le Passé sous silence*, *Garçon manqué*, *Au Pays de mes racines*, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*). Given strong autobiographical focus within the tradition of ‘beur’ literature, it is interesting to note that ‘French fiction’ contains a similar strand, although the realist dimension of ‘beur’ novels is much less pronounced here. The study also contains what might be seen as modern reworkings of the Bildungsroman or even the picaresque genre, in *La Goutte d’or*, *L’Amour en relief*, and *Un Aller simple*. The choice not to restrict the corpus to specific genre categories arguably results in one of the study’s strengths, in that it allowed interesting juxtapositions of a broad range of issues relating to Franco-Algerian relations to emerge, from visionings of the exotic, to interpretations of historical events, and questions of personal identity and memory. As the next section will suggest, in addition to their specific literary contribution, certain texts also act beyond the purely literary to engage with theoretical questions of the postcolonial, albeit in a literary mode (*Le Passé sous silence*, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*). The collection of disparate texts across common themes was advantageous in that it allowed for the construction of a conceptual agenda directed by the findings of theoretical and textual analysis, rather than according to the expectations of a defined category of literature (as is the case with ‘beur’ literature, or francophone Maghrebi literature).

The second criteria for the selection of texts is based on the need identified by Hargreaves for a study of ‘French fiction’. Biographical details of the twelve authors whose novels comprise the primary bibliography of this study are provided in the Appendix to the study, but a brief overview serves as a reminder of the problematised nature of ‘French identity’. While several of the authors, such as Michel Tournier and François Maspero, have been influential figures within the

Parisian publishing world for several decades, others are less obviously 'Franco-French', for a variety of reasons. Although all born within metropolitan France, the surnames of Didier Daeninckx, Guy Hocquenghem and Didier van Cauwelaert bear witness to the extra-Hexagonal influences on their family origins, demonstrating the effects of previous waves of immigration from various European countries. The origins and careers of J.M.G. Le Clézio and Hélène Cixous also make a 'Franco-French' categorisation difficult to sustain, since both come from multilingual families and have strong links to geographical locations far beyond metropolitan France (Mauritius and Panama in Le Clézio's case; Algeria in the case of Cixous). Nonetheless, the fact that both have chosen to write in French, and to live in France, together with their prominence within the milieu of Parisian publishing, has led many to consider them as French writers.

A similar situation applies in the case of Marie Cardinal who, born in Algeria, lived in France for around thirty years before moving to French Canada. Like Le Clézio and Cixous, her career blurs traditional conceptions of the French writer yet, perhaps incorrectly, entries on her life frequently describe her as French. Arguably more problematic is the situation of Leïla Sebbar and Nina Bouraoui, two writers of mixed Franco-Algerian parentage. They are included based on a number of factors: their decision to live and work in France; the fact that, although caught between two cultures, they are excluded by surveys of 'beur' literature; and, in Sebbar's case, the declaration that she considers herself to be French.<sup>76</sup> Finally, being further towards the Algerian pole of a Franco-Algerian spectrum, their work brings a valuable dimension to a consideration of transmediterranean issues.

What the inclusion of these writers serves to underline is the blurred and fluid nature of the field of contemporary 'national literature'. In an era of globalisation, national boundaries are increasingly transgressed in literature, as in other domains, and it is therefore hardly surprising that the identity of writers seeps beyond the Hexagon. Indeed, the tendency for writers who are commonly considered to be French (in terms, for example, of their classification on the shelves of bookshops) to

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<sup>76</sup> Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes: autopsie de l'exil* (Paris: Bernard Barrault, 1986), pp. 125-6.



be linked to geographical areas beyond metropolitan France arguably supports the direction taken by this thesis in considering the extra-Hexagonal influences on French identity. If Frenchness is constructed by factors exterior to metropolitan France, we should not be surprised to see French writers demonstrating connections and affiliations beyond the Hexagon.

The final criteria for the selection of primary texts relates to chronology. Each text was published between 1980-2000, a period which coincides with the emergence of what might be referred to as a 'crise d'identité' within the French nation, which arguably continues today. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, although North African immigration had been taking place since the late nineteenth century, it was not until the mid 1970s that it became visible to the majority population. This was because the economic boom of the 'Trente Glorieuses', which had made the arrival of 'single' North African men a welcome addition to the labour market, came to an end after the first oil crisis of 1973.<sup>77</sup> In an attempt to combat rising unemployment, the French government suspended immigration in 1974. However, the effect of this was to make many workers fear that if they returned home to their countries of origin, as had been the case for short periods, they would not be able to return to France.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, they remained in France and brought their families to join them. Whereas the men had mostly lived in hostels or rented rooms which separated them from the majority population, family immigration led to a new visibility, with an influx of North African children into schools, and a sharp increase in the proportion of immigrants living in HLMs. Together with the high levels of unemployment amongst immigrants, this led to a growing perception amongst the French that immigrants posed a threat to French society.

Whilst many of these social changes began to take place during the 1970s, with a few notable exceptions – Jean Raspail's *Le Camp des saints* (1973) and Claire Etcherelli's *Elise ou la vraie vie* (1967), for example – literary representations did

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<sup>77</sup> The word 'single' is used in inverted commas since many workers, although they lived alone in France, in fact had families in North Africa whom they supported with money from their earnings in France.

<sup>78</sup> *Immigration in Post-War France: A Documentary Anthology*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 6.

not emerge until the 1980s.<sup>79</sup> This is in part due to the illiteracy of many immigrants arriving in France. However, during the early 1980s immigration grew to become a fully-fledged political issue, leading to the first literary responses from the 'beur' community, and an increase in the number of metropolitan texts concerning relations between France and North Africa. One reason for the heightened profile of immigration was the Socialist amnesty for illegal immigrants which took place during the winter of 1981-82, during which over 130,000 individuals were able to regularize their situation.<sup>80</sup> Whilst the Front national exploited public anxieties about the situation, media coverage of a wave of strikes by immigrants working in parts of the car industry increased apprehension amongst French voters in the run-up to the municipal elections in March 1983.<sup>81</sup> Immigration therefore featured as a main theme of the 1983 elections, to the benefit of the FN. In the parliamentary elections of June 1981, the FN had gained less than 0.5% of the vote. However, in certain areas of the 1983 municipal elections, and in various by-elections held later that year, they began to score double figures. In the European elections held in June 1984, the FN took 11% of the national vote, suggesting a significant growth in French anxieties regarding immigration.<sup>82</sup> In the 1986 parliamentary elections the FN won almost 10% of the vote, giving it 35 *députés* and a presence in the *Assemblée nationale* for the first time.

These changes in the political landscape were accompanied by an outbreak of racist attacks during the summer of 1983.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, younger members of the immigrant community began to mobilise in an organised way, culminating in the 1983 'Marche des Beurs', and the founding of SOS Racisme in 1984. Political mobilisation was accompanied by the beginnings of literary representation, and the emergence of what is often termed 'beur literature'. While these texts have been much studied, researchers have paid less attention to the metropolitan texts dealing with similar issues which appeared from 1980 onwards, despite the fact that

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<sup>79</sup> Jean Raspail, *Le Camp des saints* (Paris : ???, 1973); Claire Etcherelli, *Elise ou la vraie vie* (Paris: Denoël, 1967).

<sup>80</sup> Hargreaves, ed., *Immigration in Post-War France*, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> Hargreaves, ed., *Immigration in Post-War France*, p. 77.

<sup>82</sup> Hargreaves, ed., *Immigration in Post-War France*, p. 107.

<sup>83</sup> Hargreaves, ed., *Immigration in Post-War France*, p. 108.

immigration represented a pressing issue for both the immigrant and majority communities.

The beginning of the 1980s marks the emergence of a group of texts treating the national 'crise d'identité' provoked by immigration, and so provides the starting date for the period of enquiry, whilst 2000 forms the later limit. When this research was begun in 2003 no relevant texts published later than 2000 were identified, suggesting a natural break had perhaps occurred in literary representations of Franco-Algerian relations.<sup>84</sup> There may be a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it is notable that the majority of texts featured in this study were published between 1980 and 1992, the exceptions being Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1994), Prévost's *Le Passé sous silence* (1998), Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué* (2000), and Cixous's *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* (2000). The decline in metropolitan texts treating the transpolitical space formed by France and Algeria is arguably linked to the outbreak of the Algerian civil war, which began after elections were annulled in 1992, and which touched France directly in the form of the GIA's attacks on the Paris métro in 1995. Although references are made to civil war in Sebbar, Prévost and Bouraoui's texts, they are fleeting and most commonly suggest that Algeria is a violent ghost from France's past, which continually returns to trouble the present. The realities of the war are most notable as an absence within the texts, suggesting that perhaps writers were inclined to allow time to elapse before entering into representations of an ongoing and violent episode.

The second, related reason for halting the period of enquiry in 2000 concerns the terrorist attacks which took place in September 2001. Arguably, this event altered the framework of relations between France and Algeria, particularly in light of the GIA's Islamist attacks in Paris, by overlaying the post-colonial relationship between the two countries with a new, transnational framework in which the American 'war against terror' problematised relations between the West and Islamic countries. While this is a subject for future research, it is clear that 2001 introduced new issues which are outside the scope of the present enquiry. It could be argued that a more

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<sup>84</sup> A potential exception is Malika Mokeddem's *N'zid* (2001) which deals with personal amnesia and transmediterranean identity. However, the text was omitted since it is difficult to view the author other than as a francophone Maghrebi writer.

appropriate timeframe for the study would have been 1981-2001, reflecting the two major events – the coming to power of François Mitterrand, and the 9/11 attacks – which marked the distinctiveness of the period. However, since this would have eliminated two important texts (*Désert* and *Au Pays de mes racines*) which were published in 1980, any attempt at extreme precision must bear in mind the reality that any chronological categorisation is approximate. Categorisation by decade is arguably therefore an arbitrary but effective means of carving out a body of texts which deal with a set of issues around identity and immigration which had been building in urgency, and which emerged as pressing political questions during the 1980s and 1990s.

### Literary singularity

Having embarked on an analysis of the changing relationship between the former French Centre and the North African Periphery, it is reasonable to ask what the choice of a literary methodology may contribute to the problematic, as distinct from the sociological or political approaches which, as we have seen, are more commonly undertaken. The question of what constitutes literature is an old one, and this thesis cannot hope to provide a satisfactory answer within its limited scope. Instead, this section aims to open up questions of the literary, in preparation for the chapters which follow, and which attempt to tease out the specific ways in which the literary functions within certain contemporary texts which treat changing conceptions of Frenchness, as seen through the prism of the Maghreb.

The difficulty of isolating the quality of the literary is highlighted by Sartre in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* when he says, 'Aussi les cent mille mots alignés dans un livre peuvent être lus un à un sans que le sens de l'oeuvre en jaillisse; le sens n'est pas la somme des mots, il en est la totalité organique'.<sup>85</sup> Derrida is even more explicit in his assessment:

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<sup>85</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 56.

No *internal* criterion can guarantee the essential 'literariness' of a text. There is no assured essence or existence of literature. If you proceed to analyze all the elements of a literary work, you will never come across literature itself, only some traits which it shares or borrows, which you can find elsewhere too, in other texts, be it a matter of the language, the meanings or the references ('subjective' or 'objective').<sup>86</sup>

There is a sense, then, in which the literary is the 'something else' within a work of literature, something which exceeds the individual signification of the words which are selected and combined within the text. Sartre speaks of the experience of this when he says: 'Ainsi arrive-t-il souvent que nous nous trouvions en possession d'une certaine idée qu'on nous a apprise par des paroles, sans pouvoir nous rappeler un seul des mots qui nous l'ont transmise'.<sup>87</sup>

One of the earliest attempts to theorise the specificity of literature was made by the Russian Formalists. For them, the purpose of art is to force us to re-experience the world, and the measure of literature is the extent to which it can distance us from the familiar object by means of 'literariness'. One of the leading Formalist theorists, Viktor Shklovsky, argues that our perception of familiar objects is generally automatic, a status that he describes as 'recognition':

An object appears before us. We know it's there but we do not see it, and, for that reason, we can say nothing about it. The removal of this object from the sphere of automatized perception is accomplished in art by a variety of means.<sup>88</sup>

The literary process of overturning 'recognition' is referred to as the Russian neologism *ostraniene*, which has been translated as both 'defamiliarization' and 'enstrangement', and which can be defined as 'a process or act that endows an object or image with "strangeness" by "removing" it from the network of conventional, formulaic, stereotypical perceptions and linguistic expressions'.<sup>89</sup> Although

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<sup>86</sup> Jacques Derrida, "'This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 73, emphasis in original. Although conducted in French, this interview was undertaken specifically for the English-language volume *Acts of Literature*, and the original French-language transcript is unpublished. The translation is by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby.

<sup>87</sup> Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, p. 26.

<sup>88</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. by Benjamin Sher (Normal, I.L.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Benjamin Sher, 'Translator's Introduction', in Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. by Benjamin Sher (Normal, I.L.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), xix. On the same page, Sher rejects the translation of *ostraniene* as 'defamiliarization' on the following grounds:

Shklovsky develops at length the various means by which literary distancing can be achieved, he summarises it as follows:

The devices by which Tolstoi estranges his material may be boiled down to the following: he does not call a thing by its name, that is, he describes it as if it were perceived for the first time, while an incident is described as if it were happening for the first time.<sup>90</sup>

The Formalist concern with literary device emphasizes the role of perception in the process and experience of reading. Chapter Two considers in more detail the means by which literary estrangement can be achieved, in particular through the use of the senses. In all of this, however, the Formalist concern is to move away from banal abstractions and, as Gerald L. Bruns says, to '[foreground] the materiality of language'. The extent to which this is suited to the representation of cultural encounters is something to which we will return shortly.

If the experience of the literary is what sets it aside from other forms of writing, it suggests that what is considered as literary depends in large part on the individual reader's encounter with the text, within the wider context of established written conventions. Derrida develops the notion of the experience of literature, and argues that it is best discussed in phenomenological terms:

Literarity is not a natural essence, an intrinsic property of the text. It is the correlative of an intentional relation to the text, an intentional relation which integrates in itself, as a component or an intentional layer, the more or less implicit consciousness of rules which are conventional or institutional – social, in any case. Of course, this does not mean that literarity is merely projective or subjective – in the sense of the empirical subjectivity or caprice of each reader. The literary character of the text is inscribed on the side of the intentional object, in its noematic structure, one could say, and not only on the subjective side of the noetic act. There are 'in' the text features which call for the literary reading and recall the convention, institution, or history of literature. This *noematic* structure is included (as 'nonreal,' in Husserl's terms) in subjectivity, but a subjectivity which is non-empirical and linked to an intersubjective and transcendental community. I believe that this phenomenological-type language to be necessary [...]

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[...] it is quite wrongheaded. Shklovsky's process is in fact the reverse of that implied by the term. It is not a transition from the 'familiar' to the 'unknown' (implicitly). On the contrary, it proceeds from the cognitively known (the language of science), the rules and formulas that arise from a search for an economy of mental effort, to the familiarly known, that is, to real knowledge that expands and 'complicates' our perceptual process in the rich use of metaphors, similes and a host of other figures of speech.

<sup>90</sup> Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, p. 6.

There is therefore a literary *functioning* and a literary *intentionality*, an experience rather than an essence of literature (natural or ahistorical).<sup>91</sup>

Derrida here is concerned with the relationship between the ‘noematic structure’, which can be described as objects of perceptual structure or ‘features “in” the text’, the writer’s experience of writing (the ‘subjective side of the noetic act’), and the relationship between reader and writer (the ‘intersubjective and transcendental community’). In his terms, the experience of reading and writing is a phenomenological process which is open to change over time, rather than being subject to a fixed essence.

Derek Attridge has been strongly influenced by the work of Derrida, and that of Levinas, on questions of literature and alterity and, following Derrida, it is also in phenomenological terms that he views the encounter with the literary.<sup>92</sup> Rather than dealing with theoretical accounts of literature, in *The Singularity of Literature* he defines his approach as being concerned with ‘the observable phenomena themselves: the paradoxes inherent in the way we talk about literature, the pleasures and the potency that we experience in reading it’.<sup>93</sup> This thesis follows both Derrida and Attridge in focusing on the experiential quality of the texts, and the ways in which they challenge and alter the reader’s perception of the Self-Other relationship. In doing so, the thesis treats the specifics of the encounter between French and North African cultures, and the ways in which literature enables the perception of these encounters. This perception frequently manifests itself in material ways, through the body, the senses, and the psychological. The senses, particularly those of sight and touch, abject matter such as blood and vomit, experiences of violence and death, and the bodily experience of pregnancy, will be recurrent tropes in the chapters which follow, indicating that contemporary intercultural encounters take place, and are represented, in embodied forms.

Like Sartre and Derrida, Attridge identifies an element within literature that escapes any attempt to reduce it to grammatical or linguistic structures. It is this

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<sup>91</sup> Derrida, ‘An Interview with Jacques Derrida’, pp. 44-5, emphasis in original.

<sup>92</sup> For a comprehensive overview of Attridge’s influences and intellectual debts, see his Appendix to *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 139-45.

<sup>93</sup> Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

element which differentiates literature from other forms of writing although, as we shall see in later chapters, the effects of literature may be common to other forms of creative art, such as cinema or painting. For Attridge, 'Literature always seems to present itself in the final analysis as something *more* than the category or entity it is claimed to be [...] and as valuable for something *other* than the various personal or social benefits that are ascribed to it'.<sup>94</sup> What that 'more' or 'other' might be is in part the subject of this thesis, in an attempt to answer, within the particular context of postcolonial France, what makes literature a singular phenomenon amongst our experiences of language, and what it is that literature does in mediating the relationship between France and Algeria that political writings, or sociological writings, cannot do (except when in a literary mode). However, the assertion that the value of literature exists independently of any alleged personal or social benefits poses an issue for this thesis, which aims to produce literary figurings of political questions. In his introduction, Attridge cautions against what he calls literary instrumentalism:

What I have in mind could be crudely summarized as the treating of a text (or other cultural artefact) as a means to an predetermined end: coming to the object with the hope or assumption that it can be instrumental in furthering an existing project, and responding to it in such a way as to test, or even produce, that usefulness.<sup>95</sup>

One of the challenges of this study is the attempt to square this circle, or at least to negotiate a way through in full awareness of the pitfalls, for the literary texts analysed in the chapters which follow have been selected because they engage on some level with the political issues involved in the contemporary relationship between France and the Maghreb. In one sense, then, the thesis falls into the trap of reading the texts against predetermined criteria. Yet the aim of Attridge's work, which is to investigate what happens when we as readers engage with the singularity, the inventiveness, and the alterity of literary texts, is one which is shared by this study.

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<sup>94</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 5, emphasis in original.

<sup>95</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 7.



Since alterity is a much-used term – and one which, accompanied by ‘otherness’, will reappear throughout this thesis – Attridge outlines his conception of alterity in literature with reference to the creative process of writing:

To pause for a moment on an example, we may say that in order to be able to write *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen must have had a profound awareness of the resources of the English language, the conventions of the novel, the stylistic palette of humorous writing, and the norms of individual morality and social interaction, as these all existed in late eighteenth-century British metropolitan culture, and the ability to draw on them to produce fiction of extraordinary richness and subtlety. At the same time, the only way to explain the novel’s leap into new territory is to say that in the process of manipulating these familiar materials (in her head and on paper) she must have been drawn – perhaps without realizing it was happening – to exploit their discontinuities, press at their limits, and extend their capacities, and that in so doing she found a work of startling newness emerging.<sup>96</sup>

It is this process of pushing at the limits of written convention that allows newness to enter the text (since Attridge acknowledges that what emerges is not always new but may manifest itself through the return of the old, he generally uses the terms ‘otherness’ or ‘alterity’). Derrida makes a similar point, in what could almost be a gloss on Attridge’s example:

Cette écriture est passible de l’autre, ouverte à l’autre et par lui, par elle travaillée, travaillant à ne pas se laisser enfermer ou dominer par cette économie du même en sa totalité.<sup>97</sup>

As Derrida and Sartre make clear, this alterity is not an objective essence, but exists within the individual reader’s encounter with the text. It is therefore relational, depending on the context of the individual reader, and as Attridge says, ‘it is always a *singular* encounter, and an encounter with singularity’.<sup>98</sup>

The effect of otherness entering the text is to challenge, and possibly alter, the reader’s assumptions about the conventions which operate. As Derrida points out, inventiveness inevitably destabilizes the existing order:

Une invention suppose toujours quelque illégalité, la rupture d’un contrat implicite, elle introduit un désordre dans une paisible ordonnance des choses, elle perturbe les

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<sup>96</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Psyché: Invention de l’autre’, in *Psyché: Inventions de l’autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), pp. 11-61 (p. 61).

<sup>98</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 29.

bienséances. Apparemment sans la patience d'une préface – elle est elle-même une nouvelle préface –, voici qu'elle déjoue les attendus.<sup>99</sup>

However, unlike a technological invention like the internal combustion engine, or more recently, the Internet, which impacts on the status quo in a permanent manner, literary invention may have varying effects on the reader. Sartre refers to the emotional impact that literature can have on those who encounter it: 'C'est pourquoi l'on voit des gens réputés pour leur dureté verser des larmes au récit d'infortunes imaginaires; ils étaient devenus pour un moment ce qu'ils auraient été s'ils n'avaient passé leur vie à se masquer leur liberté'.<sup>100</sup> In this case, the effect of the inventive otherness of literature is momentary, rather than permanent. With the exception of those few texts which so radically alter our perception of the world that we can never return to our old ways of thinking, the effects of literature appear to be powerful but temporary. However, as Attridge suggests, the otherness of a text can be re-encountered with each reading:

Each time I read what I have written, I undergo (though never in quite the same way) an encounter with alterity, which is to say the shifting and opening-up of settled modes of thinking and feeling. In such a case, the idiocultural displacements which made the creative event possible have not produced a permanent transformation; alternatives just glimpsed as the other became the same have receded again as old habits have reasserted themselves, only to flicker up again on re-reading. In this case what I have to offer the world is the possibility not of a new structure of knowledge but of a powerful and repeatable *event* of mental and emotional restructuring.<sup>101</sup>

There is an ethical dimension to the reaction demanded of the reader in response to this encounter with alterity – a reaction which Sartre calls 'générosité', Attridge calls 'responsibility', and which I will consider as hospitality. For them, an ethical response is a necessary aspect of any responsible literary reading, but here the obligation is underscored because of the postcolonial questions framed by the literary corpus of the thesis. The nature of the reader's obligation is not discussed here, but will be explored in Chapters Three and Five.

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<sup>99</sup> Derrida, 'Psyché: Invention de l'autre', p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, p. 65.

<sup>101</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, pp. 27-8, emphasis in original.

Initially, the literary otherness discussed by Attridge and Derrida appears to have little in common with the alterity which is presented by postcolonial theory, and which forms part of the relationship between France as Centre and Self, and the Maghreb as Periphery and Other. Indeed, Attridge is clear that on one level there is no correspondence between the terms, since when a culture and people is categorized as 'Other' in order to oppress, 'there is no creativity, no response to alterity and singularity'.<sup>102</sup> Derrida makes a similar point: 'Le racisme est aussi une invention de l'autre, mais pour l'exclure et mieux se renfermer sur le même'.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, when we encounter the ethnic Other as an individual person, as we do in literature, then the limits of the category of 'Other' are challenged.

It is in the acknowledgement of the other person's uniqueness, and therefore of the impossibility of finding general rules or schemata to account fully for him or her, that one can be said to encounter the other as other – in the same moment that those rules and schemata shift, however momentarily, to take account of the now no longer other. While affirming the other as other, therefore, I encounter the limits of my own powers to think and to judge, my capacities as a rational agent. In this way, the encounter with a human other is not different in its essentials from the experience of the other as one attempts creatively to formulate fresh arguments or to produce an original work of art or philosophy.<sup>104</sup>

Without wishing to argue that literary characters can possess the kind of unique roundedness experiences in the human encounters described above, since this would imply an unintended humanism, I would argue that the literary texts in this thesis present a series of encounters with ethnic otherness which are singular, and which therefore, at their best, escape the general rules and schemata which stifle a creative response to otherness. They therefore offer an opportunity to engage with the evolving relationship between France and its former colonial Others in North Africa, and to investigate what follows when the Other is encountered in ways which allow the potential for transformation, both for the notion of the Other which, now known, is no longer Other, and for the reader who accepts the possibility of being changed. The effects are potentially profound, as Attridge suggests: 'The transformations wrought when the racial other ceases to be other as a result of

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<sup>102</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 151, n. 23.

<sup>103</sup> Derrida, 'Psyché: Invention de l'autre', p. 34, n. 1.

<sup>104</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 33.

cultural change are wide-ranging – they include shifts in cognitive categories, in habits, in affective responses, in ethical judgments, and much else'.<sup>105</sup> Through a range of contemporary metropolitan texts, this thesis therefore explores the contention that literature's openness to alterity, indeed the way in which it welcomes and accommodates otherness, makes it a unique site in which the otherness of the singular relationship between France and Algeria can operate, with the potential to create and manifest new possibilities. The chapters which follow provide contemporary illustrations of this postcolonial relationship between literature, France and North Africa.

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<sup>105</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 30.

# PAGE NUMBERING AS IN THE ORIGINAL THESIS

## Chapter One Exoticism: Translating the Other

Et en arriver très vite à définir, à poser la sensation d'Exotisme: qui n'est autre que la notion du différent; la perception du Divers; la connaissance que quelque chose n'est pas soi-même; et le pouvoir d'exotisme, qui n'est que le pouvoir de concevoir autre.<sup>1</sup>

Segalen's pronouncement of exoticism as difference was significant in terms of representations of relations between France and those nations which were once its colonies, although the extent of its influence would not emerge for some time. Prior to Segalen's writings, and during its apogee as a colonial power during the nineteenth century, France occupied an established position at the centre of Europe and the civilised world. Since the time of Montaigne, this had resulted in the establishment of a literary tradition of exoticism in which French writers sought to represent the otherness of far-flung countries, based on French movements out from the Centre. Although the original, sixteenth-century concept of exoticism was neutral, denoting relative foreignness,<sup>2</sup> over time the literary tradition which developed centred largely, although not exclusively, on a fascination with the heat and light of the colonies, and with their different flora, fauna, and customs. Segalen's writing, which equates exoticism with alterity and insists that it extends far beyond colonialism,<sup>3</sup> increasingly became relevant as colonial conceptions of exoticism were tested by the moves towards decolonisation during the course of the twentieth century. This in turn placed the old opposition between Centre and Periphery under strain, and called for new modes of literary expression which would represent the changing relationship between France and its Others.

This chapter questions the extent to which the opposition between the terms of Centre and Periphery has become blurred, and asks how France's conception of its historical Others in North Africa has been challenged by postcolonialism, and the resulting immigration which has brought former colonial subjects into the heart of the

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du divers* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1978), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> 'Le "colonial" est exotique, mais l'exotisme dépasse puissamment le colonial'. Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, p. 81.

Centre. It examines the part which literature and other arts have played in representations of the exotic, with reference to three novels: J.M.G. Le Clézio's *Désert* (1980), Dominique Bona's *Malika* (1992), and Leïla Sebbar's *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982). Based on close examination of the texts, it also considers the extent to which the expression of what is considered to be exotic has evolved as a result of the political changes which have taken place in North Africa during the twentieth century.

Employed in a range of contexts over time, consequently exoticism has become a much contested term. From its original, neutral usage, exoticism came to be identified with colonialism, an assumption which, despite Segalen's work, persisted into the mid-twentieth century. More recently, contrasting approaches have developed in Anglo-Saxon and French scholarship, which Forsdick argues is the result of differing attitudes towards postcolonial theory: 'English-language scholarship on the exotic [is] heavily reliant on notions of colonial discourse derived largely from Edward Said's work, [...] with its French-language counterpart offering less ideologically committed readings of colonial literature'.<sup>4</sup> He also notes the disruption in postcolonial French literature of exoticism's one-way vector, and the development of a more relativized, Segalenian understanding of the term, which allows for the possibility that France itself may become a site of exoticism for postcolonial travellers.<sup>5</sup> While exoticism has been frequently dismissed by postcolonial critics as an objectifying process, recent work by scholars such as Santaolalla has demonstrated the need for a more nuanced understanding of the term which takes account of its potential ambivalences.<sup>6</sup> Because of its postcolonial framework, this study follows the English-language approach in acknowledging the influence of Said; however, it recognises the complex nature of the exotic in terms of both its historical conflation with the colonial, traces of which persist in recent literary texts, and its potential to challenge the same colonial assumptions about the Other.

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<sup>4</sup> Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*, p. 44; see also Mildred Mortimer, *Journeys Through the French African Novel* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; London: James Currey, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> 'New Exoticisms': *Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), ed. by Isabel Santaolalla, *Postmodern Studies*, 29.

The enduring characteristics of exoticism were established during the colonial heyday of the nineteenth century. At that time, the exotic was the preserve of gentlemen adventurers such as Flaubert and Loti, to whose world-weary eyes the new landscapes and animals of the colonies offered both novelty and sensory gratification, as Flaubert's letters show: 'Si tu savais comme le soleil est beau! Quels palmiers! Quels chameaux! Etc. J'ai fait ce matin 2 lieues à l'âne pour aller voir les bains de Cléopâtre'.<sup>7</sup> For Flaubert and other writers, the novelty of discovering distant lands, and indeed the relationship between explorer and exotic, is conceptualised in colonial terms of exploitation and subjugation to a superior power. Consequently, there is an assumption that, although fascinating and charming, the exotic is essentially inferior to the glories of French civilization. Although Flaubert's exoticism appears to valorise alterity, as a strand of the broader discourse of Orientalism it is based on representation rather than knowledge of its object. The value of the exotic object therefore is not intrinsic, but rests in the position and perception of the (Western) observer; its attraction lies in the feelings of novelty which surround its otherness, and which differentiate it from the banal and familiar. Distance is crucial to the preservation of the exotic, since once an object or culture becomes known and familiar, its interest is destroyed. Because its value is relative, exoticism operates in a similar manner to other discourses of otherness, such as nationalism:

Idéalement, l'exotisme est un relativisme au même titre que le nationalisme, mais de façon symétriquement opposée: dans les deux cas, ce qu'on valorise n'est pas un contenu stable, mais un pays et une culture définis exclusivement par leur rapport avec l'observateur. C'est le pays auquel j'appartiens qui détient les valeurs les plus hautes, quelles qu'elles soient, affirme le nationaliste; non, c'est un pays dont la seule caractéristique pertinente est qu'il ne soit pas le mien, dit celui qui professe l'exotisme. Il s'agit donc dans les deux cas d'un relativisme rattrapé à la dernière minute par un jugement de valeur (nous sommes mieux que les autres; les autres sont mieux que nous), mais où la définition des entités comparées, 'nous' et 'les autres' reste, elle, purement relative.<sup>8</sup>

Representations of the exotic therefore reflect the values of the representing artist rather than a knowledge of the object, and are based on the assumption that since the exotic

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<sup>7</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance I (janvier 1830 à juin 1951)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 526.

<sup>8</sup> Todorov, *Nous et les autres*, p. 355.



cannot speak for itself, it must be spoken for. In this sense, exoticism of the colonial period does not valorise its object any more than does Orientalism.

As this emphasis on representation implies, it was not enough for travellers such as Flaubert and Loti simply to experience the exotic. Art and literature played an important part in cementing the experience by providing a medium through which they could communicate and share their discoveries with a wider audience. Writing about the French term 'exotisme', Forsdick notes that representation has always formed an intrinsic element of the experience of the exotic:

Since it was coined just over 150 years ago, the term 'exotisme' has been subject to steady semantic shifts between two poles: one signifying an exoticness essential to radical otherness, the other describing the process whereby such radical otherness is either experienced by the traveller from outside or translated, transported, and finally represented for consumption at home.<sup>9</sup>

The emphasis on artistic representation led to the beginnings of what might be described as a touristic approach to exploring foreign lands. Todorov points out how writers such as Chateaubriand and Loti travelled to gather images, objects and sights which would provide 'local colour' for their writings. This led to a process of selection, which favoured objects which could be passively observed over those which required an active engagement.

Ayant choisi de privilégier les objets au détriment des sujets (de s'ériger en seul objet), Chateaubriand valorisera systématiquement l'image au détriment du langage et donc, en pratique, la vue de préférence à l'ouïe [...] Si l'on chérit l'ouïe, on écouterà les paroles d'autres personnes – on sera donc obligé de reconnaître ces autres personnes. La vue, en revanche, n'implique pas qu'on soit regardé en retour: on peut se contenter de contempler les rivières et les montagnes, les châteaux et les églises.<sup>10</sup>

In this context exoticism functions as a literary device amongst others, with 'the exotic' defined in terms which facilitate its representation to a Western readership. By privileging objects which require little engagement because they can be viewed from a distance, Chateaubriand adhered to a pattern of visual discovery which, as Rojek and

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<sup>9</sup> Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*, pp. 82-3.

<sup>10</sup> Todorov, *Nous et les autres*, p. 405.

Urry have shown, was to become the norm for contemporary tourist practices.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, he also ensured that the distance necessary to the exotic would not be threatened by any deeper knowledge of the land or its people. The part played by vision, and in particular by photography, in encounters between the representatives of dominant cultures, and those of former colonies, is a significant aspect of the contemporary interaction between cultures, and is one to which we will return.

The constant need to maintain a distance from the objects under observation led to the creation of a series of literary and artistic exotic clichés. By force of repetition, these began to act as a form of intertextual shorthand, thus further reducing the need for any firsthand knowledge of the object and preserving its exotic nature by increasing the distance between object and audience. Lisa Lowe refers to clichés such as the harem and points out that painters such as Ingres never travelled to North Africa or the Near East but instead made use of the illustrations and descriptions found in the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*. Consequently, Lowe argues that 'Ingres' paintings of Turkish odalisques bring together iconographies from a multiplicity of Orient',<sup>12</sup> making them multi-referential texts which in their turn influenced future conceptions of the exotic. In such clichés, the object of otherness has become almost entirely disengaged from its representation.

### Translating the Other in literature

This raises questions about how art and literature, in both the nineteenth century and the contemporary era, can deal with the challenge of communicating the specificities of the exotic. The task of the writer consists in bringing to bear the imaginative power of literature, which the reader experiences in the act of reading, on the alterity of the exotic, and so translating it into terms which are meaningful to the writer's audience. The artist,

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<sup>11</sup> *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, ed. by Chris Rojek and John Urry (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 2.

then, is caught between the exotic object and the audience, intended or eventual, of the representation being produced, and faced with the tendency for the object to become altered or corrupted in the process of translation. Roger Célestin models this tension and shows the artist caught between the opposing poles of Home and its dominant paradigms, and the desire for the other place, the exotic.

*Straining* as I use it here applies not only to the individual's attempt at translating an exotic otherness for Home, but also to the tension between the gravitational pull of Home, the Same, the familiar, the dominant, and the individual subject's dissident desire for another place, an outside – an outside that simultaneously embodies desire and destabilises the desiring subject (isn't this what desire is supposed to be about in the first place?), 'leading him astray,' nubile Nausikaa to homeward bound Odysseus. This is precisely what is not as readily exposed when the object of representation belongs to the world of the Same and the familiar.<sup>13</sup>

At the two extremes, Célestin figures the possible outcomes of this tension as 'exemplification' and 'experimentation'. In the case of the former, the exotic is so corrupted by the process of translation that its otherness all but disappears within the dominant 'Home' paradigm. In the case of experimentation, translation is interrupted by the rejection and subsequent disappearance of the Home paradigm, such that the otherness of the exotic becomes dominant:

[With *exemplification*] the Other becomes a mere exemplar, ultimately *disappearing* under the layers of what otherness was only there to illustrate or serve, as in certain reductive anthropologies or 'economic feasibility' studies. The result [...] is to strengthen an organisation, a discipline, an institution, a dominant, institutionalised discourse, a nation, indeed, a civilisation rather than the individual Western subject; this individual can also be said to *disappear* to a certain extent in the very structures and discourses whose construction he has contributed to by translating exotic otherness into the understandable and the usable, into language, into 'knowledge', into a commodity.

The second tendency, *experimentation*, is, on the contrary, stamped by the individual Western subject's will to explore the exotic as a means of severing ties with home [...] at its extreme, this propensity sometimes results in the 'loss of self' or 'merging with the Other' that is often referred to as 'madness', gone the way of Ahab, Kurtz, and others who do not return. Another, although diametrically opposed, instance of disappearance.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Roger Célestin, *From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 4, emphasis in original.

<sup>14</sup> Célestin, *From Cannibals to Radicals*, p. 6, emphasis in original.

The difficulty of achieving a translation which succeeds in representing and communicating the otherness of the exotic without corrupting it in the process is perhaps the principal challenge in exotic literature. However, it is complicated further because the difficulty is not merely one of translation, but concerns the nature of the object being translated. Exoticism is alterity and otherness, and as such it has a propensity to escape, remaining outside the conventions and paradigms which we habitually use to frame and contain the surrounding world. As I will argue throughout this study, literature is perhaps uniquely placed to accommodate this otherness, since we experience otherness in the act of reading what Derek Attridge refers to as 'inventive writing', that is, writing which challenges the conventions of written expression.<sup>15</sup> However, a distinction should be made between the exotic alterity referred to by Célestin, and that of Attridge. For Célestin, the exote is attempting to translate, to represent a specific form of alterity through writing. The specific nature of this alterity increases the probability of corruption in the process of translation. For Attridge, however, the task is different, since the writer welcomes and assumes responsibility for otherness without knowing anything of its nature in advance, accepting the risk that it may not necessarily be beneficial. In practice, of course, the writer of exoticism must encounter and address the issues of both translation and representation; however, this is not to say that they are identical.

The linguistic representation of the exotic brings particular challenges. As Kateryna Longley states, the slipperiness of language calls into question the feasibility of conceptions of exotic representation and containment:

[The exotic is] elusive and ungraspable [...] the sting in the tail of orientalism because it is the alluring and potentially entrapping aspect of otherness [...] Language and discourse always invent as much as 'record' their 'object' and the idea of 'containment' is a fiction.<sup>16</sup>

This notion pushes at the limits of representation and asks what might happen if something as slippery as exoticism were to escape the dominating discourse, refusing to be contained. It suggests that exoticism has a certain power which is potentially available

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<sup>15</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*.

<sup>16</sup> Kateryna Olijnyk Longley, 'Fabricating Otherness: Demidenko and Exoticism', in *'New' Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness*, ed. by Isabel Santaolalla, *Postmodern Studies*, 29 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 21-39 (pp. 28-9).

to the exoticized subject, because it exceeds the discourses habitually used to refer to it. However, I will argue that while this power appears to be available to the exotic subjects examined in this chapter, on closer analysis, far from giving them freedom from Western discourses, in some cases their exotic status merely perpetuates Western views of the Other.

To underline Longley's point, it is worth noting that similar criticisms have been levelled at the suggestion that Orientalism is a monolithic discourse which uniformly represents the Orient as the Other of the West. Lisa Lowe draws attention to the complexity of power relations when she rejects Orientalism as a homogeneous discourse, referring to it as an uneven matrix of situations across different cultural and historical sites, each of which is internally complex and unstable, and which intersects with other traditions of representation. For her, these points of intersection are where 'narratives of gendered, racial, national, and class differences complicate and interrupt the narrative of orientalism'.<sup>17</sup> Where Orientalism is destabilised, the potential emerges for marginalised groups to begin articulating resistance. The challenge for the exoticized subject is to use what Bhabha has identified as the 'ambivalence' of the discourses acting on him or her and to turn this slipperiness into power which can be used to find a voice and a position from which to speak. In these moments of resistance lies the potential for the individual subject to evade the monolithic roles in which the dominant discourse constantly seeks to cast him or her. One of the concerns of this chapter is the extent to which this is valid in the contemporary texts examined here.

### The development of exoticism

As the opening lines of this chapter suggested, in keeping with other aspects of Western discourse, exoticism has undergone something of an evolution since the days of Flaubert and Loti. Nineteenth-century exotes sought the exotic in geographically distant lands, although as always perceptions of the exotic were relative and varied according to

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<sup>17</sup> Lowe, *Critical Terrains*, p. 5.

the experiences and position of the writer.<sup>18</sup> However, the distance which is a necessary underpinning of exoticism was strained by the development of a number of factors, including the growth in global trade, increased technological developments, and improved ease of travel. The geographical remoteness which had once functioned as the guarantor of exoticism now came under increasing threat, for as the blankness of the globe was filled in so the promise of radical alterity gradually declined. This was compounded during the mid-twentieth century as, with the advent of decolonisation, many of the French colonies began to assert themselves against the old, imperial paradigms.

Nonetheless, the desire for exoticism did not disappear as the twentieth century progressed. Indeed, if anything, nostalgia for what had been lost increased as cultures converged and became more homogenous.<sup>19</sup> Zygmunt Bauman refers to this new state as 'liquid modernity' and points to a number of trends which characterise it, and which I argue are important to the evolving conceptions of exoticism.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps most significant is the continual drive towards 'modernization', which aims to allow the post-industrial world constantly to increase its production and competitiveness, but without the earlier belief in an attainable *telos*. Belief in progress having gradually collapsed, the drive to modernization now exists as an end in itself.

The technological expertise put at the service of this aim has succeeded in dislocating the planes of time and space, through air travel but most importantly through electronic communications, so that space becomes distinct from time. As suggested above, this has the potential to impact radically on conventional views of exoticism. Moreover, as Bauman says, the power flows at work across the globe are engaged in

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<sup>18</sup> Because of its status as France's main trading colony, Flaubert and his travelling companion Maxime du Camp did not consider Algeria or the Maghreb as part of the Orient – an ironic situation given that the Maghreb derives its name from the Arabic 'gharīb', meaning 'exotic'. See 'Appendice: Afrique du nord et exotisme chez les arabes,' in *L'Exotisme, Cahiers CRLH. CIRAOI*, No. 5, 1988, ed. by Alain Buisine and Norbert Dodille (Paris: Diffusion Didier-Erudition, 1988), p. 418. According to Dobie, Egypt and the Middle East, on the other hand, were an entirely different matter. Madeleine Dobie, *Foreign bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 21-2.

<sup>19</sup> Renato Rosaldo refers to this longing as 'imperialist nostalgia', and defines it as follows: 'Imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox: a person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a way of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention'. Renato Rosaldo, 'Imperialist Nostalgia', in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1989), pp. 69-70

<sup>20</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

dismantling any network or structure which would confine the movement of power. Beginning centuries ago with the end of the feudal system, this has resulted in the disappearance of the structures which provided identity, and consequently, as Alain Touraine claims, 'the end of definition of the human being as a social being, defined by his or her place in society which determines his or her behaviour and actions'.<sup>21</sup>

Contemporary society is now characterized by fluidity, with individuals working to create their own identity in locations which owe more to the demands of the labour market than to their place of birth or family residence. As Bauman says, "individualization" consists of transforming human "identity" from a "given" into a "task" and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance [...] to speak of individualization and of modernity is to speak of one and the same social condition'.<sup>22</sup> While it is possible to view this trend as a necessary liberation, and to advocate its evolution into yet more radical forms, for many individuals the consequences of developing modernization are lived as a demanding struggle.

Since exoticism is a product of the West's perceptions of itself and its Others, the nature of contemporary Western society necessarily influences what is conceived as exotic. The search for the contemporary exotic has consequently seen a move away from an emphasis on the geographical exoticism beloved of intellectuals as late as Segalen, to an investigation of other territories where questions of difference and distance are negotiated. One of the most fruitful terrains is identified by Segalen, when he says 'L'exotisme n'est pas seulement donné dans l'espace, mais également en fonction du temps'.<sup>23</sup> In his *Essai*, he differentiates between geographical exoticism, which for him is 'le seul que l'on développera', and temporal exoticism, which he identifies as either historical or futuristic.<sup>24</sup> In an era where the element of distance in geographical exoticism has been fatally compromised, historical exoticism in particular offers the promise of what Roger Célestin calls 'the ever receding presence, the unattainable

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<sup>21</sup> Alain Touraine, 'Can We Live Together, Equal and Different?', *European Journal of Social Thought*, 1.2 (1998), 165-78 (p. 177).

<sup>22</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, pp. 31-2.

<sup>23</sup> Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, p. 20, emphasis in original.

fullness' which excites exactly because of its absence. He illustrates this point with a quotation from Gautier:

Il y a deux sens de l'exotisme: le premier vous donne le goût de l'exotisme à travers l'espace, le goût de l'Amérique, le goût des femmes jaunes, vertes, etc. Le goût plus raffiné, une corruption plus suprême, c'est le goût de l'exotisme à travers le temps: par exemple, Flaubert voudrait forniquer à Carthage; vous voudriez la Parabère; moi rien ne m'exciterait comme une momie.<sup>25</sup>

There is no danger of ancient Carthage losing its attractions through banal familiarity, and so desire can be endlessly deferred with confidence. Temporal exoticism also enables the creation of a sense of nostalgia for the alterity that has been lost. Whether this takes the form of an ancient civilization, or a primitive tribe, exoticism emphasises elements which are no longer present in Western society – a propensity which numerous critics have interpreted as a symptom of the West's psychological or spiritual lack.<sup>26</sup> bell hooks is particularly critical of the tendency for ethnic otherness to be appropriated within Western fashions as a means of adding spice to the bland homogeneity of white culture. There is, then, a tension between cultural appreciation and appropriation, with the danger that the Other will then simply become a commodity, to be consumed and thrown away at will, rather than being respected and accepted for its difference. The notion that Western culture has become homogenised is shared by J.M.G. Le Clézio, whose novel *Désert* is examined in this chapter. He describes it as the catalyst for his own interest in the exotic:

La culture occidentale est devenue trop monolithique. Elle privilégie jusqu'à l'exacerbation son côté urbain, technique, empêchant ainsi le développement d'autres formes d'expression: la religiosité, les sentiments, par exemple. Toute la partie impénétrable de l'être humain est occultée au nom du rationalisme. C'est cette prise de conscience qui m'a poussé vers d'autres civilisations.<sup>27</sup>

The next section considers the extent to which Le Clézio has succeeded in working the tension between appreciation and appropriation of desert culture.

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<sup>25</sup> Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal* (Paris: Fasquelle-Flammarion, 1959), at the date of 23 November 1863, p. 1360, cited in Roger Célestin, *From Cannibals to Radicals*, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> Examples of this include Dorothy Figueira, *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), bell hooks, 'Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance', in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End, 1992), pp. 21-39, and Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* (Boulder & Oxford: Westview, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> J.M.G. Le Clézio, 'Entretien avec Tirthankar Chanda', *Écriture(s)*, 45 (2001), p. 5.



*Désert*: 'exoticism... the infinite of nostalgia'<sup>28</sup>

It is his nostalgia for lost difference which transforms J.M.G. Le Clézio's text, *Désert*, from an anti-colonial novel into a work of contemporary exoticism. It tells the story of the last days of a nomadic desert tribe, the 'hommes bleus', faced with defeat at the hands of invading French and Spanish colonial forces, a historical narrative which is spliced with the narrative of Lalla, a descendant of the last 'hommes bleus', who lives in an indeterminate post-colonial present. In narrating the history of the tribes from their perspective, the text subverts the conventions of the colonial novel to place the nomads centre-stage in a radical act of de-centring. This is achieved in part by locating the novel in the nomads' desert environment for, as Rice comments, 'In the context of the Maghrîb, to focus on the desert is to decentre, for the space of a moment, a theoretical apparatus that has been pulled via a colonial history toward the metropolitan West'.<sup>29</sup>

Le Clézio's construction of alterity begins with the introduction of his first characters. The 'hommes bleus' emerge like shadows into an elemental world, hostile to humanity, where the familiar features of wind, sand and sun take on exceptional, heightened qualities and the characteristics of human individuals are subsumed to tribal collectivity. This creates in the reader the sense that this is a sphere of perception different from the material experiences of the familiar world.

Ils étaient les hommes et les femmes du sable, du vent, de la lumière, de la nuit. Ils étaient apparus, comme dans un rêve, en haut d'une dune, comme s'ils étaient nés du ciel sans nuages, et qu'ils avaient dans leurs membres la dureté de l'espace [...] C'était un pays hors du temps, loin de l'histoire des hommes, peut-être, un pays où rien ne pouvait apparaître ou mourir, comme s'il était déjà séparé des autres pays, au sommet de l'existence terrestre.<sup>30</sup>

Born of the desert, intimately linked to the earth, and so leaving no trace of their passage in the swirling sand, their timeless world is about to clash with the linear history of the

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<sup>28</sup> Irving Babbit, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (New York: AMS, 1978), p. 251.

<sup>29</sup> Laura Rice, 'Critical Appropriations: One Desert, Three Narratives', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2001), 128-145 (p. 140).

<sup>30</sup> J.M.G. Le Clézio, *Désert* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 9 ; p. 11.

invading colonisers. But although they will be defeated in linear time – the text opens and closes with the historical details of their defeat, dated by the Christian calendar: ‘Saguiet el Hamra, hiver 1909-10’; ‘Agadir, 30 mars 1912’ – the nomads disappear as they appeared ‘comme dans un rêve, ils disparaissaient’, their relationship to the earth unchanged and passed on to their descendant Lalla. They commune in what Kristeva has called ‘temporalité monumentale’ which encompasses repetition and eternity, a primitive cycle in which life and death are an integral part of nomadic wandering.<sup>31</sup> This is one example of Le Clézio’s use of alternative conceptions of time as a means of exoticizing the desert culture; however, due to constraints of space this study will treat them only briefly.<sup>32</sup>

The novel recounts the experience of the desert tribes, who follow their chief, Ma el Aïnine, as he leads his people in courageous but doomed efforts to find safety and peace. Le Clézio describes their primitive nomadic way of life in an environment which is radically different from that of the urban West, but he also emphasises other elements of their way of life which separate them from contemporary experience. The most striking of these is the spiritual or metaphysical aspect of their tribe. The text emphasises the dependence of the nomads on the spiritual guidance of their leader, who turns to God and his representative Al Azraq, the deceased holy man who was once Ma el Aïnine’s teacher. This faith in a holy man and his belief system is threatened by the invaders, but their shared spiritual dependence leads the tribes to a collective awareness of their shared destiny. This sense of destiny is so strong that in their forced march they follow an invisible path which is clear to all. The spiritual aspect of their lives, even under the hardships of the endless march, contrasts with the rationalism and scepticism of the West today, and emphasises the different way in which the ‘hommes bleus’ relate to the world. Le Clézio makes their unswerving faith seem appealing by revealing the certainty and encouragement which it provides, even in the midst of appalling hardship – a certainty which is largely absent from Bauman’s liquid modernity.

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<sup>31</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Le Temps des femmes’, 34/44, 5 (1979), 5-19 (p. 7).

<sup>32</sup> For a broad range of views on time, see *Time and Value*, ed. by Scott Lash, Andrew Quick and Richard Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

The metaphysical aspect is both shared collectively by the tribe, and is intensely personal. Nour, a boy of the tribe, and Lalla, apparently his descendant, are both from the line of Al Azraq, and so enjoy an enhanced communion with their ancestor's spirit. When her solitary state of orphan in an extended family becomes too much for her, Lalla can seek Al Azraq's presence on the high plateau and finds it as a 'look' or 'gaze' directed upon her like the heat of the sun. Unlike the gaze as defined by feminist theorists such as Rose and Pollock, this is a look which communicates rather than objectifies, speaking directly into her inner being through the noise of the wind, of the sand and the scorpions and snakes. Lalla calls him 'Es Ser', the Secret, for no-one else knows of him. His presence draws Lalla into the timeless world of her ancestors, altering her perspective and enabling her to see with his eyes so that she sees mysterious visions of the desert she has never seen, great white cities with fine towers, ornate red palaces, and lakes of pure blue water. The presence of Es Ser alters perceptions of location and of time:

Ici, tout est semblable, et c'est comme si elle était à la fois ici, puis plus loin, là où son regard se pose au hasard, puis ailleurs encore, tout près de la limite entre terre et ciel [...] Alors, pendant longtemps, elle cesse d'être elle-même, elle devient quelqu'un d'autre, de lointain, d'oublié. Elle voit d'autres formes, des silhouettes d'enfants, des hommes, des femmes, des chevaux, des chameaux, des troupeaux de chèvres; elle voit la forme d'une ville, un palais de pierre et d'argile, des remparts de boue d'où sortent des troupes de guerriers. Elle voit cela, car ce n'est pas un rêve, mais le souvenir d'une autre mémoire dans laquelle elle est entrée sans le savoir.<sup>33</sup>

C'est un rêve qui vient d'ailleurs, qui existait ici sur le plateau de pierres longtemps avant elle...<sup>34</sup>

Linear conceptions of time are disturbed further by the love song which Lalla's aunt, Aamma, teaches her. It is a song once sung by Lalla's dead mother, and as Aamma sings, Lalla hears another voice, strange and far-off, which takes over and seems to sing just for her. The implication is that this is the voice of her mother, Lalla Hawa. But the song associated with Lalla's mother seems also to exist outside of time, for both Nour and Lalla hear it in the presence of Es Ser, sung in the Shluh language, just as Nour shares the same vision of a city that Lalla will later see.

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<sup>33</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>34</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 204.

## Desert exoticism: metaphysics and sensory perception

In these passages, Le Clézio calls into question the relevance of conventional Western forms of perception and perspective, and suggests a metaphysical domain, reminiscent of primitive spirituality, that has been lost to modern Western culture. He uses a similar strategy to address the limitations of language and linguistic communication, a subject that he has dealt with in many of his previous texts. In *Désert* he abandons his attempt to find a solution to the postmodern problem of the unreliability of language, with its endless 'différance', instead exploring the possibility that non-verbal communication might enable a signifying space outside language. The pre-eminent figure in this regard is le Hartani, the mute shepherd boy rescued from the desert by one of the 'hommes bleus' and looked after by Lalla's village. Mute by choice, he has no interest in hearing or learning the language of men 'parce qu'il vient d'un pays où il n'y a pas d'hommes, seulement le sable des dunes et le ciel'.<sup>35</sup> Like Es Ser, he speaks silently with his eyes and meaning passes directly to the interior of Lalla. His communication enthralled her:

Ce ne sont pas vraiment des histoires qu'il raconte à Lalla. Ce sont plutôt des images qu'il fait naître dans l'air, rien qu'avec les gestes, avec ses lèvres, avec la lumière de ses yeux. Des images fugitives qui tracent des éclairs, qui s'allument et s'éteignent, mais jamais Lalla n'a rien entendu de plus beau, de plus vrai.<sup>36</sup>

Through Lalla's wordless relationship with le Hartani and Es Ser, Le Clézio challenges the convention that reality is constructed primarily through language, and raises questions about the potential for the production of meaning through engagement with the human senses, outside of language:

Par le langage, l'homme s'est fait le plus solitaire des êtres du monde, puisqu'il s'est exclu du silence. Tous ses efforts pour comprendre les autres langages, olfactifs, tactiles, gustatifs, et les vibrations, les ondes, les communications par les racines, les cycles chimiques, les anastomoses, tout cela il faut qu'il traduise dans son langage, avec ses mots

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<sup>35</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 133.

et ses chiffres. Mais il n'en perçoit que les traces: le vrai sens est passé à côté. Alors l'homme est seul, et il ne sait pas être lui-même.<sup>37</sup>

Of uncertain origin, le Hartani's connection to the desert defines him as other; he avoids people other than Lalla, who sees him as one with his fellow desert dwellers: the sparrowhawk whose soaring flight he seems to share, and the fox and goat whose invisible paths he traces. Through his sensory perception le Hartani introduces Lalla to the kaleidoscope of smells which striates the desert, initiating her into a previously unknown dimension:

Le Hartani a montré à Lalla comment il faut faire. Autrefois, elle ne savait pas. Autrefois, elle pouvait passer à côté d'un buisson, ou d'une racine, ou d'un rayon de miel, sans rien percevoir. [...] Au-dessus des traces d'un lièvre flotte l'étrange odeur de la peur, et un peu plus loin, le Hartani fait signe à Lalla d'approcher. Sur la terre rouge, d'abord, il n'y a rien, mais peu à peu, la jeune fille distingue quelque chose d'âcre, de dur, l'odeur de l'urine et de la sueur, et d'un seul coup elle reconnaît l'odeur: c'est celle d'un chien sauvage, affamé, au poil hérissé, qui courait à travers le plateau à la poursuite du lièvre.<sup>5</sup>

By creating a character like le Hartani, Le Clézio appeals to what Segalen calls 'L'Exotisme para-sensoriel'<sup>38</sup> – a world differentiated from ours by its sensations.

Le Clézio is arguably at his strongest when he acknowledges the limits of language, and explores the ways in which otherness can be communicated by non-verbal means. Through the metaphysical experiences of Lalla and Nour, which disrupt linear time, and through the sensory perceptions of le Hartani, he succeeds in manifesting the presence of otherness in his text. In the act of perception, le Hartani transforms the reality of the desert around him, and, with Lalla, we as readers are invited to imagine a world different from our own experience:

Ces choses étaient plus belles quand il les regardait, plus neuves, comme si personne ne les avaient regardées avant lui [...] il sait des choses que les hommes ne savent pas, il les voit avec tout son corps, pas seulement avec ses yeux.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> J.M.G. Le Clézio, *L'Inconnu sur la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 129.

Le Clézio here is addressing the challenge posed by Célestin. He successfully translates otherness into the text destined for a Western readership, and does this without corrupting it in the process, so that the reader is aware of the possibilities of alternative sensory and experiential paradigms. The function of the senses in enabling literature to convey experiences of otherness is a significant theme in this research, which will be developed further in Chapter Two. It points to the role of the senses in representations of the intercultural encounter, but it also highlights the gap between the phenomenology of the material world, and the phenomenological experience of reading literature referred to by Derrida in the Introduction.

However, while Le Clézio does succeed in inviting a sense of otherness into his language, a closer examination of his choice of desert location suggests that the process of translation is more complex than it initially appears. The vocabulary employed to describe the desert is restricted ('dune; sable; vent; cailloux; pierres; lumière; silence' appear repeatedly) and effectively creates the elemental sense of the landscape, but it raises questions about exactly who is seeing and describing this location. Laura Rice asks this question in an article which traces representations of the desert, and concludes that while the majority of desert inhabitants are Muslim (Berber, Arab, Black, Tuareg), literature of the desert has often been seen through the lens of the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>40</sup> She concludes that this most wild and inhuman of spaces is as socially constructed as any other, and that there is a risk in basing claims of universality on any single account:

Non-Muslim writers originally from North Africa like Camus, Jabès, Memmi and Derrida have described the desert – but theirs are, like all deserts, socially constructed. They have described the deserts their particular 'situatedness' has allowed them to see – hostile, alien, blank, secondary. Their problem is not in what they have seen; rather it is in the unwarranted claim of universality attributed to these views. Writers who come from the desert, or for whom the desert is deeply valued as reflected in their cultural tropes, see a desert full of potential, moods, complementarities, illuminations. When the colonial soldier-scholars carried out their research, they did so thinking they were seeing the landscape as it existed; they probably were often unaware of the extent to which cultural politics shaped their views. When they did recognise the bias, they maintained there was a 'rightness' about it just the same. Postcolonial critical theory, for all its insights into the workings of power, may at times fall into the same traps of appropriation: particularised

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<sup>40</sup> Rice, 'Critical Appropriations'.

'post-religious' secular deconstructions may turn out to be just such a critical appropriation.<sup>41</sup>

Her closing point about the 'post-religious' seems particularly apt in relation to Le Clézio's emphasis on the primitive spirituality of the desert. Again, however, the text reveals a more complex reality, for the post-religious spiritual elements are over-written with Judeo-Christian allusions to the Exodus, in the form of the desert nomads' endless march towards freedom and plenty in the north: 'Là-bas, il y a de l'eau et des terres pour nous tous'.<sup>42</sup> As Madeleine Borgomano points out,

le récit de cette longue marche à travers le désert vers le Nord [...] avec pour guide un saint prophète, rappelle fortement le récit biblique de *L'Exode* [...] L'histoire des guerriers du désert est exactement parallèle et semblable à celle des fils d'Israël. Et Ma el Aïnine, par bien des traits, ressemble à Moïse.<sup>43</sup>

But while Borgomano defends this reference to the Old Testament on the grounds that 'pour l'Islam, la Bible est aussi un livre sacré', in reality Islam has no tradition of an exodus, particularly not one towards a 'promised land', since what is promised to Muslims is heaven rather than a land in this world. Indeed, the Arabic phrase which corresponds to 'la terre promise' carries strong Judeo-Christian connotations.<sup>44</sup> Facts such as these serve to underline the extent to which Le Clézio, like all authors, writes through the lens created by the discourses and traditions which have shaped his perception, and which shape ours as readers. However, since there is no neutral place outside of discourse from which we can operate as writers or readers, this simply emphasises Le Clézio's success in those instances where he does accommodate otherness within his text.

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<sup>41</sup> Rice, 'Critical Appropriations', p. 145.

<sup>42</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Madeleine Borgomano, *Désert: J.M.G. Le Clézio* (Paris: Bertrand-Lacoste, 1992), pp. 95-6.

<sup>44</sup> I am grateful to Dr Ayman Shihadeh from the Dept of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Glasgow for his confirmation of this point. It is interesting to note that the second novel in this chapter, *Malika*, contains a similar reference: 'Le nom de la capitale française sonnait comme celui de la terre promise' (*Malika*, p. 230). This reference neglects the Judeo-Christian origins of the phrase, which would be meaningless to a character of Muslim origin, such as Malika.

## The Periphery within the Centre

As we have seen, Le Clézio successfully introduces the otherness of the exotic into those passages of his text which focus on the desert nomads. However, in the second half of his novel, Le Clézio extends the challenge of translating otherness, and moves the character of Lalla from the desert, across the Mediterranean to Marseilles. He now faces the difficulty of conveying the exoticism of Lalla amidst the familiar surroundings of the rundown quarters of a twentieth-century city: arguably a more difficult proposition. I propose to examine this section of *Désert* in conjunction with the second novel in this chapter, *Malika* (1992), by Dominique Bona, as this latter text deals with a similar scenario, in which a Moroccan girl leaves her desert village to follow her destiny in France. In both cases, the authors are operating close to the ‘exemplification’ pole on Célestin’s continuum, with the exotic object uprooted from its original context and placed within a Western setting familiar to a Western readership. The challenge therefore is in translating the exotic whilst ensuring that its specificity is not overwhelmed by the familiar setting.

The French locations chosen by the authors are geographically close – Marseilles and St. Tropez – but their tenor could not be more different. The picture which Le Clézio paints of contemporary France is a bleak one. Focused on the negative aspects of Bauman’s ‘liquid modernity’, it is a place of alienation, peopled almost exclusively by impoverished immigrant workers, exploitative owners, thieves and beggars who constitute an omnipresent underclass. It has nothing in common with the tales of Europe Lalla heard in the desert: ‘Lalla a beau regarder, elle ne voit pas la ville blanche dont parlait Naman le pêcheur, ni les palais, ni les tours des églises. Maintenant, il n’y a que des quais, sans fin, couleur de pierre et de ciment’.<sup>45</sup> No one is free; even the bourgeois who do not feature in the novel are by implication subject to society’s capitalist forces. Marseilles, it is suggested, is the real desert.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 261.

<sup>46</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the origins of ‘désert’ lie in the Latin ‘desertus’, meaning abandoned or deserted. Critics such as William Thompson and Hanna Hofhansl have observed that the



As Thompson points out, the nomads are at home in the aridity of the physical desert and it is only in contact with French civilisation or in France itself that Lalla encounters feelings of abandonment, emptiness and fear. In the desert, silence and solitude are the means for individuals to relate to their surroundings, listen to their ancestors, and become a part of their context. In the city, silence means isolation and fear, the inability to connect with those around, which transforms the city into a space of noise and flow in which individuals are endlessly swept along by the movement of the crowds, unconsciously drowning in the torrent of humanity. The flow of humanity is reminiscent of the desert tribes, but where the nomads shared a common purpose and sense of destiny, the undifferentiated mass of the crowd forces these urban nomads to keep moving aimlessly, depriving each of the choice to continue or halt, or of any sense of purpose.

Il faut marcher, ici, marcher, avec les autres, comme si on savait où on allait, mais il n'y a pas de fin au voyage [...] Il faut marcher pour ne pas tomber, pour ne pas être piétiné par les autres.<sup>47</sup>

All around, Lalla feels a living death: the earth has been cut off from the sky by a whiteness which suffocates men and stops their hearts and memories. Lalla watches as people from around the world – blacks, North Africans, Turks, Spaniards, Greeks - are drawn, tired and anxious, to the promise of a land of opportunity, through the ports and railway stations that act as the mouth of this creature 'qui [va] les broyer et les dévorer'.<sup>48</sup> Contemporary France is depicted as a modern version of *Germinal*'s 'Le Voreux'.

The setting of *Malika* could hardly prove a greater contrast. Bona locates her text in a St. Tropez villa, where a bourgeois Parisian couple are on holiday with their family, surrounded by a milieu of similar friends. David and Marie-Hélène Paul-Martin's summer villa is the epitome of 'BCBG' chic, providing an annual vacation in keeping with the material display of David's successful career in banking. From an old wine-

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word therefore refers less to the geographical characteristics of an area than to its characteristic state. William Thompson, 'Voyage and Immobility in J.M.G. Le Clézio's *Désert* and *La Quarantaine*', *World Literature Today*, 71.4 (1997), 709-716 (p. 710); Hanna D. Hofhansl, 'Le Désert d'Albert Memmi: la (con)quête du 'Royaume-du-Dedans'', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 3.3 (2000), 170-179 (p.173).

<sup>47</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 309.

<sup>48</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 273.

producing family, Marie-Hélène is emblematic of 'la vieille France' and can point to a senator and a former 'député' within her family as evidence of the source of her elegance, refinement and success as a social hostess. In a few pages, therefore, Bona swiftly constructs a Hexagon-centred world reminiscent of earlier novels such as Sagan's *Bonjour Tristesse*.<sup>49</sup> The superficial similarities of both novels are striking (besides the classic isolated St. Tropez setting, *Malika* also concludes with the death of a character in a car accident) and by referencing them Bona is able to signal concisely her concern with similar central issues: the disruption of a stable and typically French bourgeois set of relationships and the ultimate resumption of bourgeois norms, albeit in a subtly altered form. As in Sagan, Bona's disruption is precipitated by the introduction of an outside figure invited into the holidaying milieu but here the outsider is a symbol of the periphery which enters and effectively decentres the (French) culture of the Centre.

The introduction of Malika, the young au pair, immediately splits the reality of the villa and creates 'un autre monde'<sup>50</sup> at the back of the house, an unseen world of cooking and child-care divorced from the glamorous world of guests and relaxation. As with each of the heroines of these texts, Malika is a liminal figure moving in the interstices between child and adult. Barely more than a child herself, in St Tropez she assumes the role of surrogate mother caring for the young Paul-Martins, and embarks on sexual adventures which mark her out as a latter-day Cécile, albeit more experienced. This duplication of worlds and realities is a constant refrain in the novel, crucial to the construction of Malika as exotic and other, and established from the opening pages. Having given an exoticized description of her beautiful North African appearance, the narrator insists that she doesn't belong to the scene depicted:

Ces gens ne venaient pas du même monde que le sien [...] Du promontoire, en aplomb de la crique, elle fixait au loin, au-delà des rochers rouges, au-delà des balises, *un monde qu'elle était seule à voir*. Mystérieux aux autres, il agissait sur elle comme un charme. Elle sentait sa présence. Elle n'aurait su dire si sa force, lointaine et invisible, lui porterait malheur ou chance, mais elle ne pouvait s'en défendre. *Ce monde, autrefois perdu, elle le portait en elle*, intact, tel un souvenir ou telle une promesse, avec une jalousie de lionne.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Françoise Sagan, *Bonjour Tristesse* (Paris: Julliard, 1954).

<sup>50</sup> Dominique Bona, *Malika* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Bona, *Malika*, pp. 12-3, emphasis added.

The figure of Malika gives the reader access to another world which she alone sees, and which we see through her. This world is drawn in exoticized, nostalgic language strikingly similar to that of the vanished world of Le Clézio's novel. 'Autrefois perdu', it exists in Malika in a manner reminiscent of Lalla's ancestral past, through her faith in her destiny which she believes comes from her grandmother's Berber forebears.

Because Malika exists on the interface between Western and ancient realities, the extent of her otherness is not immediately remarked upon by the Paul-Martin circle, whose expectation is of a silent domestic worker. The impact of her arrival to serve dinner one night is therefore striking, her presence silencing the murmur of polite social conversation:

La jeune fille rayonnait. Avec ses cheveux noirs très courts, ses dents de nacre, elle exprimait une merveilleuse jeunesse. Elle ne s'estompait pas comme Marie-Hélène l'eût souhaité, telle une figurante dans le décor. Au contraire. Elle avait l'éclat d'une star. De la soubrette, elle n'avait que le costume: une robe noire et un tablier blanc. La robe, à décolleté bateau, arrivait à mi-cuisses. Benoît Darman savourait du regard les jambes et les bras satinés, doux comme une peau d'abricot. Le tablier blanc avec le volant épinglé sur la poitrine à moitié visible ressemblait à un accessoire d'opérette. La jeune fille semblait jouer, être quelqu'un d'autre. Quelqu'un que personne ne connaissait, bien différent du rôle incertain et secondaire de servante qu'on lui attribuait. Quand elle se penchait, un curieux bijou en or, qui représentait une main, se détachait de ses seins ronds et se balançait au-dessus de l'hôte auquel elle présentait le plat.

La jeune fille fit en balançant des hanches le tout de la table, vivement, sans s'attarder, mais en se laissant contempler, sous tous les angles. Elle disparut. On fut bien incapable de reprendre la conversation là où on l'avait laissée.<sup>52</sup>

The entry of the exotic into the midst of bourgeois normality forces a reassessment of perspective. Debates about the relative merits of Florida golf courses and makes of tennis racquet, laced with sophisticated English vocabulary – these entertaining diversions are immediately forgotten and cannot be recovered once the figure of the girl has vanished. The incident, ostensibly about Malika and her silent and conscious use of what she knows to be her greatest asset – her body – is in fact a catalyst which disturbs the equilibrium of the group and prompts them to re-evaluate their self-image and their image of their companions. The appearance of Malika induces a process of de-centring whereby the attention moves from a unified focus on the Centre, to a fragmented vision in which the

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<sup>52</sup> Bona, *Malika*, pp. 36-7.

Centre is seen only in relation to and as a reflection of the Other. The immediate reaction of the other characters is to categorise Malika in conventionally exotic terms of eroticism, beauty and an exceptional yet unknowable presence:

D'où pouvait-elle venir? Quel était son passé? De quel exotisme tirait-elle son étrange et fascinante beauté? Depuis le passage de l'inconnue, chacun demeurait sous l'emprise de son érotisme.<sup>53</sup>

The impact made by Malika's presence, which destabilizes the status quo, is the first suggestion that she represents Longley's notion of the power of the exotic. The French dinner guests conceive of her in conventionally exotic terms, but the references to the 'other world' which she belongs to hint that she exceeds the confines of conventional discourse on exoticism, and creates an expectation in the reader that she will act in unforeseen ways, with unpredictable consequences.

Bona achieves the exoticisation of Malika by describing her in relatively stereotypical terms, yet prevents her otherness from disappearing into a series of Western clichés by insisting that she is intimately connected to a different, lost world. Perhaps because the terms of her exoticism are comparatively conventional, her difference is immediately apparent to everyone in the French party. Le Clézio, on the other hand, addresses the difficulty of translating otherness into the midst of Marseilles by suggesting that Lalla is 'otherworldly', but that she learns to conceal this exotic quality in order to help her survive in her new surroundings:

Au début, elle était encore toute marquée par le soleil brûlant du désert, et ses cheveux longs, noirs et bouclés, étaient tout pleins d'étincelles de soleil. Alors les gens la regardaient avec étonnement, comme si elle venait d'une autre planète. Mais maintenant, les mois ont passé, et Lalla s'est transformée [...] quand Lalla met son manteau, elle a réellement le sentiment de devenir invisible.<sup>54</sup>

Whether those around her are aware of it or not, Lalla possesses the same exotic qualities that were evident in the desert. Despite her grim surroundings, she has not lost her

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<sup>53</sup> Bona, *Malika*, p. 38.

<sup>54</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 268.

connection to the desert. Its power is still capable of transfiguring her, perhaps even of altering the banal reality of a Marseilles department store:

Il y a comme l'éclat du feu dans le noir des cheveux de Lalla, dans le cuivre rouge de son visage. Maintenant, c'est comme si la lumière de l'électricité avait ranimé la couleur du soleil du désert, comme si elle était venue là, dans le Prisunic, directement du chemin qui vient des plateaux de pierres.

Peut-être que tout a disparu, réellement, et que le grand magasin est seul au centre d'un désert sans fin, pareil à une forteresse de pierre et de boue. Mais c'est la ville entière que le sable entoure, que le sable enserme, et on entend craquer les superstructures des immeubles de béton [...]

C'est le regard de Lalla qui porte la force brûlante du désert.<sup>55</sup>

With her spiritual connection to the desert intact, she is able to reach out to Es Ser across the expanse of the sea. In a nightclub she starts to dance with the rhythmic tribal movements of long ago and as gradually the crowd around her disappears she dances trance-like 'pour devenir invisible, pour monter comme un oiseau vers les nuages'.<sup>56</sup> In what Le Clézio himself might call 'l'extase matérielle', she communes again with the desert sands and stones which gradually appear around her. The trance culminates as the heat of Es Ser's gaze falls on her as if for the first time, and she collapses slowly onto the dance floor. The scene is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's 'devenir imperceptible', as Lalla is 'phantasmagorically transported to the space of the desert where a totalising incorporation of all identities and differences is enacted'.<sup>57</sup> It is following this experience that she returns to the Western Sahara, where she will give birth to le Hartani's child under the same ancient fig tree as her mother.

### The power of the exoticized subject

In both texts, the exotic presence of the North African girls appears to give them a certain power. In her transfigured state, Lalla attracts the attention of a photographer who,

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<sup>55</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 332.

<sup>56</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 355.

<sup>57</sup> Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*, p. 182.

fascinated by her otherworldly appearance, turns her overnight into a successful international cover-girl. Soon Lalla's face, under her new persona, 'Hawa', is everywhere, and she becomes known as a sought-after model. Similarly, Malika encounters a French photographer, Raymond, who has travelled to Morocco in search of fresh creative inspiration, and who becomes her lover. Again, he is captivated by her appearance, and ensures that her photographs appear widely in magazines. In both texts, the urge to photograph is described in similar terms:

Le photographe ne cesse pas de photographier Hawa [...] Elle lui donne sa forme, son image, rien d'autre [...] Chaque fois que son regard rencontre celui de Hawa, cela fait un pincement au coeur, et c'est pour cela qu'il se hâte de prendre des photos, toujours davantage de photos [...] Puis, tout d'un coup, Lalla sort du champ de lumière, parce qu'elle est fatiguée d'être photographiée. Elle s'en va. Lui, pour ne pas ressentir le vide va continuer à la regarder encore pendant des heures, dans la nuit du laboratoire improvisé [...] Il y a quelque chose qu'on peut voir, mais jamais posséder, même si on prenait des photographies à chaque seconde de son existence, jusqu'à la mort.<sup>58</sup>

Il [Raymond] me montra les photographies qu'il avait prises: plusieurs centaines de Malika [...] Les sunlights n'éblouissaient pas Malika. Le Leica pouvait essayer sur elle toutes les approches, les 'mitrailles' et caresses habituelles, il ne troublerait pas son naturel déconcertant. Sa personnalité rayonnait, dans le viseur, d'une sensualité à laquelle personne, selon Ray, n'aurait pu résister.<sup>59</sup>

For the two Frenchmen, photography is a means of taking possession of an exotic object which remains constantly beyond their reach.<sup>60</sup> It at once valorises the girls as object of desire, but it also objectifies them in an act of possession. It recalls Chateaubriand's touristic privileging of the image, which can be observed in a powerful but unengaged manner, over language which requires the active engagement of listening, thereby emphasising the passive object status of the exotic woman. In this the photographs are reminiscent of the traditional conception of the Oriental woman as passive, mute odalisque, but while the odalisque is traditionally represented in the individual work of art, which carries an aura, the photographs are mass-produced and disposable, used to advertise the girls as commodity. Nonetheless, the male photographers recognise something in their female subjects: an alterity which offers a promise of satisfaction, the

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<sup>58</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, pp. 348-50.

<sup>59</sup> Bona, *Malika*, p. 191; p. 194.

<sup>60</sup> For more on photography and tourism, see John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1990).

'spice' of the Other to which bell hooks refers. This presence is inalienably linked to the girls' exotic appearance, to their gender, and to their Arab origins.

However, rather than acting as passive odalisques, the girls exert their own control over their male admirers/exploiters. They achieve this as befits the exotic object by remaining remote and aloof at all times, maintaining themselves at a distance from their male admirers, but also from French society and from the implied French reader. This distance from the reader is achieved through narrative techniques, most strikingly in *Malika*, where the protagonist remains silent, leaving other characters to speak on her behalf. Chapters one, three and seven are made up of third person narrative with, in Genette's terms, a *focalisation interne* which deals primarily with the bourgeois French characters and their reactions to the unusual experiences of the summer. It is not until the second chapter that 'la jeune fille' is named and given a context, and this by another character, a clairvoyant whose first person narrative in the other chapters retells Malika's story as it was related to her.

The fragmented nature of this reported story, based on Malika's recollections of her childhood, recounted years after her arrival in France and supplemented by the findings of the narrator's own investigations, introduces layers of unreliability into the narrative and effectively distances the reader from the subject. Malika never speaks for herself in the text; even reported speech is lacking. According to the clairvoyant, the remoteness experienced by the reader is shared by other characters, for Malika takes care in her relationships not to allow other people access to the entirety of her life, thus maintaining her enigmatic persona:

Personne parmi ceux qui ont croisé sa route – sauf moi peut-être qui tente de rassembler nos souvenirs éparpillés – n'a connu Malika dans son unité. On croyait la connaître et pourtant elle nous échappait toujours, ne donnant chaque fois qu'une part d'elle-même, une pièce plus ou moins originale du puzzle de sa vie.<sup>61</sup>

A similar distancing effect takes place in the narrative of Lalla and indeed, of Shérazade, the eponymous character in the third novel, both of which use a *focalisation interne*

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<sup>61</sup> Bona, *Malika*, p. 214.

which gives only limited access to the characters' thoughts and desires, and constructs them as mysterious creatures whose actions are unpredictable, refusing to conform to the expectations of those around them. Again, the distance between character and reader is maintained: Lalla is withdrawn from society and the narrative gives little access to her emotions. Lalla's reaction to her material success is an example of this: she remains disinterested and untouched by the furore which surrounds her:

Elle ne veut pas d'argent, cela ne l'intéresse pas. Chaque fois que le photographe lui donne de l'argent – le prix des heures de pose – Hawa prend les billets de banque, en choisit un ou deux, et elle lui rend le reste [...] Ou bien elle parcourt les rues de la ville, à la recherche des mendiants aux coins des murs, et elle leur donne l'argent [...] Elle donne de l'argent aux gitanes voilées qui errent pieds nus dans les grandes avenues, et aux vieilles femmes en noir accroupies à l'entrée des bureaux de poste; aux clochards allongés sur les bancs, dans les squares, et aux vieux qui fouillent dans les poubelles des riches.<sup>62</sup>

The mysterious and elusive nature of each protagonist is underscored by their shared propensity to quit their current situation without warning, to the frequent dismay of the male characters who surround them, drawn moth-like to their flame. Never knowing how long the girl who so captivates them will remain with them, each of these male characters must negotiate their apparent powerlessness in the face of the emasculation threatened by the heroines' appropriation of their own subjectivity. Forced to accept their lack of control, and knowing that any attempt to retain or hold onto the fragile relationship will result in its loss, the men learn to appreciate the time bestowed on them by these mysterious girls whose actions seem dictated by some unseen force of nature; they appear to obey some inner instinct and go where they choose, like wild birds, excused somehow from the need to explain or justify their reasons (*Malika*, p. 205; *Désert*, pp. 351-2; *Shérazade*, p. 148). Their elusiveness adds to their fascination, set apart from the conventions that dictate life for the masses, so that the perception of them as exotic is enhanced even as they assume responsibility for their actions and so contradict the traditional conception of the passive Oriental woman.

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<sup>62</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 352.



## The construction and appropriation of exoticism by the West

On one level, then, both Lalla and Malika appear to wield the power of the elusive and exotic object referred to by Longley. They both achieve a degree of recognition through their photographic careers, but are dismissive of the material rewards which accompany it. They prefer to maintain their freedom on their own terms, choosing to remain distanced from the French society within which they find themselves, and are liable to disappear without warning. They exert a profound effect on those around them. This is particularly true of Malika, who by her enigmatic presence entirely disrupts each member of the St. Tropez holiday party. She inspires the architect, Benoît Darmon, to conceive his new design collection in a decadent, oriental style far removed from his trademark clean lines. This change in direction thoroughly unsettles Benoît's hostess, Marie-Hélène, who senses in it an artistic betrayal. Nonetheless, Malika's presence also leads Marie-Hélène to explore her own artistic leanings, and embark on painting and sculpture which enables her to develop as an individual, rather than in the roles of design manager, wife, hostess and mother which have occupied her for so long.

The same creative response is not shared by her husband, David Paul-Martin, for whom Malika's presence brings back painful, repressed memories of his *piéd noir* childhood. These memories, like 'des esprits malins, sournois, qui venaient troubler sa paix',<sup>63</sup> are compounded by his son Jérémie's use of the term '*sidi papa*', which disturbs David because it recalls the unhappiness of another era, and provides evidence that far from being lost, this era is alive and influencing the next generation, his children. David Paul-Martin represents a privileged section of mainstream French society which has turned its back on its past relationship with North Africa, repressing the memories of its time there, and refusing to acknowledge the Algerian War and its legacy to the modern world. David's reaction, faced with the presence of Malika, suggests that this wilful rejection of the past cannot be maintained indefinitely, and that France must come to terms with the implications of the past for its future.

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<sup>63</sup> Bona, *Malika*, p. 43.

However, the conclusion that Lalla and Malika represent the contemporary exotic exercising its power, and de-centring French society through the effects of their exotic presence is, on closer examination, revealed to be less than convincing. Rather than representing the Other translated for the Home audience, the exotic power of these characters is constructed to fit contemporary Western expectations of the Oriental woman, and provide a modern odalisque suitable for consumption by a Western readership. On the most fundamental level, the construction of the exotic begins with the choice of a female protagonist. Femininity and female sexuality is key here, since Woman's status as 'the prime representative of difference'<sup>64</sup> means that it has traditionally featured strongly in both literary and artistic representations of the exotic. To this are added descriptions of Oriental beauty. The girls each have a certain physical attractiveness which, if not conventionally beautiful, fascinates those around them. The Moroccan Malika benefits from the most idealised description:

La jeune fille était belle. Longue et mince, la poitrine haute, la taille fine, elle possédait une ligne. Un dessin du corps, avec des pleins, des déliés, un style. Quand elle se levait pour s'avancer vers la mer, sa silhouette se détachait en clair sur le fond bleu. On ne voyait qu'elle. Son port de tête lui donnait un air fier. Elle marchait pieds nus, avec dédain, sur le sable brûlant.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to her beauty, her appearance communicates pride and disdain, an attitude immediately reminiscent of the portrayals of defiant Algerian women forcibly unveiled by French soldiers during the Algerian War. Other descriptions reinforce the impression of perfection to an almost unbelievable degree, as a cynical French plastic surgeon reports, 'Je peux dire sans hésiter que Malika a les seins les plus ravissants que j'aie jamais vus'.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, Lalla initially appears unexceptional in appearance, her 'visage couleur de cuivre' being her only distinguishing feature. However within her there lies an exceptional nature with the potential to outwardly transfigure her:

Elle n'est pas grande et pourtant elle semble immense quand elle avance au centre de l'allée, puis quand elle descend sur l'escalier roulant vers le rez-de-chaussée.

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<sup>64</sup> Orlando, *Nomadic Voices of Exile*, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Bona, *Malika*, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Bona, *Malika*, p. 146.

C'est à cause de toute la lumière qui jaillit de ses yeux, de sa peau, de ses cheveux, la lumière presque surnaturelle.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to their gender, the protagonists are differentiated by their age. Each author has chosen to situate them in the interstitial period between childhood and adulthood around the age of seventeen or eighteen, where they are forced to engage with the conventions of society, both African and Western. They are liminal characters, set apart from those around them who impose on them a series of expectations which must either be negotiated or evaded. The orphaned Lalla find herself isolated from her community, whilst Malika, having been treated differently as a child, has grown up believing herself to be different and unique, with a destiny ordained for her by higher powers. Occasionally a male character of the same age will share their isolation for a time (le Hartani in *Désert*; Tahar in *Malika*). Nonetheless, their age, together with their gender, marks them as different and even sets them apart from other characters who share their ethnicity but who recognise them as different.

The solitary nature of the characters appears to be a necessary requirement of contemporary exoticism. In his *Essai* Segalen emphasises the need for individualism in the exote:

L'exotisme n'est donc pas cet état kaléidoscopique du touriste et du médiocre spectateur, mais la réaction vive et curieuse au choc d'une individualité forte contre une objectivité dont elle perçoit et déguste la distance.<sup>68</sup>

Arguably, this need for individualism is linked to modernity. Without the community and family structures which characterised earlier periods, individual readers are more attuned to individual rather than collective difference. As a result, contemporary exoticism has evolved such that the status of the exotic can no longer be attributed to a mass of undifferentiated groups or communities. In light of this, it is possible to read Lalla and Malika simply as exoticized versions of conventional *Bildungsroman* liberal subjects. Their foregrounding is therefore to be expected, but it may simply be another sign of corruption in the process of translation, for it assumes that all other cultures replicate the

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<sup>67</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 333.

<sup>68</sup> Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, p. 25.

Western tendency towards individualism. Mere ethnicity is no longer sufficient to render a subject exotic; the contemporary exotic must be differentiated, marked out for the reader's benefit from the mass of her people. A more radical presentation of alterity might focus on the collective nature of a foreign culture but it seems that, to be considered exotic in the twenty-first century, it is no longer enough simply to live according to traditional customs in the desert.

However, perhaps most striking in the presentation of alterity is the emphasis laid on the metaphysical aspects of Lalla and Malika's existence. Lalla's connection with her tribal ancestors, through the ancient song sung by her mother, and through the visions of the past experienced under the gaze of Es Ser, are the defining element in her identity. Similarly, Malika lives her life according to her belief in the destiny set out for her by the stars. Although she comes from a Muslim village, her Berber grandmother taught her magic rites as a child, how to pray to the stars and how to draw the protection of the *marabout* onto her. While Malika is dismissive of the outward signs of Islam, she lives according to what she sees as this deeper, more authentic pagan faith. Her rejection of the dominant North African religion in favour of Berber religious practice (which can be seen as 'the Other of the (Islamic) Other' is another aspect which sets her apart from those around her. Certainly a sinister air of magic accompanies her at times, with the narrator describing her as 'l'ensorceuse', for, despite her docile appearance, Malika does not allow herself to be put upon by others and only endures it where it coincides with the path she is following.

Again, both characters enjoy a particularly individual experience of religion, which is not shared by those around them. The notion that religion, or the metaphysical, is something which belongs to the private sphere is a peculiarly Western view. It is noticeable that while in cultural terms, North Africa is regulated by the call of the *muezzin*, and the public and collective power of Islam, the structuring effect of religion is almost entirely absent from these texts. As Bauman argues, the strength of the Western view of religion as private is such that it is difficult to counter in order to reinsert religion into the public sphere:

It is no more true that the 'public' is set on colonizing the 'private'. The opposite is the case: it is the private that colonizes the public space, squeezing out and chasing away

everything which cannot be fully, without residue, expressed in the vernacular of private concerns, worries and pursuits. [...] *Any true liberation calls today for more, not less, of the 'public sphere' and 'public power'*. It is now the public sphere which badly needs defence against the invading private – though, paradoxically, in order to enhance, not cut down, individual liberty.<sup>69</sup>

Instead, the exotic characters offer a brand of fate and personal destiny which forms part of the 'spice' of the Other, and may appeal to an implied French reader, whilst not conflicting with the secular norms of modernity. Furthermore, it avoids the questions raised by Islam, with its associations with issues of social integration, riots, and the wearing of headscarves. With its insistence on the collective worldwide *Umma*, Islam may be mysterious to the West, but it does not offer the individual characteristics that Segalen indicates are required for exoticism.

When considered in conjunction, the combination of gender, physical appearance, age, individual solitude, and personal religion reveals the characters of Lalla and Malika to be designed in order to meet modern Western expectations of exoticism. This effectively undermines the way in which they appear to 'exceed' the norms and conventions of French society, and appropriate the power which their exoticism makes available to them. Instead, the power which they apparently wield, for example, to leave without warning, simply shows them to be operating according to the ideals of Bauman's liquid modernity (allowing the flow of power to move unhindered by ties of family or other commitments). This unexpected conformity may be due to the difficulty of translating alterity into something recognizably exotic within the restrictions of a setting within Western society. In order to combat the tendency to exemplification, in which the Other is subsumed within the norms of the Home paradigm, it may be that the writers had to resort to conventions of exoticism in order to establish their characters' alterity. This is a challenge which will also be faced by the author of the final novel in this chapter, Leïla Sebbar.

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<sup>69</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p. 39; p. 51, emphasis in original.

*Shérazade*: responses to neo-colonialism

Because Malika's sole concern is to follow the path that Fate has dictated, she is happy to be seen as different, and does not protest when that alterity is translated into more conventionally exotic attitudes, playing the exotic role when it suits her purposes. This is in contrast to the eponymous heroine of Sebbar's novel, *Shérazade*, whose search for her self-identity has meant abandoning the constraints of both her Algerian family's expectations, and those of the French society she finds herself in. While Bona dealt with the French issue of *refoulement* through the character of David Paul-Martin, Sebbar's novel explores the extent to which the residue of the imperial past persists in contemporary French society, through neo-colonial attitudes towards people whose origins lie in the former colonies, and proposes a range of possible responses to this. Her work indicates that, despite the limited influence of postcolonial theory in French academia, French writers are nonetheless engaged in exploring postcolonial issues in a literary mode.

Born in Algeria but brought up in the Paris *banlieue*, Shérazade has run away from home only to find herself confronting the exoticist assumptions of those sharing her new life in Paris. Her green eyes and dark curls mark her out and, together with her name, situate her firmly in an Oriental context:

'Vous vous appelez vraiment Shérazade?'

'Oui.'

'Vraiment? C'est... c'est tellement... Comment dire? Vous savez qui était Schéhérazade?'

'Oui.'

'Et ça ne vous fait rien? ...'

'Non.'

'Et pourquoi pas Aziyadé?'

'C'est qui?'

'Une très belle Turque de Stamboul que Pierre Loti a aimée, il y a un siècle.'

'Pierre Loti je connais. Mais pas Aziyadé... Pourquoi vous me parlez de cette femme? Je n'ai rien à faire.'

'Elle avait des yeux verts, comme vous.'

‘C’est pas une raison’.<sup>70</sup>

She becomes an unwilling object of fascination for those who encounter her, whether that be simply on hearing her name, like the radio DJ: ‘Je voudrais bien la voir celle qui porte ce nom-là, si c’est pas un faux nom... Parce que quand on s’appelle comme ça...’,<sup>71</sup> or on seeing her, as does the photographer at the bourgeois party: ‘La fille du grand vizir sous un palmier... Je rêve...’<sup>72</sup> For Julien, the Frenchman who befriends her, it is her appearance which first captivates him because she reminds him of the Algerian women whose painted images fascinate him in the work of Delacroix and others. He is a young researcher, the son of a  *pied noir*  family which actively supported FLN rebels in Oran during the Algerian War. For Julien, unlike David Paul-Martin, the Arab girl is a reminder of positive childhood memories, memories which education has transformed into a passion for North African culture, history and above all, artistic representations of North African women. He is well-educated and introduces Shérazade to opera and new writers. Yet although he is a sympathetic character, his fascination with paintings of odalisques shows him to be a modern day orientalist, with attitudes similar to those of the artist: ‘[Les odalisques] évoquent pour les peintres de l’Occident la nonchalance, la lascivité, la seduction perverse des femmes orientales’.<sup>73</sup> As he talks to Shérazade, the irrational basis of his fascination becomes evident:

‘J’étais très malheureux et je me sentais prêt à acheter n’importe quoi, pourvu qu’il y ait une femme algérienne ... Une femme arabe.’

‘Mais qu’est-ce que tu as avec ces femmes-là?’

‘Je les aime.’

‘Tu les aimes en peinture?’

‘Oui, c’est ça’.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, Julien acts like a modern artist, taking endless photographs of Shérazade, re-developing them until he is satisfied and then pinning the countless images around his

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<sup>70</sup> Leïla Sebbar, *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (Paris: Stock, 1982), pp. 7-8.

<sup>71</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 34.

<sup>72</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 124.

<sup>73</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 190.

<sup>74</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 98.

apartment. Despite his affection for her, he is constantly aware of how little he is involved in Shérazade's life, for 'elle ne lui faisait jamais partager sa vie ailleurs',<sup>75</sup> and he knows that it is she and not he who is in control. He is also aware that this echoes the original relationship between Algeria and her conquerors, as he quotes from Gautier's *Voyage pittoresque en Algérie*,

Nous croyons avoir conquis Alger, et c'est Alger qui nous a conquis. Nos femmes portent déjà des écharpes trammées d'or, bariolées de mille couleurs qui ont servi aux esclaves du harem, nos jeunes gens adoptent le burnous en poil de chameau... Pour peu que cela continue, dans quelque temps d'ici, la France sera mahométane et nous verrons s'arrondir, sur nos villes, le dôme blanc des mosquées et les minarets se mêler aux clochers, comme en Espagne au temps des Mores....<sup>76</sup>

His obsession would appear harmless were it not for its link to contemporary racist rhetoric, which implies that the sexuality and exoticism of girls like Shérazade threaten to contaminate the purity of the French nation: 'Les Français de souche seront dans quelque décennies, les nouvelles minorités... et tout ça à cause des filles comme toi...'.<sup>77</sup> When Shérazade asks why this is, he replies in the rhetoric of the day, 'Parce que c'est vous qui allez faire des enfants bicolores, des sangs mêlés, des mixtes, des coupés, des bâtards... des hybrides... des travesties...'.<sup>78</sup> Although Julien's remark is made jokingly, the underlying traits of classical orientalism remain latent within his attitudes. And while he may be a sympathetic character, the same attitudes are voiced by less attractive figures: Véronique's *piéd noir* mother, whose hatred of Arabs is made ridiculous when she asks Rachid on the phone 'Vous êtes sûr que vous êtes un Arabe? Vous parlez comme un Français de Paris',<sup>79</sup> and the crowd on the metro who witness the arrest of Omar and Martial (p. 208).

Not all the characters in the novel share Julien's depth of artistic learning, yet this does not prevent them from recognizing the exotic potential of Shérazade and her peers. The street chic of Shérazade and her friends Zouzou (from Tunisia) and France (from Martinique) gains them temporary access to a party held by the fashionable set: 'Cette

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<sup>75</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 191.

<sup>77</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 191.

<sup>78</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 192.

<sup>79</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 144.



nouvelle bourgeoisie cultivée et esthète se laissait volontiers, pour un soir, maltraiter par ces jeunes excentriques, insolents et séducteurs, nés pour la plupart dans le béton des blocs de banlieue'.<sup>80</sup> Photographers pursue them for photos which will inspire a new fashion line, a sycophantic exploitation reciprocated by certain of the young targets:

Les plus beaux et les plus belles souhaitaient provoquer au moins une fois une telle émotion, qu'un cinéaste, un photographe, ou un publiciste leur proposerait à titre d'essai un rôle, une série de photos de mode, une place de mannequin [...] C'était déjà arrivé. Pourquoi pas eux?<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, Shérazade and her friends are approached by a photographer who, aware of the ambitions of many of the immigrant youth, invites them to pose as jungle guerrillas for soft porn photos. The incident is primarily narrated through the monologue of the photographer who believes himself to be in control of the situation, yet his voice is subverted by the reader's knowledge that the girls, armed with toy pistols, have a plan to reverse the exploitation by collecting their fee and then turning the tables. In light of this, the photographer's patronizing and sexist tone is effectively exposed.

A subtle twist on this situation occurs later in the novel when Julien persuades Shérazade to star in a screen-play which he has written and which is being produced by his friend. Shérazade is initially positive, giving comments which Julien incorporates into his script. The heroine in this scenario is similar to that of the earlier porn shoot, this time being an urban guerilla, yet the director who has been searching for his heroine – 'celle qui échapperait à tous les stéréotypes' – immediately upon seeing Shérazade exclaims 'C'est elle! C'est Zina!'<sup>82</sup> It suggests that even when trying to break the exotic mould, there are certain conventions which operate. Shérazade, on the other hand, doesn't recognize herself in the test-shots taken – 'C'était bizarre, comme s'il ne s'agissait pas d'elle. Celle qu'elle voyait n'était pas elle'.<sup>83</sup> Dissatisfied with the identity being thrust upon her, she loses interest in the project.

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<sup>80</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 116.

<sup>81</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 118.

<sup>82</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 216.

<sup>83</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 219.

While Shérazade encounters orientalist prejudice throughout the novel, she refuses to accept the identity as belonging to her. Her reaction to Julien's photographs is typically forthright: she tears them up, declaring 'J'en ai marre de voir ma gueule partout, tu comprends... tu n'as pas besoin de moi vivante, finalement...'<sup>84</sup> and to his comparisons between the green-eyed women of Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* and herself, she insists that physical appearance alone is not an adequate reason (p. 8) and later declares 'Je ne suis pas une odalisque'.<sup>85</sup> Her response to the photographer who insists on taking her picture without permission is to smash his camera, thereby provoking the typically racist response: 'et qu'elles retournent dans leur pays ces petites garces'.<sup>86</sup> Yet if Shérazade rejects the imposition of an orientalist identity, her Algerian roots are never far away in her voyage of self-discovery.

Like other characters, Shérazade has been cut off from her Algerian roots by the move to France, and throughout the novel she constantly seeks to recover the personal history that has been lost, reading books on the Algerian War (p. 76), literature by a range of North African writers (p. 97; p. 132), recalling the stories told by her grandfather (p. 135; p. 147) and the sewing days with her mother and neighbours (p. 201), listening to the stories of an Algerian man she meets (p. 173) and sharing stories with Julien (p. 147), and keeping her mother's jewellery and the burnous which she took when leaving home (p. 128). All of this leads to her decision at the end to go to Algeria. Yet she has firmly rejected the pressures of her family's traditional Algerian expectations, running away from home and taking pains to avoid encountering her family, despite the pain this causes her.

It is clear that for Shérazade, Algeria is one important part of her identity. From the opening of the novel, she is identified in Julien's eyes with the women of his Algerian village, through the red and gold scarf she wears 'comme les aiment les Arabes de Barbès et les femmes du bled, lorsqu'elles n'ont pas encore été éblouies par les foulards Monoprix qui imitent, dans la couleur fondue et le motif abstrait, les foulards de

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<sup>84</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 158.

<sup>85</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 206.

<sup>86</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 124.

marque'.<sup>87</sup> But this statement conceals the nature of the scarf, which is in fact nothing but a cheap imitation of the fringed Arab scarves referred to in Gautier's *Voyage*, mass-produced in poor quality material. Shérazade breaks the thread of the scarf, signaling her fractured allegiance to the traditional feminine role although, certainly in Julien's eyes, the scarf is more reminiscent of Arab feminine submissiveness than is the Palestinian *keffia* which Shérazade formerly wore. It is, however, ultimately a fashion accessory, significantly closer to the *banlieue* culture which Shérazade adopts than to Arab traditions, just as her Frenchified name both calls to mind and denies the association with the pre-colonial tradition of the Arabian Nights.

As the novel unfolds, it becomes apparent that Shérazade is an urban nomad, with an identity constructed from a range of sources. The success of her strategy of *bricolage*, and her nomadic practice of refusing to be defined by one location, instead preferring to traverse cultural and geographical markers, is in striking contrast to the fate of Le Clézio's traditional desert nomads. The identity of the *hommes bleus* is indissociably bound up with their way of life, such that it would vanish if they were forced to become sedentary. In contrast, Shérazade is defined only by her strategy of eclecticism, and cultural nomadism. The opening of the novel, with its comparisons with Schéhérazade and Aziyadé, takes place against the orange formica of a fast food restaurant, with Shérazade drinking Coke and listening to her walkman: a contemporary, globalised odalisque. She listens to a range of radio stations from NRJ to Radio-Beurs, flicking incessantly to choose the station which best suits her at that moment (p. 34) – a microcosm of her attitude to culture – while later in the novel Julien introduces her to opera. She comes to live in a squat, a refuge from the conventions of the outside world where numerous young people of varying origins hold forth on their ideals, from revolutionary Marxism to Rastafarianism, united only in their shared experience of marginalization.

However, the squatters' rejection of the West ('Babylone') in particular doesn't prevent them from incorporating elements of it into their identity, even in an ironic sense. 'Il te manque le casque colonial' someone tells Basile, who next day augments his hat

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<sup>87</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 8.

collection with a white plastic pith helmet.<sup>88</sup> Their passion for all things American is evidence of the influence of globalization on *banlieue* culture; it is linked to the fashionistas' interest in them because their individualized consumption 'de tout ce qui venait en direct des USA'<sup>89</sup> can be translated into new high street ranges. Like Lalla and Malika, they choose to live outside the margins of materialist society, still consuming goods but refusing to be possessed and consumed by their possessions, wearing them lightly and abandoning them easily when they move on. Each novel shows the rejection of capitalism and the construction of an alternative economy based on gifts,<sup>90</sup> shoplifting, begging and theft, supplemented in *Shérazade* by the occasional restaurant hold-up or burglary which are part protest against 'les bourges', part self-made entertainment. Capitalist society has rejected them as being different, and consequently they refuse to support or participate in the system which has excluded them. Items are coveted by Malika and Shérazade but the desire for them is more important than the items themselves which, once obtained, are easily given to others. Shérazade certainly is less interested in the items she steals than in the way in which she acquires them (p. 37) as for her, living outside the system becomes a means of defiance and self-definition.

This oasis of urban culture allows its inhabitants to develop their identity freely. Only first names are used; Julien Desrosiers stands out apart from this counter-society in that he alone is given a surname. With no questions asked, characters are relieved of their past history, to the extent that her fellow-squatters are not even certain that Shérazade's name is not made up (p. 47). Without the formality of identity papers she is able to assign herself different names – Camille, Rosa – as it suits her: 'ça dépend avec qui je suis'.<sup>91</sup> This flux of identity is echoed by the forged identity card which is ordered but which never arrives. Other characters also give themselves alternative names, usually linked to historical or artistic characters whom they admire: Zingha, Kahina, Olympia, Leïla,

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<sup>88</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 63.

<sup>89</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 117.

<sup>90</sup> As Mauss suggests, the exchange of gifts has the effect of creating the ties of a loose community between the squatters, who otherwise have little in common and who come and go with little warning. Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques (1923-24)', *Sociologie et Anthropologie: précédé d'une introduction de l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss par Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Paris: Quadrige, 1993), pp. 143-279.

<sup>91</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 180.

Roxelane (p. 103), borrowing the vestiges of established identities to fashion their own in an eclectic *bricolage*.

In this environment Shérazade is free to assert herself against the prejudices which she encounters; she deterritorialises her identity, frees it from the constraints of Western thought systems and borrows or steals those signifiers which attract her from a range of social and artistic practices. Although she rejects the Orientalist view of herself, the paintings of odalisques beloved of Julien possess an equal attraction for Shérazade herself (p. 188). Their gaze, with its unmoving, open quality, moves her in a way that she cannot or will not express, and empowers her to discover more of herself. Her decision to go to Algeria is taken only after a night primarily spent gazing at Matisse's *L'Odalisque à la culotte rouge* (p. 245). She is moved also by a more modern image of the odalisque, found in the book *Femmes algériennes 1960* which perhaps also plays its part in directing her to Algeria:

Ces Algériennes avaient toutes [...] le même regard, intense, farouche, d'une sauvagerie que l'image ne saurait qu'archiver, sans jamais la maîtriser ni la dominer. Ces femmes parlaient toutes la même langue, la langue de sa mère.<sup>92</sup>

For Shérazade, therefore, the neo-colonialist attitudes which she encounters are to be confronted and subverted whenever possible, although her relationship with the Orientalist tradition is more complex and ambivalent. While it spawned the attitudes which she despises, it was also responsible for artistic representations of Arab women through which Shérazade is able to access elements of her lost personal history, adding to the range of sources from which she constitutes and reconstitutes her nomadic identity. In the hands of neo-colonialists such as Julien, representations of Oriental women, whether paintings or photographs, are negative because they represent the desire to possess and control, but when encountered from a non-Orientalist perspective these works can be sources of creative self-production. They can be seen as an example of Longley's claim that

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<sup>92</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*, p. 220.

the exotic [is] elusive and ungraspable [...] capable of sliding away or striking back [...] It is in this context of the limits of representation that the idea of the exotic can be put to use to suggest that which cannot be captured or tamed by the dominating structure.<sup>93</sup>

Beyond this, however, the odalisque operates as an example of Said's 'travelling theory', in which the reception of ideas and theories progressively evolves in relation to changing politico-historical contexts.<sup>94</sup> Forsdick argues that implications of travelling theory extend to 'the displacement, recycling, and reinterpretation of colonial concepts (and, more controversially, of the language used to describe them)', and points to Robert Young's study of the term 'hybridity', which evolved from a nineteenth-century racialized term to become a cultural term in the twentieth century.<sup>95</sup> In a similar way, Shérazade appears able to take the concept of the odalisque, which she experiences as objectifying, and appropriate its power in a postmodern context as a positive aspect of her own nomadic identity.

In this sense Sebbar has successfully managed the exoticizing tendencies at work in contemporary French culture. By locating neo-colonial attitudes in the characters and society of her novel, and enabling her protagonist to confront and subvert these totalizing forces, she has succeeded in representing both the French tendency to exoticize, and the exoticized subject's ability to respond to this. At the same time, she maintains the tension identified by Célestin, that is, the pull of the opposing poles of Home and its dominant paradigms, and the desire for the other place, the exotic. Rather than disappearing into either extreme, Shérazade successfully establishes a remit within which she is able to develop her own distinct identity which also remains fluid and evolving.

Sebbar perhaps succeeds precisely because her exotic 'other space' is so close to the Centre, constructed as a diverse community of youths whose common characteristic is their location within the metropolitan space which Célestin would call Home. This minimises the scope of the translation required for her Home audience to understand and appreciate the exotic, since Shérazade's status as exotic depends largely on a neo-colonial

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<sup>93</sup> Longley, 'Fabricating Otherness', pp. 28-29.

<sup>94</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Traveling Theory' in *The World, The Text and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1991), pp. 226-47.

<sup>95</sup> Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*, p. 31; Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

discourse itself produced by the Centre, with which the audience is already familiar. This familiarity also enables the audience to comprehend Shérazade's reaction to and rejection of the discourses with which she is confronted, reactions which establish her as different not only from Western discourse but from the assumptions and pressures of her own Algerian background. Shérazade therefore succeeds in negotiating the tension between the opposing poles and establishes her nomadic location between France and Algeria.

Like the other two novels, *Shérazade* demonstrates clearly that the exotic holds a persistent attraction for the West. Although the form assumed by the exotic has evolved in response to the rise of modernism, the residue of colonial attitudes present in all three texts is an indication that, for these novelists at least, Hexagonal attitudes towards North Africa have altered little in the period since decolonisation. With the exception of *Shérazade*, it appears that literary constructions of France have remained comparatively untouched by postcolonial realities. What also emerges through an examination of the three texts, however, is the difficulty of translating alterity in literary terms. As Célestin indicates, the writer is caught in the tension between the two opposing poles of the Same and the Other in trying to represent difference in terms meaningful to his implied reader. Because as writers and readers we are all implicated in the process of bringing our cultural expectations to bear on otherness, we should constantly be aware that there is no neutral place outside of discourse from which we can exercise our judgements and readings. This tension is responsible for the problematising of Le Clézio and Bona's attempts to decentre the Hexagon by focusing on the exoticism of the desert and its inhabitants, which result in the replication of existing exotic conventions.

However, as Attridge argues, through the act of reading and experiencing literature it is still possible to have an experience of otherness. Where this succeeds, as Le Clézio demonstrates in his passages on the sensory perception and non-verbal communication which takes place in the desert, the result is exoticism for the contemporary period. Passages such as these, which offer an alternative paradigm that challenges our preconceptions, and sparks our imagination, stand out as examples of alterity which Attridge argues is the hallmark of inventive literature, offering an experience of otherness which draws the reader closer to the unknown. In a different way, Sebbar also succeeds in negotiating the tension between alterity and residual Orientalist

paradigms, and demonstrates that the exoticist literature and art of the past can function as a catalyst for the creation of new forms of difference.



## Chapter Two Defamiliarization: France from the Outside

As we saw in the last chapter, in writing *Désert* Le Clézio is primarily engaged with a literary tradition of exoticism which historically has focused on France's outward gaze, from the Centre towards the Periphery. While Le Clézio can be criticised for his exoticisation, inadvertent or otherwise, of the desert tribes and their descendants, his apparent desire to write an anti-colonial novel does result in the subversion of this tradition, as he focuses on the desert, and the experiences of its people. By altering the directional focus of his writing and narrating events from the point of view of the desert nomads, he is touching on another established literary tradition, dating back to Montesquieu. This focuses on the relationship between Self and Other through movement in a different direction, from Periphery to Centre, and is particularly apparent in those passages in which Lalla arrives in Marseilles. Here, the reader is given a defamiliarized description of the conventional urban setting of a port, seen for the first time through the unaccustomed eyes of the girl from the desert shanty town. By seeing the scene through her eyes, the reader is able to experience the arrival in a Western port, as if for the first time, and is invited to reconsider aspects of society which would normally be accepted as 'natural'.

The French literary tradition of using a foreign subject to highlight the home society extends back as far as Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, and Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, 1747.<sup>1</sup> Published anonymously in 1721, the Persian visitors of Montesquieu's text provided a literary device through which the author could safely level his criticisms under the pretence of observing French society for the first time, whilst also providing a relatively complete comparison with Persian culture. While the influence of the text is difficult to overestimate, Nigel Leask points out that its novelty waned over time, particularly following the appearance of 'authentic' texts written by native Orientals recounting their

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973 [1721]); Françoise de Graffigny, *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, 1747 (Paris: côté-femmes éditions, 1990 [1747]).

impressions on visiting Europe, of which Mirza Abu Taleb Khan's account of his travels is an important example.<sup>2</sup>

The Marseilles episodes of *Désert* follow the classical tradition of Montesquieu in reporting the expectations and reactions of the foreigner arriving in the Centre for the first time. Lalla arrives with expectations of the 'ville blanche', with its palaces and church towers about which Naman the fisherman has told her, expectations which are met instead with the reality of a harbour 'encombrée de saletés'. For the girl from the desert shanty town, the impressions of the metropolis are overwhelming: 'Il y a tellement de rues, tellement de maisons, de magasins, de fenêtres, d'autos; cela fait tourner la tête, et le bruit, et l'odeur de l'essence brûlée enivrent et donnent mal à la tête'.<sup>3</sup> Like Lalla, the reader is effectively transported from the solitude of the desert and thrust into the midst of modern urbanity. By evoking the unaccustomed assault on the girl's senses through the noise and smells, Le Clézio invites the reader to share her reactions to the mundane reality of a cityscape experienced for the first time.

The technique of persuading the reader to re-evaluate a familiar setting by presenting it through the eyes of an immigrant is reminiscent of the work of the Russian Formalist theorist, Viktor Shklovsky. As discussed in the Introduction, Shklovsky is interested in the way in which a literary text can alter the reader's perceptions, introducing a distance between reader and object and forcing a reappraisal of what has hitherto been disregarded because familiar. This state of automatically perceiving the familiar he describes as 'recognition'. The artistic process which he advocates in order to introduce distance and reverse the state of recognition is referred to in sensory terms:

And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, in order to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By 'enstranging' objects and complicating form, the device of art makes

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<sup>2</sup> Nigel Leask, "Travelling the Other Way": The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan (1810) and Romantic Orientalism', in *Romantic Representations of British India*, ed. by Michael J. Franklin (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 220-37.

<sup>3</sup> Le Clézio, *Désert*, p. 266.

perception long and 'laborious'. The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest.<sup>4</sup>

This emphasis on the importance of the senses, which is evident in Le Clézio's description of the noise and smell of Marseilles, suggests a phenomenological aspect to enstrangement which, based on Shklovsky's assertion that '*Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant*',<sup>5</sup> has commonly been considered as a purely literary device. Indeed, elsewhere Shklovsky returns to the part played by the senses in creating the process of literary perception, arguing that 'a dance is a walk that is felt; even more accurately, it is a walk which is constructed to be felt'.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in *Désert*, Le Clézio demonstrated how literary reference to the sense of smell can be used to estrange the description of walking in the desert, introducing an unfamiliar dimension of reality through the sensory experience of le Hartani.

From this it is evident that the senses play a significant role in constructing the way literary otherness is communicated and perceived – it is a theme which will be developed throughout this study, not least in the present chapter. However, it is notable that in the quotation above, Shklovsky elevates one sense above the others when he refers to the 'organ of sight', and contrasts it with the automated recognition against which literariness operates. The suggestion that perception is structured primarily around sight concurs with Montesquieu's approach in *Lettres persanes*, in which perceptions of French society are given 'through the eyes' of two Persian travellers. At the same time, as we saw with reference to Chateaubriand in Chapter One, cultural encounters which are mediated primarily through sight have been open to accusations of passive observation, rather than an active engagement which would demand a greater degree of personal investment on the part of the visitor. Questions around the politics of sight, and its place in relation to other forms of sensory perception, therefore form a central thrust of the argument in this chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, p. 6, emphasis in translation.

<sup>6</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, 'On the Connection between Devices of *Syuzhet* Construction and General Stylistic Devices (1919)', in *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, ed. by Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt, (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), pp. 48-72 (p. 48).

Shklovsky's notion that enstranging transforms the familiar into the Other, and that the very essence of literature, that is, 'literariness', consists in introducing otherness into the experience of reading, is closely related to Derek Attridge's work.<sup>7</sup> Attridge suggests that there is a phenomenological aspect to literature, or 'inventive writing', because literature pushes at the boundaries of artistic convention and so opens the text to the possibility of otherness. The reader experiences this otherness in the individual act of reading, and for an instant may be changed by the phenomenology of this experience. In this sense Attridge deviates from Shklovsky's insistence that the artefact itself is unimportant; indeed, as this chapter will show, the literary enstrangement of perceptions goes beyond the purely artistic, since perception, being culturally mediated, can be put to political use in critiquing the surrounding environment. Shklovsky's emphasis on the sensory experience of reading, and in particular on 'the organ of sight', that is, seeing as opposed to recognition, will prove crucial in characterising perceptions of the estranged object. However, it is important to state that the phenomenology of perception referred to here by Shklovsky and Le Clézio, which is developed in the literary texts in this chapter and with reference to theorists such as the anthropologist of perception, Tim Ingold, although related, is different in character to the phenomenology of literature referred to in the quotations from Derrida and Attridge in the Introduction, which concerned the experience of reading.<sup>8</sup>

In *Désert*, Le Clézio takes as his primary focus a development of the contemporary exotic, with the critique of (post)colonial French society playing a secondary role. However, other contemporary novels more fully resume Montesquieu's project of presenting French culture through the defamiliarizing eyes of a foreigner, in order to expose the relationship between Centre and Periphery. This chapter will consider the strategies employed by three authors who use Maghrebi immigrant figures as the means of encountering contemporary French society, and assess the implications of these for views of both the metropolitan self and the Arab other. The first texts to be examined are Michel Tournier's *La Goutte d'or* (1986),

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<sup>7</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

and Guy Hocquenghem's *L'Amour en relief* (1982). The chapter initially examines the ways in which the authors characterise the two cultures in question, as they see, and are seen by, the immigrant protagonists. It considers the objectifying power of images and the gaze, and looks at the intellectual tradition of sight.<sup>9</sup> It then demonstrates how the novels serve to defamiliarise conceptions of the gaze in postmodernist criticism, showing that it is not vision which objectifies, but the visionaries. Finally, it raises questions about how the literary device of borrowing the immigrant's eyes can function within a postcolonial ethics. With reference to Didier van Cauwelaert's *Un Aller simple* (1994), it argues that humour serves as an effective device for critique and that, rather than reducing the immigrant figure to the status of a cipher or tool, it can achieve this whilst maintaining the dignity of the North African individual.

### From the desert to the city: the immigrant's view of the Centre

Both *La Goutte d'or* and *L'Amour en relief* centre on a journey. In the former, Berber shepherd Idriss leaves his desert oasis in search of the blonde French tourist who took his photograph and failed to send him a copy of it. The first half of the novel follows his journey through Algeria to Paris, while the second half deals with his experiences there as street-sweeper, extra in a television advertisement, model for shop mannequins and construction worker. *L'Amour en relief* follows a similar trajectory and then continues far beyond, as the Tunisian boy Amar, blinded by an accident caused by French tourists, goes first to Rome and Paris, and then on to America, where he becomes, successively, a gigolo to an aged widow, Mrs. Halloween, a blind surfer by day and prostitute by night, a dancer, and finally, as the

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<sup>9</sup> Feminists such as Jacqueline Rose and Griselda Pollock have argued that in Western culture the gaze has been defined in terms of masculine hegemony, where the observing eye is characterised as male and the female body is positioned as observed object or spectacle. See Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity and Feminism and the History of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

result of being convicted of drug trafficking, an unwilling subject in scientific trials which lead to the forced restoration of his sight by transforming him into a cyborg.

Like Montesquieu's Persians, who journey to Paris, this movement is critical to the enstrangement of their experiences. Because cultural norms are learnt and their interpretation shared by a social collective, in order to create the distance required for the enstrangement of a particular set of practices it is necessary to move the viewing subject from one culture to another. Furthermore, at a more fundamental level, spatial geographers and anthropologists have shown that movement is critical to sensory perception. 'Information only exists thanks to the movement of the perceiver relative to his or her surroundings'.<sup>10</sup> The constant movement of the North African travellers, and their interaction with a changing environment, ensures a continual stream of information which the reader is encouraged to interpret.

Tournier is concerned with revealing French culture through the perceptions of his Berber immigrant, thereby creating a mode of distanciation which forces the reader to notice and consider scenarios which otherwise would be banal to the point of invisibility. Like Montesquieu before him, one of Tournier's devices for achieving this is to develop a detailed portrayal of the non-Western culture. This functions as a means of comparison with the West, a norm which the author uses to undermine the reader's own ethnocentric tendencies. The first half of the novel is therefore set in Algeria, and deals with Idriss's life in his oasis settlement of Tabelbala, and his journey from the Sahara to Oran, where he takes the ferry to Marseilles. Life here is stripped bare, reduced to the essentials and structured according to tradition and superstition. The deaths of Ibrahim and his camel serve to remind that life here can be unpredictable, brutal and short. In this sense the text comes close to the exoticised primitivism of Le Clézio's desert sufferings.

The success with which Tournier draws the reader into his desert world becomes apparent when the ferry carrying Idriss approaches Marseilles. Having established the culture of the desert, Tournier introduces the second term in his cultural dichotomy. The advanced industrial culture into which Idriss steps is one in which the power of the image dominates. Appropriately, Idriss's first encounter with

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<sup>10</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 18.

French culture comes through the medium of television.<sup>11</sup> As the screen image flickers, the reader shares the expectation of the immigrants, who wait in awe to receive the first message from what Tournier, in another exoticised moment, refers to as the 'terre promise'. Reactions, when the image clears to reveal adverts for *Soleil* washing powder, and *Briodent* toothpaste, are mixed: the reader's sense of anti-climax combines with shame and cynicism at the realisation that this is the immigrants' first impression of France. The result is a re-sensitisation to the discourse of advertising, and an invitation to critique the superficiality of the image. The immigrants, however, are perplexed at the portrayals of joy associated with mundane products, and struggle to attribute these visions of paradise either to the country of reception, or to the magical attributes of the showcased brands. Their attempts to discern the relationship between image and reality – 'C'est donc cela la France?'<sup>12</sup> – are compounded by subsequent images of French riot police using tear gas on student demonstrations.

This inability to decode the television images demonstrates the Berbers' lack of facility with perceiving and interpreting images. Idriss's physical journey mirrors his internal efforts to define his sense of self, a process which is hindered by the barrage of images which consistently seek to define him in terms of the relation between the West and the desert. From the tourist's photograph which precipitates his journey, and the tourist postcard of the braying donkey which should have been his photograph, to the museum of desert life, the crudely-drawn backcloth of Mustapha's photographic studio, and even his passport photo which looks like another man, all of the identities which are imposed on him are created in order for the West to be able to imagine, categorise and commoditise the desert. The exception is old Lala Ramirez, who imagines that Idriss will take the place of her dead son; a lone example of the desert trying to impose identities on its own. Struggling to develop his sense of self, Idriss becomes increasingly bewildered at this plethora of images which others attribute to him: he recognises himself in none of them.

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<sup>11</sup> Michel Tournier, *La Goutte d'or* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 104.

During his time in Paris, Idriss is subjected to the totalising French expectations of the desert which, meaningless to him, place him in the ironic situation of having to be taught the 'real' meanings of 'le Sahara' and 'le couscous'. As an exotic subject he is commoditised, like the notion of the oasis which is transformed into a soft drink brand name, 'Palmeraie', and the camel which is bought to be filmed with Idriss in a television commercial, only to be sent with him to the abattoir afterwards. The reifying effect of being reduced to an image is powerfully demonstrated in the process of transforming Idriss into a mannequin model, a process in which he loses eyebrows and lashes and is nearly buried alive in a vat of resin. It is only when he refuses to become a robotised figure alongside the mannequins of himself that the destructive imaging trend is halted.

### Enstrangement of the senses

In contrast to Tournier's desert opening, Hocquenghem's text begins with a description of life in post-1968 France. Through the account of Andrea, the novel's co-narrator, the reader enters a world of hedonism, feminism, consumerism, and the new sexual revolution. The focus is on illusions and appearance, where image is key to status and success, and where surfaces take precedence over substance. Society is exposed as petty and hypocritical, for example, in the reactions to Andrea's abortion:

[Léopold] s'est barré en laissant un chèque, et pas bien gros, et que je n'ai pas pu toucher tout de suite, vu qu'il était barré, lui aussi. Heureusement, un groupe de filles qui voulait soutenir les avorteuses m'ont envoyé un mandat à l'hôpital. Quant à mes amis du boulevard Saint-Germain, ils m'ont envoyé une orchidée sous plastique par Interflora, en me laissant payer la surtaxe internationale.

La clinique m'a mise dehors en cinq jours, encore saignante. J'avais commencé à draguer les infirmiers dès le lendemain du curetage. Quand je suis revenu à Paris, j'avais le choix: depuis que j'étais une avortée, les filles les plus snobs du M.L.F. se me disputaient. J'ai préféré retourner avec eux, boulevard Saint-Germain.

On sortait tous les soirs ensemble, et on buvait les chèques de l'avortement.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1982), p. 12.



Almost without exception, the characters in this French society are self-obsessed and superficial, content to drop those around them as soon as they attain a position of status and have no further need of their so-called friends.

Having illustrated and acknowledged the centrality of image within French society, Hocquenghem challenges the relationship between image and sight by causing his teenage protagonist, Amar, to be permanently blinded. In doing so he raises questions about how an image-obsessed society deals with individuals who cannot participate in this discourse.<sup>14</sup> He thus achieves an extreme form of the enstrangement advocated by Shklovsky, transforming the nature of Amar's narration by accentuating the focus on other sources of sensory perception. The loss of sight forces Amar to perceive the world in terms of his remaining senses, so that he 'sees', in particular, through touch, the connection of his skin and the world. Because of the privileged sensory role occupied by sight, its loss transforms the familiar into a state unrecognisable to the reader, as this description shows:

Il faisait froid, certes, plus froid que je n'avais jamais senti. Mais surtout, le bruit sonnait différemment, étouffé. J'ai cru que j'étais devenu sourd, d'un seul coup, à cause des cassettes, et j'ai laissé tomber Zita, terrifié encore plus qu'elle. La ville me parvenait pourtant, assourdie, comme si l'air lui-même était devenu plus épais. J'ai fait un pas, et j'ai senti avec horreur une poussière plastique qui se rétractait sous mon pied avec un bruit de papier déchiré. Je me suis baissé, et j'en ai pris un peu. La matière était froide comme le glaçon d'un whisky, mais aérien, léger, fondant, une ouate qui ressemblait à de la barbe à papa gelée. J'aurais juré que cela vivait, bougeait dans ma main en fondant. C'était de la neige.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike *La Goutte d'or*, where enstrangement was caused by the protagonist's culture of origin, here the familiar is made strange by manipulating the sensory receptors themselves. The novel therefore becomes in part a phenomenological text, posing questions about the nature of reality, how it is perceived within our culturally-constructed experience, and coded through language. Beyond this, however, Amar's

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<sup>14</sup> In his novel *Poisson d'or*, published fifteen years later, Le Clézio follows a similar approach to Hocquenghem, in focusing on an African protagonist with a sensory disability who travels from Africa to France, and then on to America, whilst consistently remaining an outsider. There are differences, however, in the narrative detail: the protagonist in *Poisson d'or* is a young girl, Laila, ostensibly from North Africa, although it is likely that she is originally from Sub-Saharan Africa. Although Le Clézio makes her deaf, her disability barely features in the narrative, and his critique of French society is conventional, being based on exposing the hardships of immigrant life. J.M.G. Le Clézio, *Poisson d'or* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, p. 171.

difference provides Hocquenghem with an opportunity to examine and critique the ways in which Western society responds to him.

Although there is less emphasis on his ethnicity than on Idriss's origins in *La Goutte d'or*, Amar remains exoticised by his co-narrator Andrea and other characters on aesthetic grounds, as in Andrea's opening description:

Je ne veux pas le décrire; je ne le décris jamais, par superstition. En fermant les yeux, je deviens comme lui; et je n'ai plus envie de parler de ses yeux, noisettes dorées, des boucles de ses cheveux, boucles noires aux reflets violets; ni même de son sourire, son demi-sourire en interrogation, un sourcil levé, qu'il décoche en se retournant, quand il entend quelqu'un marcher derrière lui, un sourire déjà à tout hasard complice.<sup>16</sup>

Whether on ethnic or other grounds (and as we shall see, Amar's identity is multiply-problematised), Amar, like Idriss, is an exoticised subject through whose encounters with Western culture we are given an insight into our Western selves. There is therefore a strange (dis)connect between Amar and the reader: both are unable to see visually, yet nonetheless have 'views'. The reader sees Amar through what other characters say about him, that is, through the codings of written language. Amar of course cannot see, yet the novel is a narration of his perceptions – the exotic other looking back at us. The question is, how and what does he see?

### 'L'invisible voyeur du monde des voyants'

The loss of his sight prompts Amar to develop an entirely new system for perceiving his environment. In his discussion of perception, Rodaway defines perception as being corporeal, 'mediated by our bodies' which interact with our surroundings to form a holistic perceptual system which James Gibson refers to as the principle of ecological perception.<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Halloween is responsible for the uniqueness of Amar's perception, patiently helping him discover how to use his body as a machine, with

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<sup>16</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994), p. 12; James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1986).

such success that he refers to the period of her education as his second birth. Touch becomes central to his perception, so that not only his digits but the skin of his entire body becomes a means of interacting with the world in a reciprocal process, for the touching of a surface always entails being touched in return.<sup>18</sup> The world is experienced in relief, as embodied matter rather than as projected simulation. For Amar, then, the logical way to know someone and to be known completely is through sex:

Mon seul moyen de vraiment ‘connaître’ des gens, de pouvoir m’en former une ‘image mentale’, est de palper leur corps entier. Et le plus simple, pour parvenir à ce but, est de faire l’amour avec eux.<sup>19</sup>

The meanings associated with sex, at least on Amar’s part, are thus radically altered. By removing the dominance of the image, sex becomes a way of knowing people without the prejudice of either age or gender. Amar sleeps with both men and women, but because this is as a means of knowing them the practice does not constitute sexual preference. For his grateful clients, sleeping with him represents an escape from the tyranny of the image, from the fear of aesthetic judgement. There is also the thrill of breaking a taboo, ‘Faire l’amour avec un aveugle, [...] c’est faire l’amour avec un mort qui écoute’.<sup>20</sup>

Hocquenghem here is drawing on the tradition of philosophical blindness treated in Diderot’s *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749), which differentiates between the morality of the sighted and the blind. Amar’s perceptual system is so radically different from that experienced by the sighted that it raises questions about the nature of what it is that he perceives. He repeatedly refers to it as an alternative reality, existing in parallel to that of the sighted world:

Au fond, mon monde ne coïncide avec celui des voyants qu’au prix d’un gigantesque malentendu: je ne saurai jamais si je touche les mêmes objets qu’ils voient.<sup>21</sup>

Comme tous les voyants, vous ne comprenez pas que nous ne parlons pas du même monde, quand nous employons les mêmes mots. Nous sommes deux univers parallèles, qui coïncident parfois.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies*, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Hocquenghem, *L’Amour en relief*, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Hocquenghem, *L’Amour en relief*, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Hocquenghem, *L’Amour en relief*, p. 48.

The radicalness of Amar's reality raises questions about the nature of the sighted world, which is further problematised by the counter-weight account given by his co-narrator, Andrea. The importance of appearance is seen in the divergent reactions to Amar and Mrs Halloween: while Amar's appearance attracts all those around him, they completely ignore his companion, whose ancient ugliness leads Andrea to describe her as 'une dame si vieille qu'on aurait juré une momie démaillotée', and a 'mauvaise fée [qui] avait un nez crochu'.<sup>23</sup> As with the entirety of her narrative, this description is necessarily coloured by Andrea's obsession with Amar and, arguably, by her mental instability, which asserts itself periodically. Her account is thus problematised as a pastiche of French society which, although undoubtedly intended as a critique on the part of the self-confessed Francophobe Hocquenghem, also calls into question its objectivity.

How then can the reader interpret the narrators' conflicting views of society? It is evident from the plot alone that there is an element of fantasy fused with the specificity of dates and places, a fusion which Bill Marshall has referred to as 'realism and what we might call "utopia-apocalypse"'.<sup>24</sup> The extent of the realist element is undermined by further examination of the places which feature: while the Chelsea Hotel on New York's 23<sup>rd</sup> Street was indeed a seedy yet bohemian location in the 1970s, the Kerkennah islands which feature as Amar's homeland are less accurately described. Andrea's description of their rented house perched high on cliffs overlooking the sea contrasts with the physical reality that the highest point on the island is no more than thirteen metres above sea-level, and creates the impression of a world a few degrees removed from the islands on the geographical map.<sup>25</sup> Like a parallel universe which has slipped slightly, this world is almost but not quite recognisable. Hocquenghem's characters introduce us to this new reality: as with Idriss, we 'see' through their 'eyes', but unlike the reader of *La Goutte d'or*, here we have no superior knowledge. By his defamiliarised environment, Hocquenghem

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<sup>22</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, pp. 211-2.

<sup>23</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, p. 101.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Marshall, *Guy Hocquenghem: Theorising the Gay Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Ascertained by author during visit to Kerkennah, June 1999.

causes the reader to question the veracity of even provisional interpretations; nothing can be conclusively categorised in this parody of the world, because everything is destabilised.

### The binary of the gaze

While Hocquenghem creates an unstable but recognisable pastiche of Western society, Tournier establishes a rigid binary opposition between the desert and the West, based on attitudes toward the image and its dominance. While the West considers the image as integral to cultural processes such as communication and memory, for the desert it is something to be feared and rejected, intimately linked with the colonising process. This is seen in the differing attitudes to Idriss's experience of being photographed by a French female tourist, whose momentary visit and subsequent departure with the image of the young shepherd leaves him changed. 'Quand la Land Rover disparut en soulevant un nuage de poussière, Idriss n'était plus tout à fait le même homme'.<sup>26</sup> What to the tourist is a chance sighting is in fact a moment of two worlds looking each other in the face, and while the tourist leaves with her souvenir, a record of the authentic experience which she has sought in coming to the desert, Idriss is conscious of having been gazed upon and objectified by the camera's lens. Although the tourist's belief that this is an acceptable, harmless encounter is shared by the Marseilles prostitute who takes Idriss's 'goutte d'or' pendant, and all of the businessmen who give Idriss money in return for using him, Idriss lives these encounters as a series of exploitations which he is powerless to resist. The French characters are oblivious to any difficulties which their behaviour may cause; they are unaware of the existence of any alternative world-view and see everything through ethnocentric eyes. Through Idriss's reactions, however, Tournier makes his French readership aware of possible alternative interpretations.

The power of the photograph is a key issue in revealing the differences between cultures. Its power to capture and possess the fetish of female sexuality was

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<sup>26</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 14.

discussed in the previous chapter; here the position is reversed, such that the female holds the power on the basis of her privileged ethnic, that is, Western, position, which here over-rules the gender hierarchy. Here, the apparently innocuous snap of Idriss displayed in a Paris apartment will become part of a discourse which fixes him as exotic and other, coded by virtue of its mode of production and context of display. As Crawshaw and Urry argue, 'Photography can thus be seen as part of the dominant ideology of a society, reproducing and enhancing its preferred images while appearing to present entirely accurate representations'.<sup>27</sup> The apparently primitive Berber fear of the camera lens, seen as an eye which attracts the *mauvais oeil* to its subject, and of the maleficent power of the photographic image, is thus revealed as an aversion to being exposed to the coding which Idriss will experience repeatedly in his encounters with Western culture.

Tournier takes the Berbers' distrust of the image, with its roots in a combination of Islam and superstition, and makes it fundamental to the binary opposition which he sets up between the West and the desert. Because Idriss is passive and cannot offer an alternative vision, Tournier uses the narrator to develop the second term in his dichotomy. To the power of the image he contrasts the power of the sign, the pure abstract form most clearly evidenced in the 'goutte d'or' pendant worn and lost by Zett Zobeida, who herself is the desert's answer to the blonde Frenchwomen whose sexuality disturbs Idriss.

Que Zett Zobeida et sa goutte d'or soient l'émanation d'un monde sans image, l'antithèse et peut-être l'antidote de la femme platinée à l'appareil de photo, Idriss commença peut-être à le soupçonner ce soir-là.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to opposing it to the image, Tournier proposes the sign as a means of overcoming the metaphorical blindness with which Idriss is afflicted, demonstrated by his passivity and inability to make sense of the images with which he is faced. As Lynn Salkin Sbiroli points out, Idriss's blindness is paralleled by the sight defects suffered by Idriss's various would-be mentors: Ibrahim, the nomad has only one eye, the photographer Mustapha is short-sighted, Lala Ramirez has

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<sup>27</sup> Carol Crawshaw and John Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye', in *Touring Cultures*, ed. by Rojek and Urry, p. 183.

<sup>28</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 31.

unblinking eyes like a snake's, and Mage, the film director has a squint.<sup>29</sup> None of them are able to offer Idriss guidance, and the poverty of their advice is contrasted by the momentary flash of insight from the blind man at Oum Kalsoum's concert, who suddenly sees the singer as the colour green. While those with visual defects struggle to make sense of a reality constituted by images, the mythic blind seer is touched by the power of the spoken word. The significance of this seems to escape the inwardly-blind Idriss: 'Ce garçon si jeune comprendrait-il que la parole soit assez puissante pour faire voir un aveugle, que le signe soit assez riche pour évoquer la couleur verte dans sa tête enténébrée?'<sup>30</sup>

Tournier develops his dichotomy by introducing two further instances of the power of the sign. Both appear in the text in the form of tales recounted aloud and, by appearing at opposite ends of the novel, counterbalance each other and provide a framing device for the main narrative. In the first, 'Barberousse ou Le portrait du roi', Kheir ed Dîn, the pirate turned king who has just become aware of 'la force de l'image',<sup>31</sup> demands of the court painter a representation suited to his new status. The painter faces the difficulty not only of identifying and projecting the kingly essence of a man whose past has been one of violence, but of representing the red hair and beard which the king hides as a mark of disgrace. The solution is a tapestry woven by a Scandinavian artist in which the traits of the king are represented and simultaneously dissimulated by the scenes and colours of an autumnal European forest. Under close examination, the image of the king deconstructs into a series of pictorial signs: squirrels, foxes and deer under the autumn trees. Here the similarities with the second tale end, for the tapestry is an affirming image which proclaims the sovereignty of the king and so functions as a catalyst which allows him to assume this positive identity. In contrast, the second story tells 'la légende de la Reine blonde' who, although herself beneficent, inspires a painting which causes the obsession and destruction of all who look on it. The malevolent power of this image is such that it is only neutralised when a young man learns calligraphy in order to

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<sup>29</sup> Lynn Salkin Sbiroli, 'Learning and Unlearning: Tournier, Defoe, Voltaire,' in *Michel Tournier*, ed. by Michael Worton (London and New York: Longman, 1995), pp. 103-25 (p. 117).

<sup>30</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 196.

<sup>31</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 37.

remake it as a series of signs, here, lines of poetry and proverbs in Arabic script. Again, the image is seen to demerge into a series of constituent signs.

While the story of 'la Reine blonde' clearly demonstrates the dangerous power of the image, and suggests the dominant role of the visual, the tale of 'Barberousse' suggests that the other senses also have a role to play.

Pour mieux goûter sa propre douceur, Kheir ed Dîn avait appliqué sa joue sur la tapisserie. Tournant la tête, il y plongeait son visage.

'Quelle bonne et profonde odeur!' s'exclama-t-il.

'L'odeur de la nature, l'odeur des rochers,' dit Ahmed. 'C'est de la laine de mouton sauvage, lavée dans un torrent de montagne et séchée sur des buissons d'euphorbe. Oui, telle est la grande supériorité de la tapisserie sur la peinture: une tapisserie est destinée à être vue certes, mais aussi à être palpée, et encore à être humée.'<sup>32</sup>

This reference to the role of multiple senses is reminiscent of Shklovsky's writings on the concept of estrangement, where he refers to the necessity of multiple sensations - the 'feel' of a stone, or a walk - through language in order to achieve the aim of enabling the reader to 'see' objects anew.

Together with Idriss's restoration of the sign to full materiality in the Place Vendôme, the nature of Barberousse's tapestry suggests that Tournier is setting up a multi-dimensional system of oppositions, most obviously between image and sign, but equally between vision and other senses, and arguably between civilised West and primitive Other. This structure bears similarities with Amar's 'parallel universes' which oppose the experience of the sighted to that of the blind who rely on other senses, and with the racist discourse which conflates blindness and ethnicity into a generalised category of the Other. Closer examination of these dichotomies is required in order to consider their implications for these texts.

The world looking back: Western attitudes towards the blind

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<sup>32</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 46.



Unlike Idriss, whose naïve eyes provide a transparent window through which, as readers, we can watch French society, Amar is a more autonomous individual ready to comment on the sighted world to which he gives the reader access. Following his accident, he quickly becomes persuaded of his unique status, considering himself ‘moins l’aveugle que l’invisible voyeur du monde des voyants’.<sup>33</sup> Although his experiences make him aware to a limited extent of the attitudes of individuals towards his blindness, it is the Optacon reading device of the New York Public Library which gives him access to the writings of the sighted population, and its wider views on the blind. His reading of these texts convinces him of the pity and revulsion in which the blind are held by the sighted.

The crux of Amar’s views comes in an impassioned speech prepared but never delivered to the jury which convicts him of drug trafficking, and has him sentenced to two hundred and forty-six years in jail. In it he deploras, not the loss of his liberty, for he sees this as a spectacle prized by the sighted, but the moral rules and norms which the sighted world imposes on him, which to him are entirely arbitrary. The court is unable to accept that he has smuggled fourteen kilos of heroin, although he refuses to deny it when questioned: rather than being a blind criminal, it reasons that he must simply be faking his blindness. When his blindness is proven, the prosecutor accuses him of exploiting the respect accorded to the infirm. ‘Vous étiez prêts à beaucoup me pardonner, sauf de détruire l’image de pureté aveugle que vous vous faisiez des miens,’ Amar concludes, ‘Vous m’avez condamné sans pitié parce que j’ai trahi mon rôle’.<sup>34</sup> Like Camus’s Meursault before him, Amar’s crime is to have broken the codes and norms which constitute the fabric of society.

The conception of the blind as innocent arguably relates back to considerations of the image, which in Western culture is often associated with sophistication, and the ability of the advanced capitalist market to decode consumer messages. To be located outwith this consumerist society suggests an uncorrupted community reminiscent of a former age of innocence. a suggestion supported by Victor Zuckerkandl in this description: ‘The quietness, the equanimity, the trust, *one*

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<sup>33</sup> Hocquenghem, *L’Amour en relief*, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Hocquenghem, *L’Amour en relief*, p. 214 ; p. 215.

*might almost say the piety*, so often found in the blind are in strange contrast to the irritability and suspicion encountered among so many of the deaf'.<sup>35</sup> Outrageous as this claim is, it echoes the discourse of the innocence of the blind attacked by Amar. Although it is difficult to support, the reasons which underpin this apparently illogical characterisation become clearer when we consider the manner in which we begin to make use of our senses.

Research conducted in North America into how we acquire and use our senses suggests that the senses 'develop in a definite sequence, as (1) tactile, (2) auditory, and (3) visual. As the child approaches adolescence the order of precedence becomes reversed, as (1) visual, (2) auditory, and (3) tactile'.<sup>36</sup> On this basis it is not unreasonable to view touch as associated with children, who learn initially by putting objects in their mouth but who quickly become accustomed to the admonition, 'Don't touch!'. The extreme reliance of the blind on tactile sensation would therefore place them close, in the conception of sighted people, to the behaviour of children, with all its associations of innocence and purity. Amar appears outwardly to conform to this model, which explains partially the attitudes of the court. However, through the narrative it is evident that, far from regressing to a childlike state following his accident, it is in fact while sighted that he was an unformed and innocent being, whose education and independence came into being only after the accident, thanks to the intervention of Mrs Halloween: 'J'étais alors un jeune poulain à la tête vide, effrayé par son propre ombre. Depuis, j'avais déjà plus vécu qu'aucun des autres gamins de Kerkenna ne le ferait jamais de toute sa vie'.<sup>37</sup>

In his speech, Amar refers to the way in which blindness is fixed as a form of otherness: he links it to the ethnic other, suggesting that both are rendered invisible, 'moi qui viens pas seulement de l'Arabie, mais d'un continent invisible'.<sup>38</sup> He identifies the structures created to ensure this invisibility, starting with early philanthropy, which purports to act in the interests of the blind whilst in reality

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<sup>35</sup> Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World*, trans. by W.R. Trask, Bollingen Series XLIV (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 3 (emphasis added).

<sup>36</sup> Ashley Montagu, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 236.

<sup>37</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, p. 63.

<sup>38</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, p. 211.

working to suppress them from general view by imposing a homogenous definition that allows no space for desire, corporeality or independence:

Les gens croient les aveugles sans sexe, puceaux, indéfiniment conservés dans le formol des bons sentiments. [...] Vous avez décidé que les aveugles avaient un esprit; ils n'avaient plus besoin de corps. Vous avez créé un nouvel être immatériel, pure intelligence sans sexe ni besoins, un aveugle de philanthrope que votre dignité étouffe.<sup>39</sup>

Once defined, the position of the blind is mediated through the creation of institutions for the blind which function in a Foucauldian manner through the expulsion of those whose cannot be repressed within society. The experience within the institution is that of the panopticon, with lights always on, and whistles regulating activities. Consequently inmates internalise the surveillance and their behaviour becomes self-regulating.

As a gay-rights campaigner, Hocquenghem's critique of the institution for the blind is aimed at a Republican model of difference which dictates assimilation and the erasure of difference where possible, and expulsion or ghettoisation where difference cannot be erased. Beyond this, however, he rejects the tendency of all identity categories, including those of the 'homosexual', the national or the ethnic, to become limited and constricting. The institution's discourse on sexuality reveals the extent to which these various categories of difference are conflated in terms of the exclusionary policies of the state:

Les Pères étaient hantés par la peur de la génétique, ils remontaient les arbres généalogiques à la recherche des autres aveugles. Ainsi, sous l'affectation d'hygiène, se manifestaient très clairement leur peur et leur haine de la cécité. Inévitablement, des couples se formaient, que le retardement systématique n'empêchait pas de se désirer suivant les règles catholiques. Ils les toléraient mieux que les couples 'dominos', comme ils disaient atrocement: les couples entre aveugles et voyants. Au moins, le risque étant localisé, ne risquait pas de contaminer et de s'étendre.<sup>40</sup>

The terms used here, particularly 'dominos', with its connotations of black and white ethnicity, are reminiscent of the discourse of racial types prevalent throughout the nineteenth century. While, in contrast to the sexually voracious black man, the blind

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<sup>39</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, pp. 214-5.

<sup>40</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, p. 61.

are regarded as pure and sexless, the fear that they will procreate, or worse, contaminate 'normal' bloodlines, is omnipresent and regulates attitudes towards their sexuality. Whether it be the blind or any other sub-category of the Other, all are subject to the same ambivalent attitude of 'assimilate/don't assimilate', whereby the dominant culture's duty to civilise does not extend to the point of losing the assurance of its own superior identity.<sup>41</sup> Marginalised on multiple fronts by his ethnicity, disability, and sexuality, but buoyed by the formation which is Mrs. Halloween's legacy, Amar refuses to conform to expectations and maintains his individuality despite the pressures of his changing surroundings.

### Characterisations of sight

France in *La Goutte d'or* and the West<sup>42</sup> in *L'Amour en relief* are worlds designed for the eye, where the discourse of images bears an arbitrary but defining relation to meaning, and reality is as transparent, superficial and flat as Baudrillard's simulacra suggest. It is a world where the other senses are restricted and denied, made subordinate to the hegemony of the visual through the glass of a television screen, the perspex of a jeweller's window, or the transparent barrier of the peep show. Tournier's Hexagon demonstrates the obsession with simulation and capitalism of which the Parisian intellectual milieu habitually accuses America. Hocquenghem makes a similar point: there is little to separate the judgements and practices of his Paris from the spectacle-obsessed America. Idriss and Amar find themselves commoditized as spectacle, either in television advertisements, or as the blind surfer, blind dancer, or blind gigolo. To develop the analysis of these practices, it is useful to consider them within the context of historical discourses around vision.

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<sup>41</sup> Gyan Prakash points to the equivocal figure of the Western-educated, English-speaking Indian as an example of this, encouraged to become civilised and Western ("be like me"), yet fixed in perpetual otherness ("don't be like me") by a particular lack (the Indian's inability to ride horses was used to keep him out of the covenanted civil service). Prakash, 'Can the "Subaltern" Ride?', 168-184.

<sup>42</sup> Although this study is concerned with the French *métropole*, Hocquenghem conflates values and descriptions of Parisian and American society, so that there is little to choose between them. Accordingly, out of necessity I refer to them here as 'the West', although mindful that this is a problematised term.

Since Plato and Aristotle, vision has occupied a privileged position among the senses. Ingold notes the insistence on the primacy of sight, evidenced by Descartes' assertion that 'sight is the noblest and most comprehensive of the senses',<sup>43</sup> especially in comparison with the so-called bodily senses of touch, taste and smell. Vision and observation have historically served as the primary instrument of objective knowledge, supported by Hannah Arendt when she argues that 'from the very outset, in formal philosophy, thinking has been thought of in terms of *seeing*'.<sup>44</sup> Linguistic support for this comes from the Indo-European root 'weid-' from which the verbs 'to see' and 'to know' derive in various languages.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Chris Rojek and John Urry note that the primacy of the visual also exists in contemporary culture, where the privileging of the visual in contemporary tourist practices appears to parallel the oculo-centrism of Western philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

However, feminists such as Rose and Pollock, have drawn attention to consequences of Western cultural practices of sight, as they have with many of the characteristics of the Enlightenment.<sup>47</sup> Their argument that the gaze in Western culture has been defined in terms of masculine hegemony, where the observing eye is characterised as male and the female (body) is positioned as observed object or spectacle, is relevant here in light of the tendency for the colonised to be conceptualised in feminine terms. The visual is thus linked to the phallogocentric imperial systems of power and domination, such as Foucault's panopticon. According to Luce Irigaray, this emphasis on the visual comes at the expense of the other senses:

More than other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, and maintains a distance. [...] In our culture the predominance of the look over the smell, taste, touch and hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations. The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 247.

<sup>44</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1978), pp. 110-1.

<sup>45</sup> Carl Darling Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 1041.

<sup>46</sup> *Touring Cultures*, ed. by Rojek and Urry, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*; Pollock, *Vision and Difference*.

<sup>48</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'Interview with Luce Irigaray', in *Les Femmes, la pornographie et l'erotisme*, ed. by Marie-Françoise Hans and Gilles Lapouge (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 50.

This loss of materiality can be seen throughout *La Goutte d'or*, as bodily substance is replaced by the image. This is most notable in the instance of the mannequins, where the mannequin collector tells Idriss of his habit of photographing his mannequins in natural situations. His pleasure in the resultant 'image of an image' is partly because the landscape makes his figurines seem more life-like but, more precisely, it is due to the way in which the juxtaposition of image and reality undermines the reality of the landscape itself:

La réalité du paysage donne aux mannequins une vie beaucoup plus intense que ne peut le faire un décor de vitrine. Mais c'est surtout l'inverse qui importe: mes mannequins jettent le doute sur le paysage. Grâce à eux, les arbres sont un peu – pas complètement, un peu seulement – en papier, les rochers en carton, le ciel n'est en partie qu'une toile de fond.<sup>49</sup>

Although presented initially as a primitive or superstitious practice, in this context the Berber aversion to the photographic image assumes its place as a rational response. The photograph, which is itself a material object and not simply a reflection of the world, as Crawshaw and Urry remind us, is for the Berber something which the individual must control, for it exists at the expense of the corporeal subject.<sup>50</sup> The taking of a photograph, as Sontag notes, enables an individual to take possession of an unfamiliar space, in what might be called an act of colonisation.<sup>51</sup> The Berber understanding of the nature of the image is one way in which Tournier establishes the opposition between the image-driven West, and the sign-based desert culture. This contrasts with *L'Amour en relief*, which in this sense is the opposite of Idriss's photograph; it is about re-embodiment and materiality, the restoration of the flesh to the ground often occupied by the image.

While Amar's blindness means that his experience is determined by his remaining senses, the simulations available in *La Goutte d'or* are designed to be accessible solely to the eye, preventing the engagement of any other sense. The glass of the television screen and the perspex of the window display form a hermetic seal preventing other sensory contact, as Idriss finds when he returns to try and meet the

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<sup>49</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 181.

<sup>50</sup> Crawshaw and Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye', p. 184.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 9-10.

peepshow actress whom he has seen perform. He does so despite the admonitions of his cousin, who better understands the situation:

Elle existait pour tes yeux, mais pas pour tes mains. Ici tout est pour les yeux, rien pour les mains. Les vitrines, c'est comme le cinéma et la télévision, pour les yeux, seulement pour les yeux!<sup>52</sup>

The glass screen creates and insulates the illusions from exposure to the other senses; under examination the illusion of the image would be exposed as the simulation it is. Rather than the 'femme-lionne' he expected to meet, Idriss returns only to find a strangely familiar cleaner. Her verdict on the men who pay to watch her speaks of their impotence against the hermetic space which contains her performance as image of the animal Other: 'Ces hommes, c'est pas croyable ce qu'ils peuvent être sales! Ils en mettent partout. Sur le fauteuil, sur les murs, par terre! Il y en a même qui éclaboussent la fenêtre!'<sup>53</sup>

The same transparent barrier protects the 'goutte d'or' when Idriss sees it for the last time. However, unlike the glass of the peep-show which creates the illusion of theatre, here the glass preserves the exclusivity and desire of a jeweller's located in the Place Vendôme, the heart of Parisian style and grandeur. On this occasion, the phallus which Idriss holds is far from impotent, for he plays the stereotypical immigrant role of construction worker and is equipped with a mighty pneumatic drill. 'Un zob de géant', his cousin says. 'Avec ça, tu crèves Paris, tu niques la France!'<sup>54</sup> As a symbol of all immigrant workers, then, this vision of sexuality stands in opposition to the exploitative sexuality of the blonde women whom Idriss has encountered throughout the novel. Entranced by the abstract form of the jewel and his memories, Idriss seems to dance with his drill, the machine becoming a partner, a metamorphosed Zett Zobeida whose vibrations shatter the glass and restore the jewel's accessibility, freeing the sign and returning it from image to material presence.

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<sup>52</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, pp. 163-4.

<sup>53</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 164.

<sup>54</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 218.

## Sensual hierarchies: historical views of vision

Historically, therefore, attitudes towards vision have been ambivalent: it has traditionally been regarded as rational, detached and analytical, whilst more recently being accused of being reductive and objectifying. The ills of modern Western civilisation, including its tendency towards individualism, have been blamed on its obsession with vision, in part because vision is seen as defining the self individually in opposition to others.<sup>55</sup> This distrust of vision can be linked to a suspicion of writing, which since Plato and Aristotle has been seen as a pale imitation of the immediacy and reality of the spoken word. This attitude can be traced through to contemporary scholarship through a review of attitudes towards writing, as Tim Ingold does in his chapter on the relationship between vision and hearing.<sup>56</sup> According to Marshall McLuhan, Gutenberg's invention of the printing press was the catalyst for radically altering attitudes towards writing and speech in favour of the former and its dependence on the eye. However, he argues that this change did not take place among indigenous peoples whose cultures remained at the level of 'oral-aural' emphasis, with an associated emphasis on the privileged position of the hearing ear.<sup>57</sup> Supported by the studies of numerous anthropologists, and in a manner not dissimilar to Tournier and Hocquenghem, McLuhan thus identified an apparent opposition between vision and hearing with a Centre-Periphery dichotomy. Walter Ong develops this position further by attributing moral characteristics to the dominant senses, suggesting that while oral culture demonstrates 'aggregative (harmonizing) tendencies', vision shows 'analytic, dissecting' characteristics.<sup>58</sup> A sound-dominated economy is people-focused, binding them into community, whereas vision centres on abstract, impersonal things.

Ong goes on to assert that the listener in an oral culture, who has never seen writing, will receive the sounds of spoken language as sound: 'In a primary oral

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<sup>55</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 247.

<sup>56</sup> Ingold, 'Stop, look, listen! Vision, Hearing and Human Movement', in *The Perception of the Environment*, pp. 243-87.

<sup>57</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988 [1982]), pp. 73-4.



culture, [...] the word has its existence only in sound, with no reference whatsoever to any visually perceptible text, and no awareness of even the possibility of such a text.’<sup>59</sup> As Ingold points out, this is entirely different from the explanation put forward by Saussure that, because of our familiarity with the written word, we hear words within the sounds of spoken language rather than the sounds themselves.<sup>60</sup> Thus, just as in a similar way we do not see ‘light’, but only the objects it illuminates, so we do not hear the sounds of language, but perceive them ready-formed into words.<sup>61</sup> Writing thus transforms our perception of the word, rather than simply representing it.

Ong suggests that writing is the only way in which cultures can represent speech, and that oral cultures remain outside of this mode of representation. He presents this apparent lack as a positive, since it allows these cultures to escape the dominance of the objectifying visual and maintain the positivity of aural privileging, and in doing so, he reiterates the opposition between vision and writing, and orality and speech.

## Binaries undone

This raises questions about the effects of these contemporary reworkings of Montesquieu’s tradition. Are they simply using their North African travellers to critique Western culture for being dominated by the reifying tendencies of the gaze? Or proposing that peripheral cultures are somehow superior, because they offer alternatives such as the sign, hearing and speech? In his work on speech and writing, Jacques Derrida questions Saussure’s binary notion of the natural order of relationships between linguistic and graphic signs:

Donc il y aurait une *nature* des rapports entre signes linguistiques et signes graphiques, et c’est le théoricien de l’arbitraire du signe qui nous le rappelle. Selon les

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<sup>59</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 73.

<sup>60</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 248.

<sup>61</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 11.

présuppositions historico-métaphysiques que nous évoquions plus haut, il y aurait d'abord un lien *naturel* du sens aux sens et c'est celui qui passe du sens au son.<sup>62</sup>

He goes on to show that since speech is shown to be as material as writing, and so subject to the same forces of deferral and difference, the notion of writing simply as representation of speech is disrupted. 'L'écriture n'est pas signe de signe, sauf à le dire, ce qui serait plus profondément vrai, de tout signe'.<sup>63</sup>

Although it would be difficult to overestimate Derrida's influence in this area, a closer look at the novels suggests that they also destabilise the sensual binary which they initially appear to propose. Both Tournier and Hocquenghem contradict Ong's suggestion that writing is the only visual representation of language. Amar uses a series of pressure codings, applied either under his fingers or, in the case of the Optacon, against his back in order to build up a 'presque image'<sup>64</sup> of the written language which he cannot see. In 'la Reine blonde', the image is deconstructed by the calligrapher who, through painstaking gestures, describes a series of signs which represent, not simply a series of sounds, but parts of an image. Their experiences may be outside of written culture, but this does not impede their accessing of language, any more than the sign language of a deaf person prevents them from communicating. This finding suggests that the characterising of cultures in terms of the dominant sense is a crude device, and that the relationship between Western and indigenous cultures may be more complex than the apparent binary opposition would suggest.

It is also useful to investigate the main charge laid against visual perception. David Levin outlines the claim succinctly – 'Vision is the most reifying of all our perceptual modalities' – and asserts that the hegemony of the visual in modern society can be linked to a will to power, technoscientific exploitation and political surveillance.<sup>65</sup> While Levin's list of evils reads like a roll-call of the experiences to which Amar is subjected, this does not necessarily make conclusive the case for the

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<sup>62</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 53, emphasis in original.

<sup>63</sup> Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, p. 63.

<sup>64</sup> Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief*, p. 174.

<sup>65</sup> David Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 65.

inherently objectifying nature of vision. Ingold points to the reciprocity of vision as a key component in identity:

[Y]our visibility, your identity, indeed your very existence as a person, is confirmed in the sight of others [...] But when the other person is blind the reciprocity of vision breaks down. Suppose that I am sighted and you are blind: while I can see your face, I am also aware that you are not looking at me. It seems that I am not there for you. But not being able to see the faces of others leads you to imagine that others, conversely, cannot see you. Hull vividly describes the nagging fear of having no face, the loss of consciousness associated with perceived invisibility. 'Because I cannot see, I cannot be seen ... It would make no difference if my whole face disappeared. Being invisible to others, I become invisible to my self'. [...] For him, quite contrary to conventional wisdom, vision personifies, whereas sound objectifies.<sup>66</sup>

Aspects of this reciprocity of vision, and its implications for identity when reciprocity is interrupted, are present in various forms throughout *L'Amour en relief*. We see it in Larry, the Nobel-winning scientist who, unable to recognise faces, forces his wife to dress in canary yellow so that he can identify her. As a consequence, he is isolated, surrounded by perpetual strangers and with only minimal emotional development, a state which arguably facilitates his grim experiments, first on frogs and chimpanzees, and later on a human subject, Amar. Amar's own inability to see and identify with the suffering caused by the experiments perhaps explains his willingness to be involved in conducting them, a willingness which evaporates as soon as he becomes their subject.

Yet, perhaps surprisingly, vision does play a part in the construction of Amar's self-identity. As those around him comment admiringly and wistfully on his appearance, he becomes aware of his own beauty. Although he is unable, like each of us, to see his own face, or even to read the reactions in the eyes of the person looking at him, their attitudes are communicated verbally. Affirmation, rather than objectification, issues from the regard of those around him, and contributes to the construction of his self-image, albeit by an indirect route. Through them he is made aware of the power that his physical beauty gives him, and despite being unable to see it, is not prevented from exercising the influence which it lends him, in, for example, picking up clients in West Hollywood.

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<sup>66</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 272, quoting John Hull, *On Sight and Insight: A Journey into the World of Blindness* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), pp. 51-2.

Most fundamentally, however, the personification due to vision is evident in the way in which Amar has to adapt following his blindness. Prior to his accident his relationships were based on sight; like most people in the West, he knew people through seeing them. Following his accident, he is forced to find a new means of knowing people. The unconventional nature of his chosen method – full-body touch and, ultimately, sex – perhaps the most striking aspect of the novel, is testament to the fact that, contrary to tradition, in everyday practice vision in fact personifies rather than objectifies.

The conclusion drawn from these examples must be that there is a dichotomy, but it is not a divide between vision and other senses. The supposed hegemony of vision does not preclude the symbolic value of other senses within Western culture, which include the ringing of church bells, the sounding of horns or sirens, or the smells of incense during Mass. Rather, the division is between the actual practices of seeing, and the cultural discourses around vision, which has its roots in the Cartesian dualism of nature and culture. As Ingold argues,

[I]t is not vision that objectifies the world, but rather the harnessing of vision to a project of objectification that has reduced it to an instrument of disinterested observation. [...] At the heart of this approach is a representationalist theory of knowledge [which] rests on a fundamental distinction between physical and cultural dimensions of perception, the former having to do with the registration of sensations by the body and brain, the latter with the construction of representations in the mind.<sup>67</sup>

Analysis of the texts suggests a similar disconnection between the way that seeing practices are carried out in *L'Amour en relief*, and the way in which visual symbolism functions in both texts. If vision itself does not automatically objectify, objectification must be caused by the tradition into which visual practices are symbolically appropriated. What we are left with, then, is 'a critique of modernity dressed up as a critique of the hegemony of vision'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, pp. 282-3.

<sup>68</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 287.

## A critique of modernity

What is under attack in *La Goutte d'or*, and *L'Amour en relief*, then, rather than being image or vision *per se*, is the functioning of modernity and its practices. These include the tendency to individualism, to objectification and to the commoditisation of identities and persons. I would like now to examine the manner in which the novels develop this critique, for it appears that while the dichotomy between vision and the other senses has been undermined, the arguably more fundamental opposition between Self and Other remains, although problematised by the dissolution of the arguments around sight.

This chapter began with reference to Lalla, the exoticised descendant of the desert tribes, and her experience of arriving in the metropole. Like Tournier and Hocquenghem, Le Clézio enstranges his description of Marseilles by presenting it through the eyes of a stranger. But this is not simply any stranger: to create the cultural distance required for enstrangement, each writer borrows the eyes of a North African immigrant, a subject who, as a figure from an oriental culture, is at once exoticised and inferior, suited only to manual labour. In doing so, they renew the opposition between Self and Other, for in order to be tools suitable for the task, the protagonists of the novels must be fixed in their otherness.

This strategy raises the question of how these tools are used in the texts; unsurprisingly the approaches differs somewhat. Idriss is almost entirely passive: he barely speaks and *La Goutte d'or* contains repeated references to his meekness and lack of comprehension, for example in his encounter with the blonde prostitute: 'Il leva une main timide [...]; abaissa son bras sans comprendre [...]. Docilement, il sortit son portefeuille [...]. Malgré une faible geste de défense [...]'.<sup>69</sup> Even at the close of the novel, having broken the glass window and released the 'goutte d'or' he remains passive, 'sourd et aveugle', refusing to engage actively or make sense of his environment.<sup>70</sup> He functions therefore as a cipher, presenting the reader with a series of (exploitative) situations, even repeating verbatim the words of French people,

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<sup>69</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 110.

<sup>70</sup> Tournier, *La Goutte d'or*, p. 220.

whose meaning escapes him but is clear to the reader, allowing us to draw our own conclusions. On the few occasions where he appears to learn from his experiences, the reader has already made the necessary connections. As a character he is simply a tool by which Tournier can reflect the culture of metropolitan France back to the reader: he is entirely fixed as Other.

Amar, on the other hand, is able to draw his own conclusions and narrate them to the reader. His is a more complex subject position, for Hocquenghem, with his aversion to finished identity, multiplies his otherness. Hocquenghem has been criticised in some quarters for his 'underestimation of Amar's Arab and Tunisian identity, and for thus falling into the very European tradition of using such a figure as a sounding-board, erotic or otherwise, for the author's philosophical or political preoccupations'.<sup>71</sup> While this is true to an extent, and certainly reflects the critique of Western society contained within *L'Amour en relief*, this point of view depends on a conception of identity as fixed and essential. Amar is other because he is Arab but because of Hocquenghem's dislike of national identity, his Arabness is all but erased by Mrs Halloween's education, and by his constant travels, which allow the writer not only to critique Western society, but to explore the possibilities of global identity. The notion of sexual preference is exploded by his blindness, which removes gender discrimination and creates new criteria for sexual attractiveness; to say that Amar is bisexual is to fail to realise that gender as a means of discrimination has been removed. Blindness is the source of his otherness, but as we have seen, it is linked to racialism in the attitudes of the authorities. His eventual transformation into a cyborg is the final illustration of his otherness. Winifred Woodhull has praised the way in which 'the Amar figure crystallises myriad forms of identity', but despite this fragmentation it is clear that, like Idriss, he is still fixed as Other, only this time from multiple angles.<sup>72</sup>

This treatment of otherness raises questions about the ethics of the authors' undertaking in using a formerly colonised subject as a literary device. In doing so they are reinforcing for their own purposes a binary opposition against which

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<sup>71</sup> Marshall, *Guy Hocquenghem*, p. 72.

<sup>72</sup> Woodhull, *Transformations of the Maghreb*, p. 194.

postcolonial subjects have struggled, often violently, for decades. Both writers have been criticised by Woodhull for conflating First and Third World subject positions:

[...] although Hocquenghem is committed to problematizing his own national identity by 'speaking through the mouth of the foreigner' and projecting his Maghrebian protagonist out of France into the high-tech world of the United States, he ultimately refuses, in *Love in Relief*, to admit of any difference between what it means for a European male intellectual to 'decline his national identity as one declines an invitation' and what it means for a member of a national minority or third-world national group to do so. Like Tournier, he implicitly views the two situations as equivalent.<sup>73</sup>

They can also be accused of neglecting the material barriers which face Maghrebi immigrants. Despite the poverty of his oasis, Idriss experiences little in the way of financial restrictions, and it is notable that, despite the oasis's isolation, on the few occasions that he speaks, this subaltern is able to communicate without difficulty in standard French. Hocquenghem goes some way towards providing an explanation in the person of Mrs Halloween, through whose intervention Amar acquires both independence and a facility with European languages. Nevertheless, Hocquenghem can be criticised for erasing any specific Arab identity not only from Amar, but from his two half-sisters and their friend Malika, all of whom are presented as undifferentiated from the mass of self-obsessed, status-driven French bourgeois. None of these immigrants are depicted in a realist manner; they exist as tools for the authors' purpose, as does their homeland:

The Third World functions simply as a metaphorical margin for European oppositional strategies, an imaginary space, rather than a location of theoretical production itself. This kind of 'othering' in theory repeats the anthropological gesture of erasing the subject position of the theorist and perpetuates a kind of colonial discourse in the name of progressive politics.<sup>74</sup>

The lack of respect inherent in this approach, which presents formerly colonised subjects as passive instruments, reinforces colonial attitudes which refuse the possibility of an active participation in the creation of meaning. Bhabha refers to this

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<sup>73</sup> Woodhull, *Transformations of the Maghreb*, p. 195.

<sup>74</sup> Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 88.

tendency in *The Location of Culture*: 'forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation'.<sup>75</sup>

A defence of the novels can, to some extent, be mounted through an appeal to their form, as both demonstrate characteristics which would place them within the picaresque genre. The episodic nature of the narratives, with their increasingly bizarre and fantastic encounters, is reminiscent of tales such as *Candide*, to whom, in his naïvety, Idriss has been compared.<sup>76</sup> In one sense these are anti-travellers, for while travel narratives are concerned with bringing the unfamiliar cultures encountered closer to the reader, these texts aim to create a sense of distantiating, removing the reader from the proximity of what is familiar. Neither immigrant nor tourist, these contemporary *pícaros* wander the streets of Paris, New York and San Francisco; with no destination in mind, they enter a Cliffordian state of 'dwelling-in-travelling'.<sup>77</sup> Like modern-day *flâneurs* they give us a view of the world around them which they themselves cannot see, being either metaphorically or physically blind. The underlying critique of society established by means of these blind *flâneurs* also locates the texts within the tradition of a *conte philosophique*, in which realist elements are not highly valued.

However, while it is certainly possible to read these texts within this tradition, its legitimacy can be challenged because of the historically-specific nature of immigration from North Africa. To appropriate figures of this group without regard for their material situation, whilst reinforcing colonial dynamics in the interests of a white intellectual agenda is indicative of a somewhat cavalier attitude that is difficult to defend. Indeed, in her work on Barthes, Marie-Paule Ha calls into question the subversive potential of their project: 'Using an alien culture as a reflector to de-naturalise and demystify one's own (dating back to Montaigne) has itself become a mythic enterprise that has already been re-appropriated by the doxa (as Barthes is aware)'.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 34.

<sup>76</sup> Sbiroli, 'Learning and Unlearning: Tournier, Defoe, Voltaire', p. 114.

<sup>77</sup> James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures', in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 96-112.

<sup>78</sup> Marie-Paule Ha, *Figuring the East: Segalen, Malraux, Duras and Barthes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 102.



Is it possible, then, to achieve a critique of French society in a way that neither exploits North African figures, nor falls back into reaffirming the fixity of persistent discourses? One possible solution is suggested by Didier van Cauwelaert's novel, *Un Aller simple*.

### The indefinable immigrant

*Un Aller simple* tells the story of Aziz, found as a baby and brought up by gypsies on an estate on the outskirts of Marseilles. His journey begins when the police arrest him for jewellery theft and find that his official papers declare him to be of Moroccan nationality. Accompanied by a French government attaché, Jean-Pierre, he is sent in the opposite direction to Idriss and Amar, to return to the supposed land of his birth. The rest of the novel deals with his attempts to manage Jean-Pierre's expectations of finding a route to his fictional home town of Irghiz, and his return to France with Jean-Pierre's body, following his death in the Atlas mountains.

Central to the plot is the uncertainty around Aziz's origins. He is named after the car in which he was found as a baby: 'La voiture était une Ami 6 de race Citroën, alors on m'a appelé Ami 6, en souvenir. Ce sont mes origines, quoi'.<sup>79</sup> While the name Aziz has Arab associations, it is quite clear that this is an arbitrary assignation of identity: Aziz is at least as likely to be French.

Mamita [...] dit toujours que c'était une mauvaise idée de m'abrèger comme ça, parce que, petit, j'avais le type français – d'après elle, les noms qu'on donne, ça déteint. Ça m'est égal. J'aime bien être un Arabe, parce qu'on est nombreux et on me fout la paix.<sup>80</sup>

Aziz is arrested, and later deported, as part of a set-up, most probably caused by the gypsies with whom he lives, who are unhappy about his proposed marriage to one of the gypsy girls, Lila. His rejection by the community which has brought him up is amplified by the rejection by the official state of his identity papers. The gypsies'

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<sup>79</sup> Dider van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, p. 6.

reaction is perhaps the more honest: while Lila's brother is happy to tell Aziz that he is 'le chien crevé au bord de la route',<sup>81</sup> the authorities' decision to send Aziz to Morocco is couched in the official *langue de bois* of overseas development policy. There is an economic irony in both situations: Aziz is accused of stealing a diamond engagement ring when in fact he bought it legitimately from a jeweller who now accuses him of theft. The same crooked jeweller also supplied his forged identity papers. Had Aziz wanted to pay more, he could have procured for himself papers declaring his French nationality; however, the market dictates that Moroccan nationality can be obtained more cheaply. Aziz's official identity and legal situation are therefore defined by economics.

*Un Aller simple* was published in the wake of the 1993 'lois Pasqua', legislation which has been described as reflecting 'an increasingly repressive and restrictive philosophy, turning the *clandestin* (illegal immigrant) into an enemy of the state, the most easily identifiable national scapegoat'.<sup>82</sup> Van Cauwelaert uses Aziz's 'repatriation' to critique the inconsistency of the French immigration laws, and to expose those who operate them as motivated by the need to be *seen* to be doing something, rather than a concern for justice. However, he does not do this by establishing a binary between French society and the North African foreigner. Rather, he demolishes suggestions of this binary by insisting on Aziz's uncertain origins, implying that the distinction is arbitrary, since anyone could find themselves in Aziz's position.

By exposing the political motivation behind the campaign of repatriation, van Cauwelaert demonstrates that being seen to act is more desirable than effective results. He highlights the privileging of image over substance, and emphasises the importance of Aziz's appearance, being dark, but not too Arab-looking, to generate accusations of racism. However, he does not appeal to the senses to give the kind of literary experience of enstrangement to which Shklovsky referred. Instead, he uses humour to create distance between the reader and the situations which are caused by the implementation of official policy, and to expose the ways in which the justice

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<sup>81</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, p. 37.

<sup>82</sup> Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality*, p. 1.

system, the media, and personal relationships are driven by selfish motivations, and prone to corruption.

In his work on comedy, Jerry Palmer argues that the forms of comedy which exist in canonic literature serve primarily to support narrative development: 'Here the logic of the absurd mostly functions to articulate comic moments on to the narrative in such a way as to serve the non-comic intentions of the narrative as a whole'.<sup>83</sup> Since the main thrust of the narrative is concerned with critiquing the politics of French immigration laws, and the arbitrary way in which they fix identity, many of the novel's comic moments surround political and legal conventions. It is worth pausing for a moment to consider how humour might be created in such circumstances. According to Palmer, humour is created by manipulating the relationship between what is plausible in a certain situation, and what convention dictates to be implausible, so that they become unequally balanced in favour of greater implausibility. This necessarily involves an attitude, towards either a person or an institution, which is irreverent, or essentially negative. This attitude is in practice a statement of political opposition, because it indicates an alternative wish or desire, and a refusal to accept. 'To mark something with the indelible seal of ridicule is intrinsically to indicate the will to oppose it – even though it may be a very short-lived act of will'.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, however, Palmer points to the ambiguity inherent in the comic situation which is created because the implausibility involved in a comic moment disarms criticism. Consequently, when implausibility is attributed to a person or institution, it becomes difficult to believe in an *intrinsic* connection between the two (although we accept that there is a connection on some level). Shaeffer describes this situation in terms of congruity and incongruity:

With incongruity we see two things which do not belong together, yet which we accept at least in this case as going together in some way. That is, when we notice something as incongruous, we also simultaneously understand it to be in some minor way congruous.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Jerry Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 153.

<sup>84</sup> Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd*, p. 199.

<sup>85</sup> N. Shaeffer, *The Art of Laughter* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 9.

Incongruity therefore creates a distance between the object and the implied audience, in a manner not dissimilar to the literary estrangement undertaken by Shklovsky. At the same time, however, the comedy resulting from the incongruity attaches itself to the object of the incongruity because we understand that in some way there is a connection between the object and the ridiculousness of the situation.

According to Palmer, it is the ambiguity created by implausibility which makes both mockery and self-mockery possible, enabling Aziz to ridicule the politico-legal system, and at the same time to laugh self-deprecatingly at the predicaments in which he finds himself.<sup>86</sup> Textual references will shortly illuminate the process, which Palmer describes thus:

[...] the essential point about the logic of the absurd is that its insistence upon the relationship between plausibility and implausibility necessarily involves placing the comic moment in a specifiable relationship with a narrative which has criteria of plausibility, and yet at the same time uses the element of implausibility, which also derives from the same narrative structure, to show how the enunciative mechanism emerges within the flow of the narrative.<sup>87</sup>

Van Cauwelaert exploits the logic of the absurd to ridicule the official system by placing his protagonist in incongruous situations. Humour therefore derives from the fundamental narrative structure of the text, and is used both to make political points and, through the self-mockery of the protagonist, to create a text which is comic rather than simply satirical.

## Humour and identification

Before passing to examples of this comic process in operation, it is important to consider the relationship which van Cauwelaert establishes between his protagonist, the object of his ridicule, and the reader. In his essay 'Humour', Freud

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<sup>86</sup> Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd*, p. 203.

<sup>87</sup> Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd*, p. 147.

distinguishes between jokes and humour on the basis of the roles involved.<sup>88</sup> In a general comic moment he identifies three possible roles: the narrator, the recipient, and the butt of the joke (the recipient may also serve as the butt). In what Freud calls 'cynical humour', the butt is commonly an institution or a value. As the narrator of *Un Aller simple*, Aziz is the primary narrator of jokes, while the recipient varies; on many occasions, however, the recipient includes the reader. As Palmer says, this is important to the efficacy of comedy, of which he says 'the bare essential is the production of subject positions for the speaker and the audience – which involve a kind of commitment – and the production of a position for the butt'.<sup>89</sup> His reference to a commitment on the part of the reader is reminiscent of Attridge's claim of an ethical dimension to the act of committed literary reading, and suggests that even the event of comedy requires an engaged response from the audience-reader.

In contrast to the comic, humour includes no butt: Freud refers to the example of a man being taken on a Monday morning to the gallows who comments 'Well, the week's beginning nicely'.<sup>90</sup> As I shall argue, *Un Aller simple* contains comic moments, in which the butt of the joke is identifiable as the French immigration system, or its political discourse on immigration. Moreover, Aziz also is allowed instances of humour, in which he asserts himself against the injustices which he is experiencing. This endows him with a certain dignity; as Freud says:

Like jokes and the comic, humour has something liberating about it; but it also has something of grandeur and elevation, which is lacking in the other two ways of obtaining pleasure from intellectual activity [...] Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious.<sup>91</sup>

No such dignity is allowed to Idriss and Amar; instead, the comic moments which occur in *La Goutte d'or* (such as the immigrants' first encounter with television) often occur at the immigrants' expense. In addition, unlike Amar, Aziz demonstrates a lack of aggression which is key in engaging the reader's sympathy. In the face of injustice and threatened with deportation he responds with self-deprecation, enabling

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<sup>88</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Humour', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth, 1961), XXI, pp. 161-66.

<sup>89</sup> Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd*, p. 175.

<sup>90</sup> Freud, 'Humour', p. 161.

<sup>91</sup> Freud, 'Humour', pp. 162-3.

the reader to identify with his position, rather than being repelled or feeling awkward at the strength of his responses. In contrast, Amar's speech to the jury, although it is never delivered, bristles with righteous indignation which alienates the reader (as part of the society under attack) even as we acknowledge the justice of his position. Humour, then, is one of the principal ways in which van Cauwelaert creates distance between the reader and the target of his satire, encouraging identification with the dignity of his protagonist, whilst introducing ambiguity into the text through moments of comedy. This contrasts with the technique of Tournier and Hocquenghem, who critique French society by distancing it through the eyes of a colonial figure who is positioned as inalienably Other.

The use of humour is demonstrated in Aziz's response to the news that he is to be deported. Van Cauwelaert underscores the ridiculousness of the situation by placing the initial explanation of government policy in the mouth of Aziz's corrupt police friend, Pignol, a character who is well aware that Aziz is not an immigrant but who is not prepared to intervene. As the explanation is given, Aziz's quizzical response exposes the illogical thinking of the government policy:

Et il m'a expliqué en gros que pour lutter contre le racisme en France, il fallait renvoyer les immigrants chez eux. J'ai continué à me taire, mais ça me paraissait bizarre de lutter contre une idée en la mettant en pratique.<sup>92</sup>

His reaction is honest, and the reader is able to acknowledge the justice of it because of his restraint in continuing to keep quiet, rather than aggressively arguing his case. Because Aziz's honesty and humour about his life engage the reader early in the novel, we are sympathetic to his plight and inclined to identify with his situation. The more damning analysis of the reasons for the government decision is left to the policeman, Pignol. Having decided effectively to abandon his friend, Pignol suffers from feelings of guilt which lead him to sporadic attacks on official policy, but the effect of his aggression is to render him a less than sympathetic character without any of Aziz's humour, despite the fact that his anger is motivated by a certain degree of support for his friend.

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<sup>92</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, p. 26.

Ils savent plus quoi faire entre le chômage et les sondages, alors ils renvoient un Arabe chez lui, et comme par hasard ils en prennent un qui a plus l'air d'un Corse que d'un Arabe, comme ça c'est moins raciste!<sup>93</sup>

Ironically, it appears that the Frenchness of Aziz's appearance is responsible for his selection. Like Tournier and Hocquenghem, van Cauwelaert here identifies and attacks the part played by image in negotiating and packaging North African identity. The government must be seen to act decisively against the perceived problem of immigration. This imperative offer the opportunity for a comic moment, as the government attaché, Jean-Pierre, outlines the official line:

'[...] le gouvernement inaugure une procédure qui non seulement s'inscrit dans un cadre de dignité, mais aspire à être efficace au plan du résultat, car le but en soi [...] c'est de vous montrer, avec toute l'aide nécessaire, que c'est *votre* pays maintenant qui a besoin de vous, car le seul moyen de stopper le flux migratoire en provenance du Maghreb est de vous construire un avenir *chez vous*, par une vraie politique d'incitation au développement, tant sur le plan industriel que sur le plan des ressources humaines, et...'

Il s'est arrêté soudain, comme s'il tombait en panne. [...]

'Et samedi l'émission "Marseille, ville arabe" a fait trente pour cent de parts de marché, alors c'est ici qu'on lance l'opération!' m'a-t-il jeté d'une voix agressive, comme si c'était de ma faute. 'Je n'ai même pas eu le temps de lire votre dossier ! Je ne sais même pas dans quelle branche vous êtes !'

'Les autoradios', j'ai dit malgré moi.<sup>94</sup>

Jean-Pierre's long explanation of government policy, with its emphasis on the benefit to the repatriated immigration, contains a layer of irony since the reader is aware that its stress on returning Aziz to his home country is misplaced. However, in comic terms, it operates as a 'straight' example of government *langue de bois*, with a comic reversal which only occurs after Jean-Pierre pauses to reveal the real motivation for the operation: the policy is driven by media ratings. Given what has gone before, this change in subject is incongruous, yet we are also encouraged to see an element of plausibility, and therefore comedy, in it. The juxtaposition of registers of language is reminiscent of Bakhtin's dialogism, where comedy is created through the disruption

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<sup>93</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>94</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, pp. 32-3 (emphasis in original).

of genre categories. The result is the elimination of reverence: 'Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world'.<sup>95</sup>

However, Jean-Pierre's change of linguistic register undermines any pretension of justice (even allowing for a case of mistaken identity). Aziz's situation ceases to be considered on its merits; instead he has become a media story, a vehicle for illustrating government policy where facts are less important than appearance. This is a serious point, and could potentially change the comic tone were it not for Aziz's response, which is out before he is able to stop himself. He says he is a car radio specialist, and Jean-Pierre immediately identifies a possible source of employment, in the Renault factory in Casablanca. The reader, however, knows that Aziz is a specialist in stealing car radios, an acceptable profession amongst his gypsy family, and one which comically demonstrates the lack of communication between him and Jean-Pierre. The butts of the joke are therefore two-fold: the government policy is ridiculed, whilst we are encouraged to laugh at the lack of understanding between Aziz and Jean-Pierre.

Caught up in the government media machine, Aziz is expected to play a role in order for his case to be packaged for consumption by the French public. However, rather than emphasising the destructive potential of the image-machine, as Tournier does with Idriss, van Cauwelaert relies on humour and ridicule to undermine the solemnity of the position in which Aziz finds himself. He achieves this by mobilising the discrepancy between the twin discourses of government and the media. The weight of Jean-Pierre's official explanations of the process of repatriation, which immediately precede this incident, are juxtaposed with the instructions from the photographer from *Match* magazine that Aziz pose suitably for the camera:

Le photographe m'a demandé de regarder l'objectif et pas l'attaché, et de sourire, moi aussi.

'Mais pas trop.'

J'ai diminué mon sourire.

'Un peu quand même, mais un sourire étonné, si tu peux.'

J'ai pris l'air étonné, et je n'ai pas eu beaucoup de mal.

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<sup>95</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 23.



'Pas trop étonné quand même, mais un peu plus souriant. Humain, quoi. Avec un poil d'inquiétude, parce que quand même. Voilà! Hop, tu bouges plus! Impec, ça – non, pas les dents, voilà... Si, tiens, reste avec la main comme ça, c'est bon, c'est naturel.'<sup>96</sup>

The artificiality of the process dehumanises and objectifies Aziz, even as he is presented as the 'natural, human' face of the illegal immigrant for public consumption, but it is subverted because Aziz and the reader are aware of the ridiculousness of having a deportee pose like a celebrity for a photo opportunity. The exaggeration of the photographer's instructions adds to the comedy of the episode, which is both accentuated and undermined when the article is superseded by events deemed more newsworthy: ultimately it fails to appear in the magazine.

Humour in *Un Aller simple* therefore serves primarily to critique French politics of immigration, by exposing the incongruity of situations created by official policy. By his use of humour, van Cauwelaert succeeds in distancing the reader from certain aspects of French politics, in a similar manner to the device of estranging advocated by Shklovsky, through which Tournier and Hocquenghem critique other aspects of French society. Furthermore, by exploiting the opportunity occasioned by Aziz's uncertain origins, van Cauwelaert ensures that the comedy of Aziz's situation does not interrupt the narrative but rather makes a particular contribution to it, acting as a tool to introduce ambiguity and otherness into the text, rather as Tournier and Hocquenghem used the immigrant-as-cipher to introduce otherness. At the same time, by allowing Aziz a self-deprecating attitude, van Cauwelaert ensures that the reader's sympathies remain with his narrator. His use of humour creates a lighter emotional tone than might be expected when dealing with serious and emotive issues, and this allows him the space to explore other issues, such as the nature of identity and otherness which exist in the text, in a more serious manner. Van Cauwelaert takes and develops these instances of literary otherness, and uses them to demonstrate that imaginative writing and story-telling have the power to create new realities, with the potential to transform situations.

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<sup>96</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, pp. 33-4.

## Storytelling as discourse: new versions of reality

Although Aziz is named and fixed as a visually-acceptable Other by the French authorities, and is subjected to the force of the law as it pertains to North African subjects, van Cauwelaert successfully avoids using his officially 'Arab' character merely as a tool to criticise the system which expulses him. He achieves this in part by focusing on how discourses can construct credible new versions of reality. Aziz falls foul of the official discourse around his origins, but his uncertain past has led him to seek solace in the stories contained in the book *Légendes du monde*, given to him by his teacher, M. Giraudy. These tales become an increasingly significant part of his life: 'Et peu à peu, je crois, le vieux livre rouge et or, tout corné, tout effiloché d'avoir été si lu, devenait mon vrai pays, mon pays d'origine'.<sup>97</sup> It is one of these stories which provides him with an answer to Jean-Pierre's question, 'Qu'est-ce que c'est, Irghiz?'<sup>98</sup> In a manner reminiscent of Le Clézio's exotic 'hommes bleus', Irghiz becomes a secret valley, peopled by the 'hommes gris' of whom Aziz is the first ever to leave.

Listening with eyes like saucers, Jean-Pierre is only too willing to believe him, and the stories which back in Marseilles were a welcome diversion from Aziz's lack of a past now become the source of his history. His experiences have taught him that, as Kristin Swenson Musselman comments, 'what you are called determines to a large extent what other people will think of you', and he now begins to create for himself a new discourse of naming.<sup>99</sup> According to Mary Louise Pratt, 'the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery, and so habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis', and through Aziz's stories, van Cauwelaert explores the ways in which this apparent representative of the peripheries reinvents a new reality with which the metropolis engages.<sup>100</sup> As Attridge's work suggests, literature here provides the opportunity for alterity, both in the form of the 'Arab', and through the creativity of story-telling, to

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<sup>97</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, p. 30.

<sup>99</sup> Kristin Swenson Musselman, 'Notions of origin in Didier van Cauwelaert's *Un Aller simple*', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 5.3 (2003), 137-146 (p. 139).

<sup>100</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 6.

impact on, and even alter, the existing structures of French culture. Irghiz becomes Aziz's opportunity to move into an identity chosen and constructed for himself, and made real by the acceptance of those around him. 'Finalement, mon attaché était plus compétent qu'il ne le pensait. En moins d'une heure, il m'avait déjà réinséré: j'étais conteur arabe'.<sup>101</sup> The malleability of identity persists when, after Jean-Pierre's death in Morocco, Aziz undertakes to repatriate his body. In a carnivalesque reversal, he assumes a new role as 'convoyeur spécial du consulat français', in which he is able to discharge his duties unquestioned by immigration officials, and is welcomed by Jean-Pierre's family.

Close examination reveals the mirroring of the attaché who repatriates the immigrant, only to be repatriated himself in turn to be more than an incidental irony on the part of van Cauwelaert. Whilst initially Jean-Pierre and Aziz appear to be representatives of entirely different social spheres, as the text progresses it becomes clear that their situations have a great deal in common. Aziz's loss of his fiancée, Lila, and the intervention of her family which precipitates his deportation is, as Mireille Rosello has pointed out, no comment on the ethics of minority groups; it is paralleled by Jean-Pierre's loss of his wife Clementine, whose lover, Jean-Pierre's boss Loupiac, has used his authority to get him out of the way by sending him out of the country.<sup>102</sup> Hearing Jean-Pierre's story, Aziz is quick to make the connection: 'On était vraiment pareils, tous les deux, et dans la même situation'.<sup>103</sup> Jean-Pierre comes to the same realisation a moment later: 'Je suis comme vous, Aziz, dans une certaine mesure'.<sup>104</sup>

That their similarity goes beyond this initial coincidence is displayed through Jean-Pierre's enthusiasm for the story of Aziz's origins: as a failed writer, he is convinced that Aziz's story will provide him with the material necessary to write a successful novel and recover his own lost dreams. He recounts the history of his childhood in Lorraine, and how his relationship with his parents was crushed by his

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<sup>101</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, p. 52.

<sup>102</sup> Mireille Rosello, 'European Hospitality Without a Home: Gypsy Communities and Illegal Immigration in Van Cauwelaert's *Un Aller simple*', *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, 26.1 (2002), 172-193 (p. 185).

<sup>103</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, p. 46.

<sup>104</sup> van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple*, p. 47.

lack of success, and his inability to accept their dreary life as his own. As he does so, it becomes apparent that Uckange, his home town which died with the collapse of the steel industry, is as lost as is Irghiz; by leaving Lorraine, Jean-Pierre knows he has abandoned his roots, as surely as Aziz has in leaving Irghiz. By publishing a successful novel, Jean-Pierre hopes to be able to return to Lorraine in triumph. The novel, written from Aziz's point of view, turns out to be the one we are reading; to write it, Jean-Pierre has had to learn about and appropriate Aziz's origins but when it remains uncompleted at his death, Aziz undertakes to finish it.

By the conclusion of the bi-authored novel, the figures of Aziz and Jean-Pierre have become almost indistinguishable. In one last, surreal parallel, Jean-Pierre's body disappears with the Citroën in which Aziz has transported him to his parents' home, an unexplained incident which mirrors the arrival of Aziz in the Citroën Ami 6. Having restored Jean-Pierre's character in the eyes of his parents through one last story about his kidnapping and ransom, Aziz is welcomed into the family, and sets about finishing the novel in Jean-Pierre's childhood room.

The endless repetition of the shared parallels and eventual merging of Jean-Pierre and Aziz which structures the novel has been referred to by Rosello as a principle of substitution:

This novel addresses the direct consequences of immigration policies on a character who is not an immigrant but who is not a national either, a character who could be any one of us, because no one knows who he really is, because he symbolizes the principle of substitution, of interchangeability (that is, as Derrida would say, the principle of the hostage).<sup>105</sup>

The principle of substitution underpins the power of van Cauwelaert's text. By demonstrating that the characteristics of homelessness and rootlessness are not confined to (illegal) immigrants but can be experienced equally by government attachés, van Cauwelaert succeeds in critiquing the government policies which define immigrants as other and subject them to racist treatment, while also deconstructing the category of otherness by relocating it both in the heart of Lorraine, and, as

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<sup>105</sup> Rosello, 'European Hospitality Without a Home', p. 179.

Rosello says, in a character who could be any one of us, because no one knows who he really is.

Through analysis of the three novels working within the tradition of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, it becomes evident that the technique of using difference to denaturalise 'our' own culture serves only to reinforce imperialist divisions when it concerns the historically-specific and over-determined figures of immigrants from former colonies. The conclusion of Chapter One, that colonial attitudes continue to exert a disproportionate influence, is reinforced by the experience of the 'Arab' characters in each of the three texts. Of the three protagonists, only Aziz succeeds in moving beyond the otherness of the immigrant stereotype in the eyes of the other French characters.<sup>106</sup> Through the power of storytelling, he is able to reshape French culture, so that it accommodates him without threatening to absorb his 'difference', thereby negotiating a new relationship of respect between himself and French society. This is arguably the strongest example thus far of Attridge's notion of the alterity of literature at work in influencing and altering the existing structures of thought on which French society is based.

While the Formalist technique of the literary enstrangement of experience indeed proves to be a powerful tool in causing the reader to look anew at the process of perception, it is important to guard against the tendency to reify the estranged subject or culture, and to avoid the conflation of discourse and actual practice. However, what emerges clearly is not only the way in which, as Shklovsky argues, the senses function as a significant aspect of the phenomenology of literature, but their importance in representing the experience of encountering another culture. Sense-impressions, and our subsequent interpretation of these, therefore operate as a major site of cultural experience. However, the analysis of the texts suggests that in the task of critiquing society, humour may be the more powerful weapon in exposing the weaknesses and inconsistencies of the dominant systems. Creating distance in an equally self-conscious manner between the plausible and implausible, humour

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<sup>106</sup> While the conclusion of *L'Amour en relief* can be read as Amar's attainment of a Deleuzian 'devenir imperceptible', this is not a view shared by the other, uncomprehending characters, for whom he remains a fascinating representative of difference, albeit a difference manifested in many forms.

engages in a similar task to literary enstranging, but because it distances in order to expose and ridicule, it may ultimately be more effective against dominant systems whose continual operations reduce them to invisibility, and blind us to their effects.

## Chapter Three The Stranger Within

In the chapters so far, we have seen how France's view of its Others has operated through two directional strands present within literature. The first tradition, that of exotic literature, historically focused on outward movements of exploration from the Centre to the Periphery, only to be reversed in more recent times by the migration of workers and their families to the Centre. The second tradition, stretching back to Montesquieu, was based on the inward movements of foreigners to the Centre, using them as a device to create the distance necessary for critique of French society. However, literary analysis of contemporary texts working within these traditions has indicated that the binary opposition on which both strands depend is seriously flawed. This is in part due to contemporary social realities, where the global movement of goods and persons has blurred national and cultural boundaries, making them porous and prone to seepage.

Consequently, Shérázade demonstrates that her otherness within French society is not borne simply of being Arab, but is created through the fusion of cultural influences and the harnessing of residual colonial attitudes which then become a source for new creative expression. Similarly, the binary between Self and Other established by Tournier and Hocquenghem is shown to be sterile, for despite the fact that Amar's identity takes myriad forms, he ultimately remains fixed as Other, albeit with multiple facets and from a variety of angles. In contrast, van Cauwelaert demonstrates the arbitrary nature of applying such a binary to an individual subject, and shows that it is simply chance that sees each of us assigned to the tyranny of one term in the opposition.

Both of the literary traditions within which the first two chapters function are based on a generic geographical opposition between Self and Other. That is to say that, while metropolitan France consistently occupies the 'Self' term, the Other has historically been represented by a range of far-off lands, whether Flaubert's Egypt in the case of the exotic, or Persia in the case of Montesquieu. While contemporary research into Francophone literature has identified a number of regions which

operate as France's Other, from the Antilles and islands in the Indian Ocean, to Sub-Saharan Africa and Québec, this thesis argues that in the postcolonial era, North Africa, and specifically, Algeria, have a singular relationship with metropolitan France. This is arguably one of the reasons why each of the contemporary writers featured in the first two chapters choose North African characters, rather than individuals from other former colonies, to figure their representations of today's French otherness.

Part Two of this study takes up and explores the alleged specificities of the Franco-Algerian relationship. Outlined in the Introduction, the most prominent aspect is the unique status which Algeria held as an integral part of France. Algeria, and, to a much lesser extent, Algerians, were subject to a Republican policy of assimilation which sought to absorb the otherness of Algeria into the sameness of the Hexagon. The failure of this policy was highlighted by the bloody war of independence, which in 1962 destroyed the illusion that Algerian 'difference' could be contained within French 'sameness', and exposed Algeria as a site of failure of French policy. This chapter looks at how the relationship between sameness and difference is now negotiated within the borders of the Hexagon, through the significant sector of the French population which is of Algerian descent. It will also touch on other aspects of the Franco-Algerian relationship, such as the residual effects of the war of independence, which will be developed in greater depth in the final two chapters.

As *Shérazade* showed, notions of a unified French Republican identity have been challenged by the emergence of 'beur' and *banlieue* culture, which draws on French and Algerian cultural expressions and combines these with American and other influences to produce a distinctive urban community which does not correspond either to French or Algerian categories. However, the very success of 'beur' culture in achieving mainstream recognition has had the effect of pushing it towards becoming another established, even fixed, identity category: that is, to the extent that any community can be said to be unified, it has developed a recognised identity. Because of this, and as much research has already been conducted on the specificities of the 'beur' experience, this chapter considers two autobiographically-inspired novels about more truly interstitial figures, which confront and demolish



fixed identity categories. Both Daniel Prévost's *Le Passé sous silence* (1998) and Nina Bouaraoui's *Garçon manqué* (2000) are narrated in the first person by a character who is the child of a French mother and an Algerian father, a situation which parallels that of the author. Inevitably this poses complex questions of identification, and the chapter examines the ways in which they are represented as figures within society. On one level it considers their reactions to their own complex identity, and on another it looks at the conflict which they experience in their relationship with a society which imposes on them the status of 'foreigner'. The Self-Other relationship under consideration here is therefore an internal one; the relationship between France's body politic and its constituent parts or individuals. The chapter also examines the strategies which they employ in order to come to terms with their interstitial position, and considers the central place of writing and literature within this.

In *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, Julia Kristeva seeks to theorise the position of the foreigner, and asks why it is that the foreigner within the national borders creates this degree of anxiety.<sup>1</sup> In her overview of the foreigner in the Western tradition, she takes a more optimistic view of our relation to the 'neighbour' than that posited by Freud, Lacan, or more latterly, Žižek, arguing that through psychoanalysis we can become aware of and reconciled to our own strangeness, which inhabits us through our unconscious. Having recognised and embraced the strangeness within ourselves, Kristeva believes that we can acknowledge that in some sense we are all foreigners. Psychoanalysis therefore enables us to embark on a journey towards what she calls 'une éthique du respect pour l'inconciliable'.<sup>2</sup> I take this work as my starting point, since it is the 'foreignness' within the Franco-Algerian characters which forces them to interrogate their own personal identity, and which is responsible for the reactions which they experience at the hands of the wider French society. However, the situation is problematised since these characters are not foreign *per se*. The chapter therefore goes on to consider the application of Kristeva's work on the abject to the individual's relationship with the self, the mother, and the motherland. I will show that although Kristeva has theorised this area more fully than perhaps any other

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<sup>1</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*.

<sup>2</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 269.

writer, her approach has limitations, which can be addressed by drawing on the work of other theorists such as Deleuze. Finally, I will consider the way in which literary writing operates as a strategy towards attaining Kristeva's aim of a universal ethics of respect, and argue that it perhaps offers the best potential in coming to terms with the stranger within each of us.

## The uncanny

Central to Kristeva's argument is Freud's notion of the *Unheimlich*. Although the presence of the foreigner is accompanied by feelings of disturbing strangeness and dread, in his essay, 'The "Uncanny"', Freud explains that this is not, as might be expected, because of the threat posed by the presence of fundamental difference. Instead, the term has its roots in the term '*Heimlich*' [homely], as Freud makes clear: '[T]he anxiety can be shown to come from something repressed which recurs [...] this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression'.<sup>3</sup> Whereas Freud's initial conception of the uncanny was as the return of the repressed within the individual psyche, Kristeva ascribes it here to the reaction of a collective when faced with the stranger within the national borders, thereby drawing parallels between the individual and the wider collective.<sup>4</sup>

Initially Kristeva's choice of this term to describe the reaction to the stranger's presence seems unexpected. Far from being familiar, surely the very essence of a stranger is that we do not know them? And yet, as Sara Ahmed suggests, an economy of recognition operates around our relationship to the stranger: the stranger is the one whom we have always already encountered, so that 'we recognise

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<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', in *Collected Papers*, ed. by Joan Rivière, 5 vols (London: Hogarth, 1950), IV, pp. 368-407 (p. 394).

<sup>4</sup> This extrapolation from individual to collective seems quite apposite. Freud refers to the way in which 'an unheimliches house' is rendered by many languages as 'a haunted house' (Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 395), and the notion of haunting is one which, in relation to France's Algerian past, recurs repeatedly in this research. By their presence in France, the descendants of 'les Français musulmans' are reminders of a forgotten, even repressed, bloody and humiliating period of French history.

somebody *as a stranger*, rather than simply failing to recognise them'.<sup>5</sup> This recognition appears to operate both as a means of maintaining distance between Self and Other, and of neutralising the threat that they might pose by placing them in a familiar, 'known' category. Most commonly this is a temporary resolution, acceptable in the absence of a more permanent solution which, as Kristeva says, has historically taken the form either of the destruction of the foreigner, or of his assimilation 'à l'alliance des "sages", des "justes" ou des "naturels"'.<sup>6</sup> The foreigner is perceived as a threat, not only to the individual citizen, but to the integrity and identity of the body politic; hence the need for his foreign identity to be neutralised.

However, it is important to clarify the reaction which Kristeva is exploring here, for as Noëlle McAfee points out, she is not discussing xenophobia, that is to say, fear of foreigners or even of foreignness, as much as a *dread* of foreignness.<sup>7</sup> Unlike fear, anxiety provoked by the foreigner is indeterminate; it has no object. As Kristeva says, 'Ce visage si *autre* porte la marque d'un seuil franchi qui s'imprime irrémédiablement dans un apaisement ou une inquiétude. Qu'elle soit troublée ou joyeuse, l'expression de l'étranger signale qu'il est "en outre"'.<sup>8</sup> The suggestion that the foreigner provokes a state of dread unrelated to her individual characteristics provides some explanation for the violence of the reaction which is often directed towards the foreigner, the exile or the immigrant. This reaction can seem disproportionate given the infinitely greater violence which the 'host' society is capable of directing towards the foreigner, indicating that some unconscious drive is at work.

Kristeva's description of the foreigner as 'en outre' is significant for attempts to understand the source of this 'dread'. It returns to questions about the constitution of the national community, which Anderson has argued is based on an imagined, shared identification.<sup>9</sup> But while Anderson focuses on the features of nationalism

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<sup>5</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 21 (emphasis in original).

<sup>6</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Noëlle McAfee, 'Abject Strangers: Towards an Ethics of Respect', in *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, ed. by Kelly Oliver (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 116-34 (p. 122).

<sup>8</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 12 (emphasis in original).

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

which unite individuals, Kristeva is interested in what happens when the unity of the nation-state breaks down, particularly where the presence of the foreigner creates a challenge to that national unity. Slavoj Žižek touches on similar issues when he argues that the element which holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification, for

the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship towards a Thing, towards Enjoyment incarnated. This relationship toward the Thing, structured by means of fantasies, is what is at stake when we speak of the menace to our 'way of life' presented by the Other.<sup>10</sup>

The foreigner therefore embodies the excess of the Thing, that which escapes and which creates the dread of 'the theft of enjoyment', as Žižek refers to it:

We always impute to the 'other' an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the 'other' is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the 'excess' that pertains to this way; the smell of 'their' food, 'their' noisy songs and dances, 'their' strange manners, 'their' attitude to work [...] The Lacanian thesis that enjoyment is ultimately always enjoyment of the Other, i.e., enjoyment supposed, imputed to the Other, and that, conversely, the hatred of the Other's enjoyment is always the hatred of one's own enjoyment, is perfectly exemplified by this logic of the 'theft of enjoyment'. What are fantasies about the Other's special, excessive enjoyment – about the black's superior sexual potency and appetite, about the Jew's or Japanese's special relationship to money and work – if not precisely *so many ways, for us, to organize our own enjoyment?* [...] *The hatred of the Other is the hatred of our own excess of enjoyment.*<sup>11</sup>

The foreigner's difference is therefore a representation of excess which has been projected out of the national Thing, but which may return to threaten the boundaries which constitute identity in the form of the nation's enjoyment. The mechanism of this return of the repressed is similar to the functioning of the uncanny, albeit on a more collective scale, as Ewa Ziarek argues: 'Perpetually threatened by the irruption

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<sup>10</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, p. 203; p. 206 (emphasis in original).

of the irreducible difference within the imagined communal unity, the national bond is inseparable from the negativity of the uncanny'.<sup>12</sup>

### Limitations of Kristeva's approach

However, Kristeva's use of the uncanny becomes problematic as she moves from consideration of personal identity to its public and political equivalents. *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* traces a path through Western culture, exploring representations of the stranger from the ancient Greeks and the Old Testament Jews, through early Christian thought to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and finally the contemporary period. The final section of her first chapter considers the question 'Why France?' and seeks to outline the specificities of the foreigner's experience there. Since Kristeva herself has lived as a foreigner in the Hexagon, she would appear to be on firm ground in her contention that 'Nulle part on n'est *plus* étranger qu'en France. [...] Et pourtant, nulle part on n'est *mieux* étranger qu'en France'.<sup>13</sup> And yet it is difficult to ignore the suspicion that the reception accorded to the young Bulgarian linguist arriving to take up a Sorbonne scholarship was somewhat different from that experienced by Algerian immigrant workers also arriving in Paris in 1966. The suspicion increases as she conflates the experiences of different groups of foreigners: 'Qu'il soit balayeur maghrébin rivé à son balai ou princesse asiatique écrivant ses mémoires dans une langue d'emprunt, dès que les étrangers ont une action ou une passion, ils s'enracinent'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in her discussion of Camus's *L'Étranger*, she posits Meursault as the universal foreigner – 'il est un étranger typique [...] La bizarrerie de cette condition étrangère [...] n'est pourtant pas étrangère aux étrangers ordinaires'.<sup>15</sup> Meursault is alienated from his mother and from his motherland of France, indeed from all those around him and from himself, yet Kristeva's assertion that 'nous sommes tous des Meursault' ignores the historical

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<sup>12</sup> Ewa Ziarek, 'The Uncanny Style of Kristeva's Critique of Nationalism', *Postmodern Culture*, 5.2 (1995) <[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v005/5.2ziarek.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v005/5.2ziarek.html)> [accessed 15 August 2006] (para. 16 of 28).

<sup>13</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, pp. 57-9 (emphasis in original).

<sup>14</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 41; p. 45.

specificities of his location as a *pied noir* in Algeria, and the significance of the colonial power play at work in a scenario which leads to him shooting an Arab. Kristeva's assertion that the shooting, 'Sur des ombres, françaises ou maghrébines, peu importe'<sup>16</sup> may be correct from Meursault's point of view, sunk in the midst of his personal estrangement and anguish, but it can hardly be said to matter little from a historico-political perspective.

The difficulties inherent in theorising the position of the foreigner are evident again when we consider that the 'foreigner' that provokes such violent reaction in France is not one which conforms to the definition given by Kristeva: 'Avec la constitution des États-nations, nous en arrivons à la seule définition moderne acceptable et claire de l'étrangeté: l'étranger est celui qui n'appartient pas à l'État où nous sommes, celui qui n'a pas la même nationalité'.<sup>17</sup> Although the 'beur' community is not the main concern of this chapter, it is worth pausing to consider the implications for it of Kristeva's theory, since the individual of mixed Franco-Algerian origin encounters many of the same racist reactions. The 'beur' generation and their children problematize the relationship between citizen and foreigner, for despite bearing French citizenship, they are consistently rejected because they embody a recognizable foreignness. Moreover, they are the embodiment of the arbitrary nature of the citizenship which is Kristeva's determiner, given Algeria's historical status as integral part of France.<sup>18</sup> Although historically denied full French citizenship, many workers from Algeria's indigenous population were encouraged to move to metropolitan France after World War II. The provisional nature of their French status was demonstrated in 1962 when the advent of Algerian independence brought about the category reversal from *Français musulmans* resident in the Hexagon, to foreign *Algériens*. The history of Algeria means that its people, who have been both 'French' and 'foreign', provoke a specific reaction which is different from that of people of other nationalities in France. This is in part due to the bloody

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<sup>16</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>17</sup> Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida have drawn attention to their own experiences of the provisional nature of French citizenship. Algerian Jews were given French citizenship under the terms of the 1870 *décret Crémieux*, only to be stripped of their status in 1940. We will return to the autobiographical writings of Cixous and Derrida in Chapter Five. For more details, see Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous: Photos de racines* (Paris: des femmes, 1994); Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996).

part played by Algeria in France's history, and in part because those people who have been in turn French, and then foreign, now have children who are French. The unwillingness to accept what is considered to be foreign, despite the legal decision that it is French, means that 'beurs' and their descendants pose a complex challenge to French identity. When she speaks of the foreigner 'whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify', Kristeva might well be referencing the reactions of many white French to their fellow citizens. These ambivalent emotions of fascination and repulsion in this passage are also reminiscent of the historical Orientalist attitudes analysed in Chapter One:

Étrange, en effet, la rencontre avec l'autre [...] Étrange aussi, cette expérience de l'abîme entre moi et l'autre qui me choque – je ne le perçois même pas, il m'annihile peut-être parce que je le nie. Face à l'étranger que je refuse et auquel je m'identifie à la fois, je perds mes limites, je n'ai plus de contenant, les souvenirs des expériences où l'on m'avait laissée tomber me submergent, je perds contenance. Je me sens 'perdue', 'vague', 'brumeuse'.<sup>19</sup>

The threat posed by the foreigner to those borders which constitute identity is commonly seen in terms of national boundaries. However, here Kristeva figures the challenge posed by the foreigner in individual terms, where the boundaries which become blurred are those which maintain individual identity. In doing so, she develops the argument which surrounds the figure of the foreigner, and which will prove fundamental to an understanding of the reactions provoked by the individual of mixed Franco-Algerian parentage, who forms the focus of this chapter.

## The abject

To understand the implications of the foreigner's challenge to individual identity, it may be helpful to consider Kristeva's earlier work in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*.<sup>20</sup> In her work on the abject, Kristeva considers the process by which the self is constituted by differentiating itself from the mother's body. This takes place

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<sup>19</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 276.

<sup>20</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

before Lacan's mirror stage when, in order to be weaned, the child comes to find the mother's body both fascinating and horrifying. As the first stage in subject formation, the mother's body is not yet an object for the child but, as an abject, it is something opposed to the child's 'je'.<sup>21</sup> This first experience of separation, then, involves the abjection of self: '[j]e m'expulse, je me crache, je m'abjecte dans le même mouvement par lequel "je" prétends me poser'.<sup>22</sup> The abject is therefore intimately linked to the maternal, and to the process of identity formation and maintenance. However, while this occurs on an individual level, Kristeva makes it clear that this process can be extended on a collective level.

The abject shares certain characteristics with the uncanny, in that it is repressed only to recur periodically when triggered by some external stimulus. Kristeva describes the effect of its return in terms similar to that of the uncanny: 'Surgissement massif et abrupt d'une étrangeté qui, si elle a pu m'être familière dans une vie opaque et oubliée, me harcèle maintenant comme radicalement séparée, répugnante'.<sup>23</sup> It is also notable that Freud connects the *Unheimlich* to the maternal in the form of the uncanny strangeness experienced by men faced with the female genitals; according to Freud, this is because 'this *unheimlich* place [...] is the entrance to the former *heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning'.<sup>24</sup>

However, in defining the abject Kristeva is clear that the two terms cannot be conflated: 'Essentiellement différente de "l'inquiétante étrangeté", plus violente aussi, l'abjection se construit de ne pas reconnaître ses proches: rien ne lui est familier, pas même une ombre de souvenirs'.<sup>25</sup> As we shall see, the situation which arises when individuals find themselves unable to 'reconnaître ses proches', which Kristeva refers to as abjection, is exactly that endured by individuals of mixed parentage, and by their families. Eligible for dual nationality, they are far from the foreigners whom Kristeva has in mind when she writes and yet, as the texts in this

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<sup>21</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 11 (emphasis in original).

<sup>23</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', pp. 398-99.

<sup>25</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 13.



chapter will show, they struggle with the boundaries which constitute identity on both an individual and collective basis.

A number of other researchers have traced the relation between Kristeva's work on the uncanny in relation to the foreigner, and her work on abjection, as Norma Claire Moruzzi points out:

In *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva discusses the privately embodied subject's relation with its own borders and excess. The subject abjects itself, and discovers itself in its own abjection; historically, the nation-state establishes itself through the convulsions of a body politic which rejects those parts of itself, defined as other or excess, whose rejected alterity then engenders the consolidation of a national identity.<sup>26</sup>

The positing of a relationship between the foreigner and the abjection enables us to look at the effects of abjection on the individual who embodies the excess of the (Algerian) foreigner, but within the citizenship of the (French) nation. It draws on Kristeva's notion of the foreigner as one who, as she says, has lost his mother, for 'Au plus loin que remonte sa mémoire, elle est délicieusement meurtrie: incompris d'une mère aimée et cependant distraite, discrète ou préoccupée, l'exilé est étranger à sa mère'.<sup>27</sup> This loss, or separation, I argue, comes about because on one level the individual has suffered the loss of mother, of motherland, and often of mother tongue, and so endures the consequences of abjection on a personal level. On another level, however, the individual represents the excess and foreignness of Algeria within the society around him, a foreignness which provokes a reaction which is all the more violent because it represents the return of the repressed, the return of what was familiar because Algeria was once part of the same, before separation occurred. The individual therefore threatens the boundaries of national identity, and must endure the consequences of being abjected. He, the abject, is

ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte. [...] on comprend qu'il s'éprouve dans sa force maximale lorsque [...] le sujet trouve l'impossible en lui-

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<sup>26</sup> Norma Claire Moruzzi, 'National Objects: Julia Kristeva on the Process of Political Self-Identification', in *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, ed. by Kelly Oliver (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 135-49 (p. 143).

<sup>27</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 14.

même: lorsque'il trouve que l'impossible, c'est son *être* même, découvrant qu'il n'est autre qu'abject.<sup>28</sup>

Turning to the novels which form the focus of this chapter's investigation, we find that this passage is an uncannily accurate description of the narrator of Daniel Prévost's novel *Le Passé sous silence* (1998).<sup>29</sup> The novel is a first person narrative telling the story of Denis, a Parisian journalist and writer who discovers in his thirties that his father was not French but Algerian. In the face of his mother's silence, he struggles to find out more about this absent figure, who died when he was still young. The novel is clearly autobiographical, for Daniel Prévost is himself the son of an Algerian, but as an author he goes to great lengths to problematise the autobiographical element of his fiction. He prefaces his text with the assertion that 'Toute ressemblance avec des personnes existant ou ayant existé serait une pure coïncidence', but immediately undermines this by dedicating the novel 'Pour Na Djidda' who, we learn on page fourteen, is his old aunt in Algeria. On the same page we learn that the fictional narrator has written of his family experiences in a novel entitled *Saint-Denis-la-Révolte*, a book which seems to correspond to Prévost's earlier novel, published by Denoël in 1995 under the name *Le Pont de la Révolte*, and which deals with the same situation and characters as the present text, albeit with a differently named stepfather.<sup>30</sup> From this early point, it is clear that the reality represented in the book reflects and yet skews the author's life, in the way that the parallel universes of science fiction are famously similar to ours, and yet different in certain crucial aspects.

The novel opens with the presentation of what will become the narrative's pivotal moment: the receipt on Denis's fifty-sixth birthday of a postcard from his mother Louise, in which she accuses him of being 'l'issue d'une racine pourrie'.<sup>31</sup> The trigger for her venomous words, which haunt her son throughout the novel, is Denis's insistence on discovering the truth about his father, which has led him to contact members of his father's Algerian family, and to write a novel telling his story

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<sup>28</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 12, emphasis in original.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence* (Paris: Denoël, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Prévost, *Le Pont de la Révolte* (Paris: Denoël, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 13.

publicly. As a result of her rejection, Denis has to come to terms with the foreignness in his life on a number of levels. He has to come to terms with the discovery, in his mid-thirties, that he is not who he thought he was, or that at least, the Frenchness which provided his identity is spliced with a foreignness of which he knows nothing. In terms of his immediate social context, he has to deal with the rejection from his mother and her Norman family, who have always known and despised his origins. He must also forge a new place in society at large which can accommodate his new, more complex identity. It is in theorising these questions that Kristeva's work on the abject is useful although, as we shall see, it is perhaps less successful in offering any solution.

### The abject(ed) mother

Given that the autobiographical texts written by 'beur' authors frequently emphasise the inner turmoil caused by the difficulty in coming to terms with the conflict between different cultures, what is most immediately striking in the novel is the ease with which Denis adapts to the news of his mixed origins. Having grown up painfully conscious of the absence of his father, he eagerly embraces the information about his past. The fact that his origins are not French is welcomed almost as a father-substitute, as if the discovery of Algerian culture, new and different, provides some kind of compensation for the realisation that he will never be able to fully discover the lost father. The depth of his enthusiasm for this re-discovered fatherland is highlighted by his children, whose initial interest in their new homeland increasingly is put to the test.

Fascinatingly, Denis does not struggle with the complexities of being both French and Algerian (or Kabyle, as he prefers to see himself: there is a hint of a certain snobbishness, as if being Kabyle outranks being merely run-of-the-mill Algerian, in terms of tradition and heritage): instead, he styles himself as Kabyle whilst continuing to enjoy the status and lifestyle of a cosmopolitan Parisian

journalist.<sup>32</sup> He embraces certain aspects of Kabyle culture, eating in couscous restaurants, playing Algerian music and delighting in spending time with his Algerian family, none of which compromise his Parisian identity. This is not to denigrate his engagement with his Algerian roots, but to suggest that his transition to Kabyle identity was facilitated by the professional status and respect which he had already established by the time he discovered the details of his father. Had he grown up with this knowledge, and been obliged to integrate it into his identity from an early age, and in different material circumstances, his experience might have been closer to that of the conventional 'beur' autobiography.

Indeed, as the opening of the novel suggests, the biggest threat to Denis's self-identity comes from his mother. Louise Drancourt had a love affair with Mohand Aït-Salem when she was young, but with pressure from her disapproving and indeed racist family, she refused him access to the young son who resulted from their liaison. Since marrying Raymond, Denis's hated step-father, she had refused all references to the past and insisted that Raymond was Denis's only father. Her difficult relationship with Denis is caused by her repression of the past, a past which returns to trouble her each time she sees her son, and poisons her relationship with him.

In Kristevan terms, then, it becomes evident that Louise has sought to separate herself from the relationship with Mohand which, with the encouragement of her family, she has come to see as unsuitable and disgusting. Since it and the pregnancy threatened her identity as 'fille de bonne famille', she has repressed the memory of it. Denis, however, is the embodied evidence of the event, and his appearance, with its foreign element, functions as the abject for his mother, disrupting her carefully constructed version of reality. Had it not been for her son, Louise's attempts to bury the past might have been more successful; in the event it is her status as mother which is the source of her dread of the foreign. As Kristeva

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<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps a measure of the persistence of binary structures (colonizer/colonized; Self/Other) within French attitudes that the concept of *métissage* does not figure in either *Le Passé sous silence* or *Garçon manqué*. It is as if the influence of theoretical notions of hybridity, put forward by theorists such as Bhabha, has not been felt within society at large, where the need to effect a strict differentiation between French and Algerian identity remains compelling. If true, this would suggest a disconnect between discourse and practice similar to that identified around vision in Chapter Two.

maintains, 'La peur de la mère archaïque s'avère essentiellement être une peur de son pouvoir procréateur'.<sup>33</sup> In this context, her contention holds true, although on reading it we might not have anticipated that the fear would reside *within* the mother.

In the text Louise is fully implanted in a patriarchal discourse which sees sexual relations between French and Algerian in colonial terms, as a threat to established order.<sup>34</sup> Louise therefore experiences her son, the living reminder of this episode, and the recurrent threat to the order that she has constructed, in terms of the abject. The reminder of the uncertain border between the maternal body and the child, which is similar to the blurred border between French citizen and French subject, forces her to endlessly re-establish the separation without which her identity would collapse into the state of pre-subjectivity. As Kristeva, drawing on Mary Douglas, makes clear, the threat to order and identity often comes through liminal elements: vomit, shit, blood, decay, bodily matter.<sup>35</sup> It is notable that, although the experience of marginality and otherness is different from the sensory perception explored in the previous chapter, it is nonetheless an embodied experience. The body therefore begins to emerge as central to the literary experience of otherness. It is in these liminal terms that Louise conceives of her son, his father, and the whole Algerian people: as 'l'issue d'une racine pourrie', a phrase which she repeats and which opens and closes the novel (p. 13; p. 240; p. 241). As a result, she is constantly trying to exclude the threat that her son represents, and re-establish the threatened boundaries, presenting Raymond, the replacement father, as a 'racine propre' to be grafted in place. When this fails, she begins to effect a separation from the one she has abjected, going as far as to say to Denis's wife, Hanna: 'Je serai heureuse le jour où je ne verrai plus Denis. Je saurai qu'il va bien et ça me suffira!'.<sup>36</sup> Like the mother of the narrator of Marie Cardinal's novel, *Les Mots pour le dire* (1975), she goes as far as to tell her son that she regrets having given birth to him. Consequently, Denis feels the compulsion to return to a pure state of bodily matter before the

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<sup>33</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> How Louise's attitude evolved from love for Mohand to one of disgust and rejection not only of him but also of her son is unclear, and despite the narrator's attempts at imaginative reconstruction of their relationship it remains one of the ambiguities of the text. However there is no suggestion that the liaison between Denis's parents was anything other than consensual.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

<sup>36</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 160.

contamination despised by his mother took place. However, his view of the location of contamination is quite different from that of his mother: rather than seeing his 'foreignness' as being responsible, he considers Louise and his stepfather Raymond as the source:

Ils [Louise and Raymond] m'étaient deux corps étrangers comme sortis de moi-même, du pus, de la merde dont je devais absolument me défaire afin de me retrouver dans ma pureté originelle, c'est-à-dire avant le péché, la cueillette du fruit selon la Bible et le Coran, quand j'étais dans Adam Aït-Salem, le spermatozoïde, et Ève Drancourt, l'adorable ovule. Le sentiment selon lequel je serais pur sans eux.<sup>37</sup>

For Denis, as for Louise, the conflict of cultural identity is conceptualised in the material terms of abjection, as bodily fluids, pus and shit.

### The abjected stranger: filth and dirt

What emerges, therefore, is a situation in which Louise abjects her son because he represents a foreignness which her racist background despises, and an incident which she refuses to acknowledge. Consequently, her son has to deal with the consequences of being abjected. Treated as if contaminated by his own mother, the narrative is filled with words which demonstrate this feeling of being soiled: 'J'étais souillé' (p. 21); 'J'étais une seconde fois souillé' (p. 27). The experience of repeatedly being defined as foreign and disgusting leaves Denis struggling to preserve and disengage his sense of who he is. The materiality of his experience of abjection and the consequences for his identity, which result from the violence of the Franco-Algerian cultural encounter, bear similarities to the embodied characteristics of Amar's world in *L'Amour en relief*.

However, Denis's material experience of contamination has a specific source. As the passage above shows, his sense of being soiled comes from his mother, and so, abjected by her, he abjects in response. The lies and revulsion of his mother, to

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<sup>37</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 187.

whom he is linked by a history of maternal fluids, produce a recurrent attempt at separation from the mother, as his selfhood threatens to be overwhelmed. His attempt to reinforce his own borders echoes Kristeva's debate on the process of abjection:

Si l'ordure signifie l'autre côté de la limite, où je ne suis pas et qui me permet d'être, le cadavre, le plus écoeurant des déchets, est une limite qui a tout envahi. Ce n'est plus moi qui expulse, 'je' est expulsé. La limite est devenue un objet. Comment puis-je être sans limite?<sup>38</sup>

While Kristeva is clear that abjection is about exclusion, Denis experiences the actions of his mother as an attempt to maintain her own respectable French identity by negating and overwhelming him. Her response to this is to abject her in an attempt to define and preserve his own sense of self. The repugnance that he feels consequently for his mother and stepfather appears repeatedly in the text – 'Je suis issue d'une famille à vomir' (p. 145); 'Nous primes congé de Louise et Raymond [...] J'avais envie de vomir de dégoût' (p. 203) – but as the child in the relationship, he is unable to separate fully from the mother, as this passage shows:

J'eus envie de vomir.

Vomir ses mots.

Le vomir, lui, Raymond,

Elle, Louise.

Les vomir tous les deux. Me faire un lavage d'estomac. Prendre un vermifuge, un laxatif. *J'articulai: 'Ça va, merci.'* [...] *j'étais impuissant à réagir.*<sup>39</sup>

Despite the violence of his feelings, Denis is unable either to voice them or to translate them into action which would achieve the separation from his mother. He is therefore left unable to articulate his individuality or affirm his subjectivity, and remains unable to separate from the mother, caught in a pre-Symbolic state. Kristeva makes the significance of abjection and the need for separation clear in an interview:

The relationship to abjection is finally rooted in the combat that every human carries on with the mother. For in order to become autonomous, it is necessary that one cut

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<sup>38</sup> Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 78 (emphasis added).

the instinctual dyad of the mother and the child and that one become something other.<sup>40</sup>

For both Lacan and Kristeva, the separation of this dyad is achieved through the father, who intervenes in the imaginary relationship between mother and child. The child learns that it cannot be the mother's Phallus, that is to say, the object of her desire, and her gratification.<sup>41</sup> It learns this because the presence of the father signals that the mother desires the father, an object of desire which is not the child. Consequently the child begins to realise that it cannot be everything to the mother. The intervention of the father between mother and child is the Law of the Father.

In her discussion of this process, Kelly Oliver points out that it takes place 'even if the father is not around', because of the child's intuition that in order for it to have been conceived, the mother, at least at one time, must have desired the father.<sup>42</sup> However, in the case of Denis, the Law of the Father has not been adequately asserted, for not only has the father been absent, but Louise has consistently refused to speak of him so that in his place is a space of absence and silence. It is years before Denis is able to discover the name of his father: the 'Nom/n du Père' is a literal absence for him. As a consequence, the separation of mother and child is partial, achieved through the Law of the Mother, who finds herself abjecting the child whose presence she both loves and reviles. Denis is left with a single parent who becomes the focus of the emotions normally attributed to mother and father. He is unable to give up the relationship with Louise, and yet she also becomes the object of emotions more commonly associated with the father. He sees her Law of the Mother – 'la mere castratrice'<sup>43</sup> – as performing the function of castration, as if to punish him for the crime of desiring the father. He imagines her reading about his

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Elaine Hoffman Baruch, in *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, ed. by Ross Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 118. Originally published as E. H. Baruch and P. Meisel, 'Two Interviews with Julia Kristeva', trans. by Brom Anderson and Margaret Waller, *Partisan Review*, 51.1 (1984), 120-32.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. by Jacqueline Rose (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 83.

<sup>42</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press: 1993), p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Prévost, *Le Pont de la Révolte*, p. 229.



search for his father in his book *Saint-Denis-la Révolte*, and then looking through old photographs:

La photo de Denis est intacte. Avec la précision d'un chirurgien, elle déchire le visage de son fils à partir du front. Soudain il lui vient une idée, elle va l'entailler à coupes de ciseaux, ce visage de honte – honte qu'il lui a fait subir par sa naissance, puis à présent. Elle [...] s'empare de la paire de ciseaux et transperce les yeux de Denis son fils. Elle lui crève les yeux.<sup>44</sup>

The passage is imagined by the narrator: it is a reflection of the emotions which Denis imputes to his mother. The blinding is a classic symbol of the fear of castration, since according to Freud, 'In blinding himself, Oedipus, that mythical law-breaker, was simply carrying out a mitigated form of the punishment of castration'.<sup>45</sup> Rather than creating a child capable of independence, Louise therefore is concerned to neutralise the potential of her son.

Denis's relationship with his mother is further complicated as he grows up, first by Louise's marriage to Raymond, and subsequently when Denis marries Hanna. Raymond is a conventionally evil stepfather who forces Denis to wash in green and scummy water of the family's boiled vegetables. Prone to right-wing views but too developed as a character to function simply as a stereotype, he joins Louise in criticising Denis at every opportunity and follows her lead in refusing to speak of Denis's origins. However, the arrival of Hanna, originally Denis's Danish penfriend, reveals him in a more sinister light, and alters Denis's attitude towards him. From this point on, Denis is wracked periodically by murderous rages directed towards his mother and stepfather, who have now become a single unit, responsible for killing a part of their 'son': 'De ce jour, j'ai gardé en moi cette pulsion de mort, ce crime, d'assassinat, envers cet homme qui *lui aussi* a assassiné une part de ma pureté et de ma confiance dans le monde'.<sup>46</sup>

Ironically, the reason why Denis extends his hate to his stepfather is in a way the opposite of why he hates Louise, and yet it reveals another aspect of the ambiguity of the foreign. Louise is repulsed by her son because of the foreignness

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<sup>44</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 383.

<sup>46</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 77 (emphasis added).

within him, yet Raymond is fascinated and attracted to Hanna, also because she is foreign. This different reaction to the foreign, which underscores the need to attend to the geographic and historical specificities of the foreigner, comes about because Hanna embodies the blonde and blue-eyed attributes of the Danish girl. As such, she still runs the gamut of French stereotypes, albeit more welcome in the eyes of Raymond, who is keen to take advantage: 'Remarque, les filles nordiques, elles ont pas froid aux yeux. Elles sont libres sexuellement, c'est commode!'.<sup>47</sup> His attempt to seduce her, appearing at her hotel door at four o'clock on New Year's morning pleading marital difficulties with Louise, is the first of many encounters which Denis becomes aware of but which Louise never knows about, encounters which locate foreignness at the heart of the uneasy and often hostile encounters between the two couples.

### Kristeva's solution to the problem of foreignness

In proposing a solution to the difficulties of encountering foreignness, Kristeva appeals to political sociology, and the cosmopolitan Enlightenment thinking of Montesquieu. She advocates a return to the notion of an 'esprit général' in which citizenship becomes a relative question, of confederates rather than citizens. In this way Kristeva addresses one of the fundamental questions of French nationhood, and one which is central to her project of the relationship between foreigners and the state in which they find themselves, namely, the contradiction contained within the 'Rights of Man and of the Citizen', which restricts universal freedoms to members of the nation. Kristeva is aware of this irony: 'Jamais démocratie n'a été plus explicite, car elle n'exclut personne – *si ce n'est les étrangers...*'.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast, Kristeva describes Montesquieu's thought as both modern and universalizing, drawing attention to its cosmopolitan aspect which highlights the interdependence of nations:

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<sup>47</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 223, emphasis in original.

Notons cette constatation d'une modernité étonnante: 'L'Europe n'est plus qu'une Nation composée de plusieurs, la France et l'Angleterre ont besoin de l'opulence de la Pologne et de la Moscovie, comme une de leurs Provinces a besoin des autres: et l'État qui croit augmenter sa puissance par la ruine de celui qui le touche, s'affoiblit ordinairement avec lui'.<sup>49</sup>

However, despite Montesquieu's universalism, according to Kristeva there is a specifically French quality to his cosmopolitanism. 'Je voudrais soutenir que la nation comme *esprit général* [...] est une des plus prestigieuses créations de la pensée politique française',<sup>50</sup> she states, while elsewhere we find that 'ce commun dénominateur qui fait le sol de la République [...] est notre antidépresseur symbolique'.<sup>51</sup> The notion of a national depression is something that will be considered in the next chapter; for now, suffice it to say that Kristeva sees immigrants and foreigners as linked both to the cause of France's contemporary depression (through the loss of empire and the colonial past, of which contemporary immigration is a constant reminder), and to its cure, since psychoanalysis advocates learning to live with (inner) alterity. She hints at this in her discussion of Montesquieu, arguing that where the rights of man are privileged beyond the rights of the citizen, 'l'effacement de la notion même d'"étranger" devrait inciter paradoxalement à garantir une longue vie à la notion... d'"étrangeté"'.<sup>52</sup> A return to the notion of 'esprit général', then, would result in a cosmopolitan community of individuals where, foreignness having been abolished, each would be free to relate those around her in acknowledgement and acceptance of their relative strangeness or, as Kristeva says, 'une entente entre des êtres polyphoniques, respectueux de leurs étrangetés réciproques'.<sup>53</sup> Commenting on Kristeva's use of the psychoanalytic as a model for the nation, Sam Haigh says

the transference relationship between analyst and analysand at last gives the latter an other in relation to whom a sense of self can be built. At the national level, 'des activités qui développent le souci pour l'autre: le soin, l'amour... le "service publique"' (*Contre la dépression nationale*, pp. 73-74), participation in 'la vie

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<sup>49</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 192, quoting Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, *Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. by Roger Caillois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> Kristeva, *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir* (Paris: Rivages, 1990), p. 27.

<sup>51</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Contre la dépression nationale: entretien avec Philippe Petit* (Paris: Textuel, 1998), p. 99.

<sup>52</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, pp. 194-5.

<sup>53</sup> Kristeva, *Contre la dépression nationale*, p. 77.

associative' (p. 70) are all '[des] antidépresseur[s] puissant[s]' (p. 74). A relationship with the immigrant as other thus becomes, for Kristeva, a privileged means through which a national sense of self can begin to be re-established in France'.<sup>54</sup>

For Kristeva, then, the foreigner becomes central to the troubled nation, no longer a source of division, but of reconciliation with self. This requires a radical reversal of thought, to conceive of the marginal as the potential cornerstone on which a 'national sense of self' can be built. Kristeva's indication of the means to achieve it is consistent with her approach set forth in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*; she advocates that reconciliation with difference take place first on an individual and internal basis, and then at the level of the national and collective. Her argument bears consideration since, were this radical reversal to prove possible, it would offer a means to resolve at a fundamental level the problems raised not only by immigration in France, but by the legacy of the notions of Self and Other which have proved stubbornly resistant in Western thought.

Nevertheless, when applied in practice there are certain difficulties with Kristeva's theory. While the universalising tone of Montesquieu's writings might be expected to provide a means of incorporating foreigners into a new, inclusive formation of confederates, in practice his cosmopolitanism maintains a distinctly European character. This is evident in his famous dictum:

'Si je savois quelque chose qui me fût utile, et qui fût préjudiciable à ma famille, je la rejetterois de mon esprit. Si je savois quelque chose utile à ma famille et qui ne le fût pas à ma patrie, je chercherois à l'oublier. Si je savois quelque chose utile à ma patrie, et qui fût préjudiciable à l'Europe, ou bien qui fût utile à l'Europe et préjudiciable au Genre humain, je la regarderois comme un crime'.<sup>55</sup>

This version of cosmopolitanism is understandable in an Enlightenment context, where most of the foreigners present were likely to be from adjoining European states. However, it is less obviously relevant in contemporary France, where the majority of foreigners, or indeed, disenfranchised citizens of foreign

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<sup>54</sup> Sam Haigh, 'Migration and Melancholia: From Kristeva's "Dépression nationale" to Pineau's "Maladie de l'exil"', *French Studies*, 60 (2006), 232-50 (p. 237).

<sup>55</sup> Montesquieu, *Mes Pensées*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 981, quoted in Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 191.

origin, are from former colonies which have no European cultural framework, notably North Africa, East Asia or, as Sam Haigh points out, the French Caribbean.<sup>56</sup>

As Moruzzi says,

Montesquieu's orderly hierarchy – self/family/homeland/Europe/Mankind – sounds good if one assumes that a mindfulness of European identity should enclose a mindfulness of national identity [...] But for the young students from francophone Morocco and Algiers, the European community is not necessarily the most accessible context in which to frame a national identity.<sup>57</sup>

On one level, Kristeva's return to the cosmopolitanism of Montesquieu is supported by a recent swell of interest in cosmopolitanism from various sociologists,<sup>58</sup> some of whom have argued for the need to emphasise the interconnected histories of Europe, Asia and Africa.<sup>59</sup> According to Featherstone, this suggests that 'we should not just focus on the cosmopolitan experiences of the global elites, or the artists, intellectuals and tourists from the West, but focus on working-class cosmopolitan migrants who can be seen as equally able to generate cosmopolitan perceptions'.<sup>60</sup> However, while this research supports the general thrust of Kristeva's argument, there remains concern amongst scholars that cosmopolitan democracy is simply an extension of the Enlightenment's Eurocentric humanism,<sup>61</sup> an accusation to which Kristeva's writing is open. Moreover, perhaps because her work predates this new wave of research it is based specifically on a return to Montesquieu, rather than a general development of his ideas in the context of the late twentieth century, and so is more open to the criticisms made above. This makes her appeal to the rational humanism of Enlightenment philosophy appear incongruous, particularly in the context of her other, more post-structural, theorising.

Moruzzi's reminder that foreigners cannot be treated as a homogeneous group returns us to the concerns over Kristeva's tendency to dehistoricise the issue of

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<sup>56</sup> Sam Haigh, 'Migration and Melancholia', pp. 239-40.

<sup>57</sup> Moruzzi, 'National Objects', p. 141.

<sup>58</sup> See the special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society*, ed. by Mike Featherstone, 19.1-2 (2002), 1-253; Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001); Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> André Gunder Frank, *Re-ORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>60</sup> Mike Featherstone, 'Cosmopolis: An Introduction', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 19.1-2 (2002), 1-16 (p. 2).

<sup>61</sup> See David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

the foreigner. It also raises concerns about her eagerness to promulgate the imposition of European values on individuals already oppressed by them, thus seeking a peculiarly European solution to a problem suffered by non-European individuals. While she makes clear the contribution of the foreigner to a new form of French nationhood, the place offered to the foreigner within this new system is less certain. It is also a reminder of the very different situations in which Denis, the Franco-Algerian, and Hanna, the blonde Danish wife, find themselves in France.

Moreover, questions are raised about the effectiveness of Kristeva's theory when it is applied to the situation of the abject 'foreigner'. Denis. Raised in a Parisian household where he was unaware of his origins until his thirties, and with a career as a journalist and writer, Denis is firmly implanted in the French intellectual establishment. No doubt the status of his profession influences the reaction of those around him, to the extent that he is accepted as French and Parisian even when he is explicit about his Kabyle origins. His foreignness is not immediately visible and so does not prompt any reaction. Nonetheless, the knowledge of his Maghrebi origins is sufficient to provoke violent expressions of racism from Louise, Raymond, and Louise's Norman family. In this context, then, Kristeva's theory, with its appeal to French values of the Enlightenment, has little to offer, because both mother and son are located in a French context where individuals see no need to privilege eighteenth century ideals over those of the late twentieth century. Indeed, the fact that foreigners have integrated themselves into French society to the point that, in Denis's case at least, they have become almost invisible, is in itself justification for 'Franco-French' citizens to reinforce the boundaries which they perceive to be under threat. The resulting notions of threat, contamination, and expulsion simply re-enact the mechanisms of the abject. It would appear, therefore, that while Kristeva's theories serve greatly to illuminate the situation facing foreigners in France, whether official, second generation, or of mixed parentage, their function is more as descriptors than as possible sources of resolution.

Although Kristeva has arguably theorised this area of individual and national identity more extensively and successfully than any other writer, it appears that in practice the application of her work to certain groups characterised by national difference is of limited use. In the case of Prévost's novel, the difficulties which exist

around the abject, both in relation to individual conflict, and on the level of conflict between individual and social context, remain unresolved, if more clearly illuminated. In an attempt to understand how such conflicts can be addressed, I consider the work of another philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, whose work with Félix Guattari offers an alternative way of conceiving of the dilemmas of individual and national difference, as experienced by individuals of mixed Franco-Algerian parentage. I examine Deleuze's work in relation to *Garçon manqué*, the second novel in this chapter, and show that it can usefully be applied to further our understanding both of its narrator, and of the narrator of Prévost's *Le Passé sous silence*.

### Deleuze and Guattari: the dissolution of the conflicted individual

*Garçon manqué*, Nina Bouraoui's sixth novel, is the autobiographical account of a young girl of mixed parentage growing up in the 1970s. Born in France to a French mother and Algerian father, she grows up in Algeria but spends two months of the summer with her grandparents in Brittany. Consequently the narrative is divided into two sections, located in and entitled 'Algiers' and 'Rennes' respectively. Like *Le Passé sous silence*, the text is a first person narrative. However, while Prévost's novel is unusual in that its narrator accepts with comparative ease the news of his mixed origins, Bouraoui's narrator undergoes the personal identity crisis common to many 'beur' texts. It is a striking fact that the experience of growing up with knowledge of the two cultures of origin appears to give rise to significantly more anxiety about identity than does Denis's potentially radical realization that his origins are not what he believed them to be. However, the reaction of sections of society to Denis and to Bouraoui's narrator is the same: they are treated as potential threats to the integrity of the national identity.

Bouraoui's narrator shares her experience of exclusion from Algeria with her friend Amine, whose mother is also French. Their inner crisis is perhaps due to their realization at an early age that they are perceived by Algerians as posing a threat: 'Le

danger est en nous. Il est sous la peau. Il est sur le visage. Il est dans le renoncement. Il est dans le manque d'un pays'.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the suspicion does not come only from Algerians. Because of her parentage, the teachers at the French lycée in Algiers do not regard the narrator as French, and place her on the right hand side of the class, opposite the 'real' French pupils, whilst the Arabic teacher places her on the left, facing the Algerians.<sup>63</sup> Later the narrator spends time with her French grandparents, where she identifies the source of French society's rejection of her (and her subsequent dislike of aspects of France).

Ce n'est pas la France qu'on détestera. Bien sûr que non. Ce sera l'idée d'une certaine France. [...] Ça se trouvera au coeur des familles rencontrées par hasard. [...] Dans leur impossibilité à aimer vraiment ce qui est étranger. Ce qui est différent. Ce qui échappe.<sup>64</sup>

Once again, the indeterminate identity of the Franco-Algerian troubles category boundaries with its uncontainable excess. The narrator is thus caught between the two nationalities which constitute her, a position reflected in the novel's opening in which she and Amine run along the beach at Algiers. The sea symbolises their in-between status, reinforced by the play on the French words for 'sea' and 'mother', since it, like their bodies, unites the two opposing countries. However the text soon makes clear that this is an uncomfortable position which is subject to violence and marginalisation. The conflict which the narrator experiences leaves her perpetually struggling to reconcile the paradox of her identity.

J'ai deux passeports. Je n'ai qu'un seul visage apparent. Les Algériens ne me voient pas. Les Français ne comprennent pas. Je construis un mur contre les autres. Etre séparée toujours de l'un et de l'autre. Porter une identité de fracture. Se penser en deux parties. A qui je ressemble le plus? [...] La France ou l'Algérie?<sup>65</sup>

However, although she feels equally excluded by both societies, the narrator does not desire to belong to them equally. Algeria, rather than the land of her birth, is the country that she loves and desires desperately to be part of.

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<sup>62</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Stock, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>63</sup> As in Denis's case, there is no space in Nina's experience for the concept of *métissage*; the distinction between French and Algerian identity is rigorously maintained.

<sup>64</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>65</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 19.



Je reste ici, différente et française. Mais je suis algérienne. Par mon visage. Par mes yeux. Par ma peau. Par mon corps traversé du corps de mes grands-parents. [...] Je porte la main de Rabiâ sur mon visage fiévreux. Je porte la voix de Bachir qui appelle ses enfants. [...] Elle est éternelle et puissante. Elle me rattache aux autres. Elle m'inclut à la terre algérienne.<sup>66</sup>

The inner turmoil created by the sentiment of being different and excluded forces the narrator to execute a series of strategies aimed at overcoming and reconciling her singularity. A primary indicator of her difference is her inability to learn Arabic, recognizing its sounds, but being excluded from the community of their sense. Rather than remain silenced by her linguistic lack she chooses to mimic those around her and invents her own way of speaking Arabic 'à ma façon'. Unsurprisingly, however, her enterprising attempts at mimicry are not sufficient to overcome the linguistic barriers, and she is left with the inner certainty of being an 'imposteur', living 'dans le mensonge'.<sup>67</sup>

### The gendered nation

Beyond language, however, the narrator's desire to become Algerian is also frustrated by her gender. What Kristeva has called 'la "lutte à mort" [...] des sexes' is for the narrator intimately linked to her gendered view of nationality.<sup>68</sup> Sexual identity therefore holds the key to a resolution of the conflicted question of national identity. In the little girl's eyes, the source of her foreignness is her (French) mother (p. 12), while her father is the means for her to attain her desire to become Algerian (p. 23). To achieve integration with Algeria, however, entails a certain separation from her motherland, and one which she struggles to achieve, for Algeria is repeatedly described as 'le pays des hommes' (p. 15; p. 17; p. 24; p. 114) and she, through her gender, is irretrievably linked to her mother's motherland of France. As the mother is the source of foreignness, she and her gender must be rejected, and in

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<sup>66</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 11.

<sup>68</sup> Kristeva, 'Le Temps des femmes', p. 18.

order to become truly Algerian, the narrator and her (male) friend Amine must 'replace their fathers' (p. 13).

The child's solution to this scenario is literally to become male:

Etre un homme en Algérie c'est devenir invisible. Je quitterai mon corps. Je quitterai mon visage. Je quitterai ma voix. Je serai dans la force. L'Algérie est un homme. L'Algérie est une forêt d'hommes.<sup>69</sup>

Je deviendrai un homme avec les hommes. Je deviendrai un corps sans nom. Je deviendrai une voix sans visage. Je deviendrai une partie. Je deviendrai un élément. Je deviendrai une ombre serrée. Je deviendrai un fragment. J'existe trop. Je suis une femme. Je reste à l'extérieur de la forêt.<sup>70</sup>

Through this reasoning, we see again the notion that female sexuality represents an excess which cannot be incorporated, and which threatens the established borders of male hegemony. The link between gender and nationality replays the movement of Kristeva's foreigner, far from his homeland, while the need for separation from the mother to achieve subjectivity repeats the mechanism of self-abjection. However, the language in these passages is more reminiscent of Deleuze than of Kristeva, suggesting that an appeal to Deleuzian theory may be more illuminating, although ultimately problematic, in this situation.

In their work *Mille Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari propose an alternative to the kind of binary structures which organize the world of Bouraoui's narrator. They view Western philosophy as calcified around the sterility of massified 'molar' categories such as France and Algeria, man and woman:

Ce que nous appelons entité molaire ici, par exemple, c'est la femme en tant qu'elle est prise dans une machine duelle qui l'oppose à l'homme, en tant qu'elle est déterminée par sa forme, et pourvue d'organes et de fonctions, et assignée comme sujet.<sup>71</sup>

Against this, they offer an alternative conception of continual creations and transformations which take place at a molecular level. With power flowing in constant motion, deterritorializing and reterritorializing, the nature of reality

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<sup>69</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 37.

<sup>70</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 40.

<sup>71</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), p. 337.

constantly changes. They refer to these molecular changes as ‘becomings’ which, because they take place at a molecular level, transform the individual into a collectivity:

Oui, tous les devenirs sont moléculaires; l’animal, la fleur ou la pierre qu’on devient sont des collectivités moléculaires [...] Il y a un devenir-femme, un devenir-enfant, qui ne ressemblent pas à la femme ou à l’enfant comme entités molaires bien distinctes (quoique la femme ou l’enfant puissent avoir des positions privilégiées possibles, mais seulement possibles, en fonction de tels devenirs).<sup>72</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari advocate an endless series of becomings of which the most radical is their ‘devenir-imperceptible’. The narrator echoes this process in her description of becoming elemental, invisible and fragmentary.<sup>73</sup> Her move to empty her body of the features which define it – her voice, her face, her name – is also reminiscent of the celebrated ‘Corps sans Organes’, in which conventional hierarchies are removed to allow new creative possibilities, and which Deleuze and Guattari claim is inseparable from becoming woman, or the production of the molecular woman.<sup>74</sup> It is clear from these passages that the narrator’s intention is to integrate with Algeria, ‘la forêt des hommes’, by mingling her molecular structure with the assemblage or mass that it represents. She reasons that it is female excess which isolates her, preventing her from being a part of Algeria.

With this in mind, the narrator sets about negating all signs of her femininity in her body, her face and her voice. She cuts her hair, throws back her shoulders into a male stance, opens her legs into a male walk, wears aftershave and dresses in jeans. The anxiety which this behaviour provokes in her family is allayed by the quantities in which she uses the feminine Nivea face cream – little do they realise that it serves as a shaving cream. She feels some success at these efforts to gain control: ‘Mon

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<sup>72</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 337.

<sup>73</sup> It is also interesting to note in passing that the narrator considers the possibility of ‘Devenir un rat’ (p. 42). This becoming-rat, which is explored by Deleuze and Guattari in the opening pages of Chapter 10 of *Mille Plateaux*, occurs when the narrator compares the danger which she represents to Algerian identity, with the reputation which rats have for terrorising respectable society. ‘Ici les rats dévorent les chats. Ici les rats attaquent les chiens. [...] Ils éventrent les nourrissons. Ils logent dans les berceaux.’

<sup>74</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 339.

corps est le centre de la terre. Je romps mon identité. Je change ma vie. Sentir mon ventre dur. Ma poitrine musclée. Mes épaules fortes'.<sup>75</sup>

In her attempts to become male, the narrator uses naming as another strategy to contain her uncertain identity. Although her given name is Yasmina (Nina to her French family), her father calls her Brio, a name which she uses in defiance against the threatening elements of the world, France and her developing female body. Her own name for herself is Ahmed, chosen to reinforce the male subject that she has become. She gives this name in response to the women who coo 'Quelle jolie petite fille. Tu t'appelles comment?',<sup>76</sup> celebrating their discomfort as a victory and a sign that she is succeeding in becoming Algerian. Yet despite her progress, the violence of these multiple identities within a single subject remains. Pursuing masculinity does not deliver the desired objective:

Je passe de Yasmina à Nina. De Nina à Ahmed. D'Ahmed à Brio. C'est un assassinat. C'est un infanticide. C'est un suicide. Je ne sais pas qui je suis. Une et multiple. menteuse et vraie. Forte et fragile. Fille et garçon. Mon corps me trahira un jour. Il sera formé. Il sera féminin. Il sera contre moi.<sup>77</sup>

The failure of her apparently Deleuzian project can be anticipated, however, not only because of the physiological changes to which her body is subject, but with reference to *Mille Plateaux*. Deleuze and Guattari strongly advocate the need for a 'devenir-femme'

[parce que] c'est à la fille qu'on vole d'abord ce corps: cesse de te tenir comme ça, tu n'es plus une petite fille, tu n'es pas un garçon manqué. C'est à la fille qu'on vole d'abord son devenir pour lui imposer une histoire, ou une pré-histoire.<sup>78</sup>

However, they are equally clear that man's place as society's hegemonic norm – which is the very thing which attracts Nina, and which persuades her that as a man she will be able to escape her interstitial position of exclusion and mingle with society at large – prevents any becoming-man. 'Pourquoi y a-t-il tant de devenirs de l'homme, mais pas de devenir-homme? C'est d'abord parce que l'homme est

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<sup>75</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 52.

<sup>76</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 51.

<sup>77</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 60.

<sup>78</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, pp. 338-9.

majoritaire par excellence, tandis que les devenirs sont minoritaires, tout devenir est un devenir-minoritaire'.<sup>79</sup> It is clear, therefore, that Nina's strategy will not succeed.

### Coming to terms with strangeness: Deleuzian strategies

Despite the failure of her gender-bending strategy to resolve her identity conflict, Nina persists in her attempts to follow a Deleuzian line of action. Sent on holiday to her French family, she experiences the racism directed at Algerians. To her it is clear that the Algerian War has not ended; it has simply been transmuted and displaced, to continue by other means. The legacy of colonialism, another dominant binary, thus persists, transformed into new forms with the passing of time, but continuing to exert its power over individual subjects. Faced with this proliferation of forces acting on her, Nina's reaction is to attempt to adapt to avoid the full intensity of the pressures at work. Her description is reminiscent of the process of becoming molecular, as she transforms her single self into a multitude of identities: 'Je m'adapte à tout. Très vite. C'est comme une folie, cette faculté d'adaptation. C'est plusieurs vies à la fois. C'est une multitude de petites trahisons'.<sup>80</sup>

However, because each element of this multitude of identities is driven in reaction to a corresponding molar force – nationalism, masculinity, colonialism – rather than positively evolving through the creative process of becoming, Nina continues to experience the consequences of difference, and is still forced to conceal the elements of herself which do not conform to the social models expected. She aims to minimise the damage inflicted on her subjectivity by fleeing the forces crushing her, whilst sustaining the violence against her personal integrity caused by masquerading as something she is not. Her model of becoming is thus far a negative one; she is fleeing but without the positive transformation created by Deleuze's 'lines

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<sup>79</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 356.

<sup>80</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, pp. 161-2.

of flight': 'L'important c'est cette volonté de se cacher. De dissimuler. De se transformer. De se fuir. D'être hors la loi. Et hors de soi'.<sup>81</sup>

At this point, then, Nina is still subject to the conflicts common to the foreigner who is not one, as the abjected daughter of France and Algeria. On an individual level, even towards the end of the novel, she continues to struggle with questions of nationality and gender: 'Tous les matins je vérifie mon identité. J'ai quatre problèmes. Française? Algérienne? Fille? Garçon?'.<sup>82</sup> On a collective level she continues to experience the racism and rejection of the society in which she lives. However, a hint of personal resolution and the potential for liberation comes during a holiday spent in the woods of New Hampshire. There, far from both France and Algeria, the narrator feels a release from the interminable pressures. This brief memory prefigures the closing pages of the novel, where Nina experiences the transformations of a subject gone finally beyond the contradictory forces which have defined her. This move allows her to reterritorialize in a new and temporary environment, suggesting that she is adopting the mode of Deleuze's nomad. The start of nomadic becoming takes place as the narrator reaches maturity, during a summer spent in the heat of Rome. There, on a neutral site beyond the reach of the violence of national, sexual and family identity, she is free to begin to exist and become. Her habitual wearing of white, ostensibly a protection against the heat and light, symbolizes the experience of renewal as she leaves behind the constraints of her earlier life:

Nous avons oublié Alger. Son climat. Son insécurité. Nous avons cherché, partout, à être plus libres encore. [...] Tout était si facile. Être. Se promener. Tarder à rentrer. Regarder. Ne plus avoir peur. De rien. Parmi les hommes. Parmi les femmes. Je n'étais plus française. Je n'étais plus algérienne. Je n'étais même plus la fille de ma mère. J'étais moi. Avec mon corps.<sup>83</sup>

Je venais de moi et de moi seule. Je me retrouvais. Je venais de mes yeux, de ma voix, de mes envies. Je sortais de moi. Et je me possédais. Mon corps se détachait de tout. Il n'y avait plus rien de la France. Plus rien de l'Algérie. Il avait cette joie simple d'être en vie.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 180.

<sup>82</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 180.

<sup>83</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 184.

<sup>84</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 185.

Released into this new freedom, Nina discovers her body as if for the first time, seeing it display the gestures and characteristics of a woman. She experiences a joy in discovering the vitality of her own being. The change transforms her from life on the margins, and under the focus of the tourist camera, she finds herself as part of a new, instantly created and temporary multiplicity, becoming imperceptible as she had wanted in Algeria, but here as part of a crowd, an assemblage of unknown Italians.

It is significant that in both episodes, Nina's experience of freedom comes as a tourist. Nelson Graburn has shown that tourism offers the opportunity to invert aspects of everyday life in particular and limited ways, and Nina's choice of tourist destination reflects this.<sup>85</sup> As the child of well-educated, middle-class parents, like many travellers she is looking to escape the constraints of the familiar but in an inversion of the conventional directional tourist flow, she turns to the West. She is attracted to environments which, like the natural woodland of New Hampshire, or the historic centre of Rome, offer a departure from her habitual surroundings. Turner has demonstrated how tourism leads to the temporary disruption of social roles, which sees Nina released from the constraints of imposed identity, and leaves her free to explore new contexts which, exotic and transient, illustrate the creative potential of Deleuze's nomadism.<sup>86</sup> However, the novel's emphasis on the part played by tourism in the process of Nina's becoming does highlight ambiguities in Deleuze's theory and raises questions about its applicability beyond those cosmopolitan elites 'who enjoy the freedom of physical movement and communication, [and] stand in stark contrast to those who are confined to place, whose fate is to remain located'.<sup>87</sup> The reproach that French intellectuals neglect to consider specific economic realities when theorising situations, concentrating instead on those who belong to the Western-educated, financially-secure position of privilege, is similar to the criticisms made of Kristeva earlier in this chapter, and here demonstrates the limitations of an otherwise illuminating theory. Moreover, while a reading of Deleuze and Guattari

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<sup>85</sup> Nelson Graburn, 'The Anthropology of Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10 (1983), 9-33 (pp. 21-2).

<sup>86</sup> Victor Turner, 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality', in *Secular Ritual: A Working Definition of Ritual*, ed. by Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (Amsterdam: Van Gocum, 1977), pp. 27-41.

<sup>87</sup> Featherstone, 'Cosmopolis: An Introduction', p. 1.

reveals the strategy by which Nina succeeds in resolving her inner conflicts, it offers little towards resolving her difficult relationship with the French and Algerian societies which reject her. Because she achieves her inner breakthrough only by physically leaving the sites of social violence, she does not address her status as the rejected product of both France and Algeria. Instead, the difficulties of being a citizen who is treated as a foreigner remain unresolved, as she has simply shifted location to one in which she has the more straightforward status of a 'real' foreigner.

### Roots and rhizomes

However, while Deleuze's work does not fully resolve the difficulties of the Franco-Algerian subject, it is sufficiently revealing to prompt a consideration in the case of Denis. Although, unlike Nina, he is quickly at ease with the discovery of his origins, as we have seen he consistently struggles either to break with or to resolve the emasculating relationship with his mother. Faced with this difficulty, Denis sets about discovering his father. This search for the absent father is the search for a kind of transcendental signifier, that is, a source of origins which will give meaning to who he is. When it becomes apparent that his father is deceased, he embarks on an impassioned search for meaning in his Kabyle roots. Given that Deleuze and Guattari reject this classical mode of thinking, which they characterise as 'arborescent', at first it seems that Denis's search has little in common with their theories. According to them, trees are genealogical, restricting thought to established forms:<sup>88</sup> 'Nous sommes fatigués de l'arbre. Nous ne devons plus croire aux arbres, aux racines ni aux radicelles, nous en avons trop souffert. Toute la culture arborescente est fondée sur eux, de la biologie à la linguistique'.<sup>89</sup> Instead, they advocate rhizomes, which they describe as a multiplicity of connections without beginning or end, without fixed point or centre. 'A l'opposé de l'arbre, le rhizome n'est pas objet de reproduction: ni reproduction externe comme l'arbre-image, ni reproduction interne

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<sup>88</sup> Nina in fact could be speaking for both Deleuze and Guattari, and Denis, when she says of the French, 'Ils ont des histoires de famille. Et un arbre généalogique. Un étranglement' (*Garçon manqué*, p. 176).

<sup>89</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 24.



comme la structure-arbre. Le rhizome est une antigénéalogie'.<sup>90</sup> Both plants and animals can take rhizomatic form: in addition to the archetypal root-system Deleuze cites packs of rats and terriers as examples of rhizomes.<sup>91</sup>

Certainly 'racines', the root-form rejected by Deleuze and Guattari, loom large in Denis's discourse and that of his mother. They recur throughout Prévost's texts, from the damage inflicted by the infamous 'racine pourrie' and the 'racine propre', to Denis's injunction to 'ne pas oublier nos racines!' and the reminder that his children also have links to Denmark, 'C'était cela aussi leurs racines'.<sup>92</sup> But while these initially appear to belong to the category of structure refuted by Deleuze and Guattari, in practice Denis's experience of his Algerian family is far from the conventional hierarchy of the family tree. Because the object of his search cannot be found, the only line of segmentation along which his roots are structured is that of absence.

The means by which he makes contact with his family is random: in *Le Pont de la Révolte* we learn that he locates the first member of his family by calling all the numbers in the phone book which corresponded to his father's surname.<sup>93</sup> Having felt that he was part of the 'milliers de déracinés de par le monde',<sup>94</sup> Denis now finds himself as part of an unanticipated grouping. The initial contact broadens progressively thanks to the network of Algerians based both in Paris and Algeria. From this relative he learns of his father's death but is able to meet his father's brother, who tells him of his Algerian half-brother by his father's first marriage, and then of his French half-brother and -sister by his second marriage to a Frenchwoman. His father's widow, an aunt, endless cousins: the structure is rhizomatic, with each discovery of a family member leading to others in a network that spans the Mediterranean and cuts across national boundaries, from Parisian stepmothers, brothers and cousins to far-flung relatives around Algeria. Indeed, the network exceeds the boundaries of the family, as Denis becomes a member of his family's

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<sup>90</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 32.

<sup>91</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 13.

<sup>92</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 146.

<sup>93</sup> Prévost, *Le Pont de la Révolte*, p. 66.

<sup>94</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 59.

village in Kabylia, and of the Berber community in Paris. Few individuals in this network are named, fewer are described in detail, for it seems that their importance lies in their number and their connection rather than their personal characteristics. The network is linked by lines of telephone calls, air flights, letters and photographs sent by post, and car and metro crossings of Paris. The family rhizome thus replaces the family tree.

While the network clearly consists of roots in one sense, they are rhizomatic in character for, as Deleuze and Guattari affirm, 'Il y a [...] des poussées rhizomatiques dans les racines'.<sup>95</sup> Like Nina, Denis finds his place in an apparently ever-changing mass, which in his case consists of the community of his extended family. The potential for the creation of new connections and relationships transforms his world, after the sterile and constricted experience of the Forestier family. He finds joy and release in this new context, which allows him to explore and develop his identity. However, it does nothing to resolve the issues with his mother, and her rejection of his ethnic difference and the memory of what that represents for her own life.

### Writing: reconciliation with society

A reading of Deleuzian theory therefore helps to reveal the strategies employed by both narrators in their struggle to come to terms with their own abjected identity. While both narrators find a degree of resolution within this sphere, they continue to struggle with the difficulties of interfacing with a society which repulses them as a threat. Clearly, any resolution in this area will require an alternative approach. These final sections examine in detail the forms of repulsion manifested by society, and consider the way in which the narrators use writing as a process of reconciliation between themselves and society at large, with potential consequences for the wider conflicts around immigration in French society.

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<sup>95</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, p. 30.

For Denis, the rejection that he experiences as a result of his origins comes primarily from that subset of society which constitutes his family. He is protected from the racism of society at large because of his French surname and Norman family, and because his appearance does not bear witness to his hidden ethnicity. However, within the small community which knows the truth of his origins, he is exposed to open hostility: “On n’a qu’à lui enlever pendant qu[e sa mère] dort et le déposer à l’Assistance publique”, avait proposé ma marraine normande, outrée que le fils de sa soeur soit un “petit bicot”.<sup>96</sup> There is also the suggestion from his stepfather that he was conceived under duress:

[Il] me déclara: ‘Oui, en fait, c’était un Mohamed quelconque,’ et [...] ajouta: ‘Mais alors, s’il y a eu viol...’

Cette phrase suinte en moi comme une plaie: un Algérien ne pouvait pas aimer, il ne pouvait être qu’un violeur!<sup>97</sup>

Growing up in the racist environment of ‘la famille aryenne’ (p. 22), Denis miserably internalizes these sentiments, accepting them as true. It is only when he reaches adulthood that he realizes that such views were not universally held, even when he was growing up thirty years previously. The catalysts for this realization are twofold. The first occurs with the discovery of a photograph taken by a favourite teacher, who used to take Denis on trips and even invited him on a week’s holiday. In the photograph she has placed a *chéchia* on the head of the little boy, in what he now realizes was a gesture of recognition and acceptance of his origins. A subsequent realization occurs when Denis meets Thérèse, his father’s Parisian second wife.

Elle avait épousé Da Mohand quelques années après sa rupture avec Louise. Ils avaient eu des enfants. Pour moi, une nouvelle preuve que rien de ce qui s’était passé avant et après ma naissance n’était inéluctable, que le clan des Normands s’était protégé par sa xénophobie. Thérèse avait épousé un Algérien. [...] Dans certaines familles donc, les mariages mixtes étaient possibles, et dans d’autres à jamais interdits. Parmi les autres, il y avait eu la mienne.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 18.

<sup>97</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, pp. 117-8.

Within his family Denis is forbidden to talk about his father or his Algerian origins. According to Kristeva, abjection and separation from the mother are required in order for the entry into the Symbolic to take place, but Louise's power stifles this process at the stage of abjection. Denis is therefore unable to progress and struggles to enter the linguistic realm. In the absence of the father, the Law of the Mother is supreme, demanding obedience to a law of silence. Denis transgresses this law and speaks out only at the cost of crippling guilt, as when he tries to tell Louise about his holiday in Algeria:

Je commençai doucement ma phrase, surveillant mon débit, mes mots, tout en sentant resurgir en ma poitrine cette incontrôlable angoisse, née de ma culpabilité d'avoir transgressé la loi du silence imposé. 'Oh! nous avons vu beaucoup de choses, de paysages, beaucoup de gens'.<sup>99</sup>

However, despite the cost, Denis is driven by the need to speak in order to affirm that he exists; for him, language is a prerequisite for subjectivity, and he continues to struggle against his mother's domination. This is perhaps the underlying motivation for entering into his profession as a journalist and writer. Certainly he is fully aware of the power of writing. The deepest wound inflicted by his mother comes through writing, in the words inscribed on the postcard sent for his birthday, 'issue d'une racine pourrie'. However, writing also proves a source of relief, allowing him to play out in imagination his mother's reactions to him, and letting him fantasize about killing her and Raymond, his racist, sexually predatory stepfather, as a way of coming to terms with his inner conflicts. In this it acts as a precursor to the archetypal 'talking cure', as he embarks on psychoanalysis at the novel's close.

### Writing: reconciliation with the past

Writing also acts as a mediator between the narrators and the societies which marginalize them, as it enables them to challenge a past which has excluded them. Both Denis and Nina recount episodes from the past in which they imagine their

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<sup>99</sup> Prévost, *Le Passé sous silence*, p. 44.

parents' early relationship, the meetings and the events which led up to their own birth. This re-enactment of the forgotten past through imagination, which is the only way we can access the past, is a way of reaffirming that despite the difficulties experienced by the narrators, at one point in the past there was a means and desire, manifested in their parents' love, which was powerful enough to overcome the divisions created by language, ethnicity, religion and culture. The need to recover the past is a powerful issue in both novels. *Le Passé sous silence* opens with the phrase 'En oubliant le passé on se condamne à la revivre', an epigraph shared with Daeninckx's *Meurtres pour mémoire*, which figures in the next chapter. One of the accusations levelled at Louise is that in her denial of Denis's father, she is falsifying history and committing a crime. But the wider focus on attempts to recover the past is located around the consequences of colonialism. In addition to the racism that lost him his father, Denis is concerned with justice for actions which affected the wider Algerian population, seeing a parallel between the repression that he has experienced, and the repression of the Berber language that took place in 1980 and led to the Berber Spring.<sup>100</sup> He feels guilty when his uncle tells of the events in Paris of 17 October 1961, and tries to recover his own half-forgotten memories of seeing Algerians and French riot police on the streets of Paris that night.<sup>101</sup> These recovered memories figure in *Le Pont de la Révolte*, Prévost's earlier autobiographical novel which features in *Le Passé sous silence* under the title of *Saint-Denis-la Révolte*.

In all of this, Denis's aim is to reinsert memories of Algeria into France's history, and to make specific instances of its past known to a wider audience through the creative power of literature. In a similar way, Bouraoui's narrator, Nina, is concerned to locate her experiences within the wider sweep of Algerian history. As part of a 'French' family living in Algiers in the late 1970s, she notes the increasing racial tension and hostility which are directed towards her mother in particular. The climate of violence will eventually be the catalyst for the author to leave Algeria permanently. For Nina, however, the trouble is a reminder of the violence of the Algerian War, sparked by the discovery of old newspapers dated 1962 and, worse, bloody knives, under the water pipes in their apartment. In 1962 a massacre had

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<sup>100</sup> Prévost, *Le Pont de la Révolte*, p. 104.

<sup>101</sup> Prévost, *Le Pont de la Révolte*, p. 109.

taken place in their building of Algerian women at the hands of the OAS. After that discovery, the whistling of the wind sounds to her like the wailing of the murdered women, and each time her father has to go away, their ghosts and the ghosts of the OAS seem closer. Here, the violence of the intercultural encounter between Algerian women and French OAS leaves material, yet also ghostly, traces which Bouraoui inscribes on her text. The notion that the past can repeat itself, and that violence can recur in the same place, is very strong in the novel, as indeed it proved to be in the Algeria of the 1990s. Once again, Algeria is experienced as a returning ghost: 'J'ai voulu oublier l'Algérie, mais elle est revenue avec l'écriture. Écrire, c'est retrouver ses fantômes'.<sup>102</sup>

For Bouraoui, writing is a defence against the threatening aspects of the world: 'Seul l'écriture protégera du monde'.<sup>103</sup> It enables her to come to terms with her experiences, to explore in imagination events which have already taken place, and work through her mixed origins, which prevent her from being simply Algerian or simply French. She speaks about the violence of being categorised by others as either a French or a Maghrebian writer, a classification which repeats her schoolgirl experiences of being made to sit alternately with the French or the Algerian pupils. Nonetheless, writing brings both Prévost and Bouraoui literary respect and recognition. As published novelists they acquire an identity which is accepted and, far from being silenced, their voices are now solicited. This, to an extent, reconciles them with the society within which they are published. It is perhaps unexpected that stories of the authors' own marginalisation should be responsible for their ultimate acceptance by society, but this is one of Bouraoui's aims in writing: to make the reader aware of the necessity of reconciling with what appears to be irreconcilably different. 'Je trouverai mieux. Je l'écrirai. C'est mieux, ça, la haine de l'autre écrite et révélée dans un livre. J'écris. Et quelqu'un se reconnaîtra. Se trouvera minable. Restera sans voix'.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Dominique Simonnet, 'Interview with Nina Bouraoui: "Ecrire, c'est retrouver ses fantômes"', *L'Express*, 31 May 2004.

<sup>103</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 20.

<sup>104</sup> Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 132.

For Bouraoui, as for Attridge and Derrida, writing is therefore a means of enabling the reader to encounter what is strange and other. Literature contains the potential for otherness, but the creation of otherness is only made complete in the individual event of reading. Within this act, otherness is able to enter the reader's world through the inventiveness of writing and, although perhaps only momentarily, it challenges and changes the reader's view of the same. As Attridge says,

[literature] is a handling of language whereby something we might call 'otherness,' or 'alterity,' or 'the other,' is made, or allowed, to impact upon the existing configurations of an individual's mental world - which is to say, upon a particular cultural field as it is embodied in a single subjectivity.<sup>105</sup>

This suggests that the privileged relationship between literature and otherness is what attracts Prévost, Bouaroui, and their writer-narrators to seek a resolution to their personal difference through writing. By publishing his novel *Saint-Denis-la-Révolte*, which he is subsequently invited to discuss on a literary television show, Denis is able to share his inner otherness with a wide audience. As an author he invites his readers to welcome and give space to otherness through the practice of their reading, and challenges them to reconsider their conceptions of Same and Other. Some, inevitably, choose not to let writing affect them in this way, restricting their interaction with the text to judgements on the merit of its literary form. However others, faced with the literary specificities and singularity of an author/character who is neither French nor Algerian, respond with hospitality: that is, they allow otherness to enter the boundaries of their existing conceptions and in doing so allow those boundaries and conceptions to be altered, albeit temporarily. This testifies to a direct link between the otherness of the 'stranger', which Kristeva identifies, and the otherness that we encounter through inventive literature, as Attridge suggests:

to the extent that I apprehend the 'already existing other' in the form of a person it is not other: I recognize the familiar contours of a human being, which is to say I assimilate him or her to my existing schemata of understanding [...] but these are responses to the person not as singular individual but as (generic) person [...] It is in the acknowledgement of the other person's uniqueness, and therefore of the impossibility of finding general rules or schemata to account fully for him or her, that one can be said to encounter the other as other.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 19.

<sup>106</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, pp. 32-3.

Attridge here suggests that literature which is open to otherness calls for an appropriate response from the reader. He follows Sartre in choosing the term 'responsabilité' to characterise this response, which Sartre refers to as follows: 'Vous êtes parfaitement libres de laisser ce livre sur la table. Mais si vous l'ouvrez, vous en assumez la responsabilité'.<sup>107</sup>

Whether consciously or not, Denis and Nina, as literary writers, seem to be working within this tradition, using writing as a strategy to reach out to an audience that does not know them or necessarily accept them, and challenging their readers to respond to the otherness which is their experience of both France and Algeria, and which they make available to others through their creative writing. In doing so, they seem to hope for the development of understanding and acceptance of their singularity through the shared event of literary (re-)creation.

As a means of reconciliation with the seemingly irreconcilable, as represented by the foreigner who is not one, who is neither French nor Algerian, writing therefore offers a potential alternative to Kristeva's advocacy of psychoanalysis. This is to be welcomed for, since the issues posed by the 'foreigner' within France's national borders have arguably never been more pressing, it seems likely that a number of strategies will be required, of which writing is merely one. Indeed, it is notable that Denis himself enters psychoanalysis at the end of *Le Passé sous silence*. However, since many of the majority population undoubtedly bear a closer resemblance to Louise, with her denial that any problem exists, than to Denis, regardless of its merits psychoanalysis may not offer a solution for many. Through these and other novels, then, literature offers one means of enabling the reader to encounter and welcome otherness, allowing it to reshape what is known and familiar. By letting writing alter our preconceived categories in this way, we as readers also allow it to challenge our conceptions of ourselves. In addition to addressing the issue of the stranger within the national boundary, therefore, it seems that writing can offer a path towards what Kristeva calls 'une éthique du respect pour l'inconciliable', encouraging us to welcome and respect the stranger that is within each of us.

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<sup>107</sup> Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, p. 61.



## Chapter Four 17 October 1961: Counter-Memory and Staging Witness

The last chapter looked at the ways in which the relationship with difference is negotiated within the Hexagon, through the figure of the Franco-Algerian of mixed parentage, and concluded that writing is one of a number of strategies which offers an encounter with otherness, and thus the hope of developing a Kristevan respect for difference. The final two chapters of this thesis continue to probe the specificities of France's relationship with Algeria, through the complex interactions between various sections of French society, and Algeria, its inhabitants, and their descendants in France, and to demonstrate the significance for contemporary France. The forum for this examination is collective and personal memory. By focusing on recollections of France's colonial past in Algeria, and in particular the events of the Algerian War, this chapter traces the ways in which the collective memory of war-time events (or the absence of memory) has influenced the development of the French national narrative. This parallels the work of Benjamin Stora who, drawing on historical rather than literary data, argues that the Algerian War has left a legacy of conflict and bitterness within French society.<sup>1</sup> The analysis of the literary texts within this chapter supports the view that the conflicts played out in the Algerian War remain unresolved. It develops the issues of racism and residual Orientalism which were evident in French society in *Shérazade* and *Le Passé sous silence*, and which indicated that the attitudes of superiority which dominated French society in the colonial period continue to exert an influence within contemporary society.

This chapter looks at the collective ways in which different elements of French society have sought to deal with France's past and with the loss of status which accompanied the end of its empire. Drawing on the substantial research which has been conducted in this area, it shows that large sections of French society have failed to come to terms with the defeat and humiliation of the Algerian War, and that

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<sup>1</sup> Stora, *Le Transfert d'une mémoire*.

consequently, have entered a period of repression in which the realities of the war are denied. However, as Freud has shown, repressed events have a tendency to return to trouble the present, and it can be argued that many within France are now effectively haunted by the events of the war. There are also signs that French society may be moving out of its period of repression to enter a new stage of commemorative frenzy. Although this may not necessarily be an entirely positive move, it may be due in part to the efforts of writers and historians who have sought to reinsert the events of the war into the national narrative. Questions of the interaction of war-time events, literature, and the French national narrative are complex, and a full investigation is outwith the scope of the present research. However, by using a case-study approach to a single event, it may be possible to draw some broader conclusions about the workings of collective memory and cultural narrative. Following this approach, the chapter looks at the literary representations of the events which occurred in Paris on 17 October 1961. It traces contemporary reactions, and considers their evolution over time, and the part played in this development by historical and literary narratives.

The massacre by French police of between 50 and 200 unarmed Algerians demonstrating against the curfew imposed on them by police chief Maurice Papon, which occurred in the streets of Paris on the night of 17 October 1961, occupies a unique place in recent French history. What was intended as a peaceful protest by immigrant workers and their families, dressed in their best clothes, resulted in widespread savage beatings and shootings by the Paris riot police. That night 11,538 Algerians were arrested and held in the Palais des sports, an unknown number were thrown into the Seine to drown, and many were later deported to Algerian detention camps.<sup>2</sup> No comparable event caused so little reaction at the time, and it was only after a period of twenty years had elapsed that the silence was broken by the publication of texts on the subject, first literary and later historical.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Anne Tristan, *La Silence du fleuve: ce crime que nous n'avons toujours pas nommé* (Bezons: Au Nom de la Mémoire, 1991), p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> Literary texts include Didier Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, [1984] 1999); Nacer Kettane, *Le Sourire de Brahim* (Paris: Denoël, 1985); Mehdi Lallaoui, *Les Beurs de Seine* (Paris: L'Arcantère, 1986); François Maspero, *Le Figuier* (Paris: Seuil, 1988); Tassadit Imache, *Une fille sans histoire* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1989); Paul Smaïl, *Vivre me tue* (Paris: Balland, 1997); Nancy Huston, *L'Empreinte de l'ange* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1998); and Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 1999). For historical accounts, see Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La Bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1991); Anne Tristan, *La Silence du fleuve*; Jean-Paul Brunet, *Police contre FLN. Le*

This chapter analyses three literary representations which aim to recover the massacre as a historical event lost from the national consciousness because of the horror of what took place that night. It includes one of the earliest texts to feature the massacre, Didier Daeninckx's *polar*, *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984), the little-studied novel by François Maspéro, *Le Figuier* (1988) and one of the more recent texts, Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999). It argues that although the Paris massacre was unique in the scale of its brutality, the reactions to it have been indicative of wider attitudes towards the Algerian War. In representing the massacre, Sebbar, Maspéro and Daeninckx do not simply give a voice to its forgotten victims, but both reinsert it into the context of France's wider history, and demonstrate its implications for French society today. The chapter looks at the ways in which this representation functions in the novels, and also assesses the extent to which they have been successful in creating an intervention in the national narrative which has so far regulated attitudes towards France's colonial past.

### The significance of the Paris massacre

From an historical perspective, 17 October 1961 stands as the decisive moment when the Algerian War crossed the Mediterranean and entered the heart of Paris. As one of the largest police massacres of civilians in France, it demands a place in French history by right, as Stora says: 'Le 17 octobre marque ce transfert de la guerre de l'Algérie vers la France, et s'inscrit comme l'une des rares fois, depuis le dix-neuvième siècle, où la police a tiré sur des ouvriers à Paris'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, although witnessed by large numbers of passers-by on the Parisian boulevards, the events of that night were almost immediately forgotten. Jim House and Neil MacMaster point to a number of factors which led to its erasure from public memory, including government (in)action, FLN reluctance to destabilise peace negotiations, divisions

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*drame d'octobre 1961* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999); and, banned upon its publication, Paulette Péju, *Ratonnades à Paris* (Paris: Maspéro, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> Stora, *Le Transfert d'une mémoire*, p. 107.

amongst the political mainstream, and the deaths at Charonne in early 1962.<sup>5</sup> However, with French newspaper reports appearing as early as 18 and 19 October 1961, there is no doubt that public unwillingness to acknowledge the consequences of police brutality played a major part in the twenty-five year silence which followed.<sup>6</sup> Writing in 1999, Stora traced the evolution of memories of the event, and contrasted its commemoration in Algeria with its reception in France:

La mémoire du 17 octobre 1961, en Algérie, sera commémorée comme 'la journée de l'immigration'. [...] Côté français, la date sera soigneusement dissimulée. Elle resurgit dans l'espace public en 1991, lorsque des enfants d'immigrés organisent une manifestation anniversaire. Mais cette reconnaissance est difficile, comme le montre le déroulement du procès intenté par Maurice Papon à Jean-Luc Einaudi.<sup>7</sup>

The difficulty of recognizing the massacre has not eased over time: as recently as October 2005, Stora claimed that the massacre continues to be absent from the narrative of France's past because the French have chosen to repress knowledge of it.

Il est inexact de parler de silence au sujet des massacres du 17 octobre 1961. [...] Le problème est que les Français refoulent ce passé. Rien, ni documentaire, ni fiction, ne s'imprime dans la mémoire collective. Nous sommes frappés d'amnésie.<sup>8</sup>

The question of why it might be that no artistic expression has penetrated the amnesia around the massacre is one that this chapter will consider in a later section.

It is notable that Tahar Ben Jelloun employs the same trope of amnesia to describe the aftermath of the Algerian War. This suggests a link between attitudes towards the specific event of October 1961, and the broader events of the Algerian War:

Entre la France et l'Algérie subsiste une mémoire. Elle n'est pas saine. C'est une part meurtrie d'une histoire commune qui n'a pas su accepter la réalité. La guerre de libération puis l'indépendance de l'Algérie n'ont pas été réellement enregistrées dans le grand cahier de l'histoire française. *Une sorte d'amnésie frappe cette partie de l'histoire* de la décolonisation, proclamée mais pas assumée dans la conscience sociale, politique et historique de la France. Que de fois des hommes politiques ont

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<sup>5</sup> Jim House and Neil MacMaster, 'Une Journée portée disparue': The Paris Massacre of 1961 and Memory', in *Crisis and Renewal in France Since the First World War, 1918-1962*, ed. by Kenneth Mouré and Martin S. Alexander (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2002), pp. 267-291 (pp. 274-7).

<sup>6</sup> See for example *L'Aurore*, 18 October 1961; *Parisien libéré*, 18 October 1961, cited in Tristan, *La Silence du fleuve*, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Stora, *Le Transfert d'une mémoire*, p. 107.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Stora, 'Entretien entre Michael Haneke et Benjamin Stora, à propos du film *Caché*', *La Vie*, 4 October 2005, p. 75.

dit: 'La page est tournée'! Langue de bois, slogan sans fondement, image naïve. Pour tourner une page, il faudrait d'abord ouvrir le grand livre et le lire. Or la 'lecture' de cette guerre, et aussi les cent trente ans qui l'ont précédée, n'a pas été faite, ou bien elle l'a été partiellement, en sautant des pages, et en arrachant d'autres.

Chacun a fait la lecture qui l'intéressait.<sup>9</sup>

In her investigation of the role of amnesia, Anne Donadey acknowledges the importance of the denial surrounding the defeat which ended the Algerian War, and compares attitudes towards that conflict to the evolving reactions to Vichy which Henri Rousso referred to as 'le syndrome de Vichy'.<sup>10</sup> In his book of the same title, Rousso identified four phases in the evolution of France's relationship to the period of Vichy France: the first phase, one of mourning interrupted by the Algerian War (1944-54); the second, one of repression, forgetting and amnesia, with a replay due to the Algerian War (1954-71); the third, a short return of the repressed and shattering of established myths about the war (1971-74); and finally, the last phase in which we are still engaged, of obsession.<sup>11</sup> Writing in 1996, Donadey argued that feelings towards the Algerian War are following the same four-phase process as for Vichy, starting with a phase of interrupted mourning, with mourning for the loss of French Algeria being stifled by the repression of the pain and shame created by the war. This repression, with its accompanying amnesia, forms the second and, according to Donadey, current phase:

Regarding the Algerian War, France is still immersed in the second phase of the syndrome, that of repression. French efforts to repress that period create, in Rousso's words, 'des rejeux de la faille' (p. 87). Just as the Algerian War acted as a replay of the earlier trauma [of Vichy] and allowed unresolved issues about it to resurface, the subsequent obsession about World War II, in turn, helped cover up the painful scars of the new conflict.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Hospitalité française: Racisme et immigration maghrébine* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), p. 22, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> Anne Donadey, "Une certaine idée de la France": The Algeria Syndrome and Struggles over "French" Identity', in *Identity Papers: Contested Nationhood in Twentieth-Century France*, ed. by Steven Ungar and Tom Conley (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 215-232.

<sup>11</sup> Henri Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy 1944-198...* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), pp. 21-22.

<sup>12</sup> Donadey, "Une certaine idée de la France", p. 218.

In the ten years since Donadey produced this assessment, there have been signs of change, despite the assertions of Stora and others that denial continues to dominate. The success of this change, and its possible causes, will be considered shortly.

The Paris massacre can therefore be read as a defining event in France's relationship with Algeria, with the denial and amnesia surrounding the acts committed on that night constituting a microcosm of attitudes towards the wider Algerian War. By representing the massacre in their work, French novelists are therefore inviting their readers to engage with a broader set of issues regarding Franco-Algerian relations. Moreover, as Jelloun suggests, although they have remained resolutely buried from view, these issues continue to exert a powerful influence on questions of social integration and national identity within French society. This was seen during the riots of November 2005, which led to the imposition of a curfew under legislation not used since Papon's curfew of 1961, effectively signalling to the disaffected *banlieusards* that their position in French society had not substantially altered since the days of the Algerian War. For all of these reasons, the massacre of October 1961 may operate as a key to recovering and addressing memories of that period of French history.

In his work *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora identifies an oppositional relationship between history and memory. For him, 'L'histoire est la reconstruction toujours problématique et incomplète de ce qui n'est plus. La mémoire est un phénomène toujours actuel, un lien vécu au présent éternel; l'histoire, une représentation du passé'.<sup>13</sup> In an era of globalisation, he sees the lived experience of memory as being under threat, subsumed in the move from memory-oriented societies into history: 'c'est le mode même de la perception historique qui, média aidant, s'est prodigieusement dilaté, substituant à une mémoire repliée sur l'héritage de sa propre intimité la pellicule éphémère de l'actualité'.<sup>14</sup> In response to the disappearance of memory, Nora points to the construction of memorial places, or

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Entre Mémoire et histoire: la problématique des lieux', in *Les Lieux de mémoire, La République*, ed. by Pierre Nora, 7 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992), I, p. xix.

<sup>14</sup> Nora, 'Entre Mémoire et histoire', p. xviii.

'lieux de mémoire' – described as material, symbolic and functional – which are required because places of memory, or 'milieux de mémoire', no longer exist.<sup>15</sup>

It was through literary texts rather than revisionist history that writers first undertook the task of representing the lost events of that night. In doing so, they are engaged in mediating the relationship between history and memory, by recovering residual traces of memory, and seeking to reinsert these into a historical narrative that has hitherto excluded them. In contrast to the deeply antagonistic relationship described by Nora, literary writing perhaps offers an opportunity for synthesis between the opposing terms of history and memory. Literature is uniquely suited to this task because of the nature of memory, described by Nora: 'Parce qu'elle est affective et magique, la mémoire ne s'accommode que des détails qui la confortent; elle se nourrit de souvenirs flous, télescopants, globaux ou flottants, particuliers ou symboliques'.<sup>16</sup>

The ability of literature to encompass metaphor and symbolism allows the writer creatively to re-imagine the remembered details, and to make new connections and associations which enable memory to be inserted into history because literature allows the contemporary reader to relate it to the present. As Nora goes on to say, 'La mémoire, en effet, n'a jamais connu que deux formes de légitimité: historique ou littéraire'.<sup>17</sup> The literary text therefore becomes in a sense a 'lieu de mémoire', and the recovered memory becomes an invitation to the reader to engage in remembering in a way that can challenge existing assumptions. Although novelists are not concerned to unearth the concrete facts of historical events for their own sake, historians do not dispute the influence and reach of their texts, as David Lowenthal admits: 'The most pellucid pearls of historical narrative are often found in fiction, long a major component of historical understanding. More people apprehend the past through historical novels [...] than through any formal history'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Although Nora includes a chapter on immigration in *Les Lieux de mémoire* (in which Gérard Noiriel argues that immigrants have been excluded from national memory), he has been reluctant to consider the necessity for the establishment of 'lieux de mémoire' which commemorate colonialism.

<sup>16</sup> Nora, 'Entre Mémoire et histoire', p. xix.

<sup>17</sup> Nora, 'Entre Mémoire et histoire', p. xlii.

<sup>18</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 220.

The three novelists here are concerned with the effect which memory, recovered and inserted into the historical narrative, can have on our perceptions of the present. As Lowenthal puts it, ‘The novelist most critically affects the past by modernizing it. “To all situations one brings a modern spirit”, in Goethe’s words, “for only in this way can we understand them and, indeed, bear to see them”’.<sup>19</sup> Memory here is not about the past, but is about a remaking of the past for the present, more easily accepted, perhaps, in light of Foucault’s insights into history as discourse.

While Linda Hutcheon demolishes the claim of history to any kind of objective ‘truth’, literature has a particular role to play in the way it re-imagines and stages its memories.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly acute in the recollections of traumatic events such as the Paris massacre, as Attridge outlines:

Thus the tradition of realist fiction should be understood – in so far as it is literature and not a type of history read for its vivid representation of past events – as a staging of objectivity, an invitation to experience the knowability of the world. We learn from literature not truth, but what the telling (or denying) of the truth is. Recent criticism has often stressed the power of literary works as witnesses to historical traumas; here again, the works in question function in several ways at once, and there is no contradiction involved in saying that, as testimonies, they witness in a powerful manner and at the same time, as literary works, they stage the activity of witnessing.<sup>21</sup>

The novels in this chapter are witnesses to the historical trauma that unfolded on 17 October 1961: they draw on historical sources and eye witness accounts, and call attention to the experiences and suffering of those caught up in the massacre, which the French authorities, and indeed the public at large, have been reluctant to recognise. As the publication records show, novelists were the first to engage in this process, with their work followed later by that of historians. But what the novels achieve which historians cannot is the staging of the activity of witness: that is, the performance of the events through the literary devices of narrative, metaphor, mimesis amongst others, thereby making connections with other historical events. This in turn opens the narrative to new layers of possible meaning, allowing

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<sup>19</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p. 225.

<sup>20</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 97.



ambiguity and questions to challenge previous assumptions. Through the literary conventions of this act of performance, therefore, the text calls for a response from the reader, who becomes complicit in the act of creation.

The term 'writing' used as a noun signals this paradoxical but familiar temporality: it implies that the activity of creating a text does not end when the author puts down the pen or exits the word-processing program. The text remains a writing as long as it is read. (If it is unread it is merely a 'written').<sup>22</sup>

Because the reader participates in the act of (re-)creation by choosing to engage in the event of reading, she becomes an active witness to the historical traumas contained in these texts, and comes under an obligation as a 'responsible' reader to respond accordingly. The trauma of the historical event is thereby witnessed and paralleled by the reader in the event of reading; in a sense it takes place again each time the event of reading re-enacts it. The engagement of reading involves allowing the otherness of the literary text to act upon the reader, thereby challenging the norms and assumptions that have constituted her idioculture thus far. The staging of the activity of witnessing is part of the singularity of literature, and the specific ways in which it is achieved are the subject of the next section.

### Collective remembering

The first of the three novels is Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999). Although the most recently published of the three texts, it shares its central concern with the earliest published novel, Daeninckx's *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984), since both are concerned with the characters' quest for hidden truth. In Sebbar's novel, set in 1996, this quest is sparked by the refusal of the older generation to speak about the terrible, but vague and undefined, events which they lived through in 1961.<sup>23</sup> Sebbar insists on the relevance to wider French society by having three young characters, who represent disparate French, 'beur' and Algerian groups, embark on a process of recovering memories of the past. By directly involving the younger generation, none

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<sup>22</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 1999).

of whom were alive at the time of the massacre, in the quest for the truth of what took place that night, Sebbar is drawing on Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'postmemory', insisting that events that occurred in the past can continue to exert power and influence over later generations. Hirsch defines 'postmemory' in the following terms:

Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. [...] Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood or recreated.<sup>24</sup>

The refusal of the generation who lived through the massacre to speak about the events of that night demonstrates that an event can continue to shape narrative, perhaps particularly family narrative, even in the absence of the horrific details involved. Postmemory therefore functions as a reminder that the significance of a past event can extend far beyond those involved on the night.

As is frequently the case in Sebbar's fiction, the main protagonist is a young 'beur' girl, named Amel, who is joined in her search for the truth by Omar, a young Algerian journalist who has come to France after his life was threatened in Algeria. Their quest runs parallel with the film being made by Louis, the French son of a wartime *porteur de valise*, who has persuaded Amel's mother to break her silence and bear witness to her memories in front of his camera. Her account is interspersed with the recollections of a police officer, *harki*, café owner, *porteur de valise* and others involved that night. The resulting film is a tapestry of testimonies, a *lieu de mémoire* in which collective remembering across the generations is made possible. Sebbar thus stages the act of witnessing in a deliberate and self-conscious manner, through the efforts of the various young people determined to discover the facts of the past, and to hear it directly from those involved.

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<sup>24</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22. The most obvious example of postmemory, which Hirsch explores in her book, is the effect of the Holocaust on the children of concentration camp victims.

While many academics have commented on the contemporary emphasis in France on the *devoir de mémoire*, Sebbar's novel reminds us of the pain that is associated with the process of remembering events of trauma. Through the figure of Noria, the mother who has chosen not to burden her daughter, Amel, with the knowledge of that night, Sebbar reminds us of what Todorov calls 'le droit à l'oubli'.<sup>25</sup> However, as Sebbar makes clear, both remembering, and choosing not to remember, come at a cost. Noria finally chooses to break her silence in order to share her memories with the camera, and through it, her daughter, and ultimately the reader.

In the light of this recovered memory, Anne Donadey argues that Sebbar is engaged in constructing an anamnesis, a collective remembrance of a lost event, which she claims is of particular importance to immigrant history.<sup>26</sup> Because historical knowledge of the event is not passed on through the State education system, Donadey argues that 'there is a need for alternative ways of learning about history, whether through the oral testimonies of participants or through literary rewritings'.<sup>27</sup> By drawing on a range of disparate sources, Sebbar's text itself becomes an example of Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, a receptacle for the fragments of memories which here have been silenced or forgotten, of which Louis's film is a *mise en abyme*. The self-conscious nature of Sebbar's text which, unlike other fictional texts that only mention the massacre in passing, is entirely focused around the details of the night of 17 October, and which is openly concerned with gathering and making accessible the accounts of those who witnessed these events, means that it perfectly fits Nora's definition of a *lieu de mémoire* as an artificial and deliberately constructed attempt to recall the past.

But while Donadey argues that in constructing a *lieu de mémoire*, Sebbar is rewriting an anamnesis or collective remembering, it is not always entirely clear who is expected to engage with this process of remembering. Although the title of

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<sup>25</sup> Todorov, *Les Abus de la mémoire*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Anne Donadey, 'Anamnesis and National Reconciliation: Re-membering October 17, 1961', in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, ed. by Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx, Contributions to the Study of World Literature, no. 106 (Westport, C.T. and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 44-56 (p. 48).

<sup>27</sup> Donadey, 'Anamnesis and National Reconciliation', p. 49.

Donadey's article, 'National Reconciliation', suggests that she reads the text as concerned with the importance of the event to the whole of French society, she nevertheless emphasises that Sebbar, like other writers of Maghrebi descent such as Nacer Kettane and Paul Smail, is engaged in highlighting the importance of 17 October 'for immigrant history'.<sup>28</sup> This claim appears logical when read against the background of Sebbar's previous novels, many of which concern the issues faced by Algerian immigrants, or their 'beur' descendants.<sup>29</sup> It is underlined by the title of the book in which Donadey's chapter appears – *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France* – and by her criticism of Didier Daeninckx, in his earlier fictional treatment of the massacre. Daeninckx opens his novel, *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984), with an account of the massacre seen through the eyes of Algerian demonstrators, but the rest of his narrative concerns Franco-French characters and their remembrance of Vichy and the part played by a Papon-like figure in the deportation of Jews. Although the novel contains explicit comparisons of the crimes committed against Jews and Algerians, Donadey nevertheless attacks what she sees as Daeninckx's privileging of Vichy history: 'While Daeninckx's novel deals with the erasure of French memory, it has little to say about immigrant memory and thus unwillingly participates in the continued silencing of the October 1961 massacre'.<sup>30</sup>

Donadey's reading of Sebbar is therefore at odds with her claim that *La Seine était rouge* is a text of collective remembering. Far from constructing a truly inclusive anamnesis, it would appear that, as with many of her other novels, here Sebbar is constructing an alternative history which includes the hitherto unheard story of the Maghrebi immigrants who lived through that period. Her text, which opens paradoxically with silence: 'Sa mère ne lui a rien dit, ni la mère de sa mère', is then punctuated with the recurrent refrain, 'Amel entend la voix de sa mère', and eventually becomes 'On entend la voix de la mère'. This progression from silence to a broad and collective hearing re-establishes lost history initially for the descendants of those concerned. It then only tentatively makes this available to the wider

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<sup>28</sup> See Kettane, *Le Sourire de Brahim*; Lallaoui, *Les Beurs de Seine*; Imache, *Une fille sans histoire*; and Smail, *Vivre me tue*.

<sup>29</sup> Sebbar, *Shérazade*; *Les Carnets de Shérazade* (Paris: Stock, 1985); *La Jeune Fille au balcon* (Paris: Seuil, 2001); *Sept Filles* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Donadey, 'Anamnesis and National Reconciliation', p. 50.

community of readers, who are included in the community of listeners through the use of the pronoun 'on'.<sup>31</sup> This suggests that Sebbar is staging her act of witness primarily as an appeal to the ethnic minority community in France, and that while she makes a case for the massacre's significance for wider French society, her main concern is the recovery of memory about the circumstances of Algerian deaths.

But the film is about more than the gathering of the past. It also records the reinscription of the past onto the present, as two of the characters, Amel and Omar, set out in search of the sites which figured in that night in 1961. In this it could be argued that Sebbar is following the strategies of Assia Djebar, the francophone Algerian author and member of the Académie française, whose novels often seek to rewrite a new history of Algeria which would incorporate the lost experiences of generations of Algerian women into the existing narrative of the past. As Valérie Orlando argues:

Djebar employs a multivalent perspective to reinscribe the multiple stories of the Other's past and present. She seeks not to wipe the historic slate clean of the former colonial presence in her own country, but to refocus the reader's gaze on overlooked events in France's archives on Algeria. Layers of history are incorporated into her narrative, creating a palimpsest text, a text through which multiple views encompassing both French and Algerian spheres may be read.<sup>32</sup>

In *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar also is engaged in the creation of a palimpsest text. The process of the layering of history is clearly seen as Amel and Omar set out to trace and re-enact the progress of the Algerian demonstrators. Their destinations are the landmarks of Paris: la Défense, République, la Concorde, the metro station at Bonne Nouvelle, Saint Michel, and Orly, all now lent a new significance through their association with the massacre. In crossing Paris, Amel and Omar are inscribing another trace of history upon the city. When, at the sites of the massacre, they find no monument to those killed, they take it upon themselves to remake the city's official *lieux de mémoire* by marking them with red spray paint, thereby transforming the government plaques which recall official French history into palimpsests of the

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<sup>31</sup> Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 13; p. 32, p. 40, p. 57, p. 83; p. 126.

<sup>32</sup> Orlando, *Nomadic Voices of Exile*, p. 111.

Algerian War narrative.<sup>33</sup> Their graffiti creates memorial sites, replacing the absence left by amnesia with presence. Thus the significance of the plaque on the wall of La Santé prison, with its celebration of resistance against the occupier, is fundamentally altered, with the French now cast in the role of occupiers. The plaque, which formerly read

En cette prison  
le 11 novembre 1940  
furent incarcérés  
des lycéens et des étudiants  
qui à l'appel du Général de Gaulle  
se dressèrent les premiers  
contre l'occupant

is overwritten with the following words:

1954 – 1962  
Dans cette prison  
furent guillotines  
des résistants algériens  
qui se dressèrent  
contre l'occupant français.<sup>34</sup>

An alternative version of history is thus inscribed which challenges the official Gaullist narrative of France as nation of *résistants*, the heroic many against the traitorous few, and presents the French as colonisers and as perpetrators. It is the novel's boldest, and arguably most successful, tactic, destabilising the dominant memory and forcing a reconsideration of what was previously accepted. The text therefore functions as a counter-memory, an alternative reading of the narrative of history from a neglected angle. The process of over-writing does not erase the earlier discourse, which is still visible as a palimpsest beneath the graffiti, but its totalising effect is destabilised by the reinscription of a lost layer of history which now exists in

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<sup>33</sup> Jim House and Neil MacMaster make the point that 'For the Algerian War, it is difficult to find a single memorial site either in France or Algeria'. 'Une journée portée disparue', p. 279.

<sup>34</sup> Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, pp. 29-30.

parallel with the national narrative. Fictional narrative thus emphasises the complex and heterogeneous nature of its equivalent, historical narrative.

If this insistence on a revision of French history is the text's strength, then its weakness lies in the emphasis laid on the place of 17 October 1961 in immigrant memory. The symbolism of the massacre, and the reasons for its suppression, relate to its significance for the French state and its conduct during the Algerian War and beyond. To reduce it to a lost episode of Algerian history which must be recovered neglects other aspects of immigrant history which are of at least as much significance, such as the MNA-FLN feud which, during the war years, caused an estimated 4,000 deaths in France. The commemoration of the events of 1961 by commentators who emphasise its importance for immigrants without reinserting it into French history risks constructing a myth of Algerian martyrdom in which Algerians see themselves only and always as victims, suffering at the hands of French oppressors. As the French obsession with Vichy demonstrates, the casting of a group in the role of historic and eternal victim can fossilise the heterogeneous play of forces, resulting in a mummified memory which prevents the evolution of a society with a new balance of power. The reinsertion of 17 October 1961 into French history is therefore crucial to its successful recovery.

### Layers of reality: the forgotten war in France

In his novel *Le Figuier* (1988), François Maspero also deals with the events of 17 October 1961, based on his own first-hand experiences of that night, witnessing police brutality and helping injured Algerians back to the safety of his bookshop. Maspero's involvement is well-known, indeed he is mentioned as a historical figure in *La Seine était rouge*, although there the fictionalised account is delivered by the anonymous manager of his bookshop on the rue Saint-Séverin. Autobiographically inspired, *Le Figuier* differs from Sebbar's text in that it situates October 1961 in the broader context of the years of the Algerian War. Having opened 'La Vigie' bookshop, the narrator, François Serre, is sent to fight in Algeria for two years, leaving the running of his business to his friend and colleague, Manuel Bixio. His

experiences of the war are briefly described, but the emphasis on humanity establishes the basis for the evolution of attitudes which will follow:

Dans les postes isolés, dans les commandos de chasse, je sus que ces frères dont je devais, suivant la morale de mon père, me sentir solidaire, étaient autant en face qu'à mes côtés: j'assistai à leur massacre.<sup>35</sup>

The focus of the novel is clearly the task of inserting memory into French history: it includes comparatively few details of the war in Algeria, instead focusing on war-time events which take place within Paris. The massacre is therefore part of a wider act of bearing witness to the attitudes and conduct of sections of French society during the war. Maspero stages the war from the perspective of minor 'intellectuels engagés', and locates the massacre within a broader context of atrocities committed in war-time Paris, and by performing his characters' reactions of outrage and indignation to what unfolds, he invites the reader to see the war from a different perspective.

As the round-ups of Algerian men in Paris increase, with many deported to Algeria or forced to join the burgeoning *bidonvilles* of Nanterre, the climate of unconcerned racism amongst middle-class Parisians deepens. Attacks on the bookshop add to the sense of a *guerre Franco-Français*, but it is the detailed and explicit account of torture conducted in the heart of Paris which is the most shocking. Hocine Rachid's account of his arrest and release by French police demonstrates the cynicism with which the state authorities manipulate Algerian suspects, releasing them only for them to be immediately seized by plain-clothes police and detained unofficially by the *harki* detachments of the rue de la Goutte-d'Or. The experience of the torture administered to Rachid is far from unique, shared by tens of others not only in the Goutte d'Or but in centres in rue du Château-des-Rentiers, and in rue Harvey. Techniques include water torture, electric shocks, and impalements on bottles, all of which were also carried out by the French army in Algeria. Many of the detainees do not survive to be transferred to the detention camp at Larzac where Rachid reports that 3,000 Algerians are being held indefinitely. Set against this backdrop, the events of 17 October, far from being an isolated incident, are shown to

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<sup>35</sup> François Maspero, *Le Figuier* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), p. 37.



be consistent with an atmosphere of orchestrated police brutality towards immigrant workers. Maspero demonstrates that, unknown to the majority of French citizens, the war in Algeria had crossed the Mediterranean and was also being waged in France. By including the description of torture in his text with the account of the October massacre, he inscribes the violence of the cultural clash between France and Algeria in material, embodied terms, presenting the traces of memory through physical scars on bodies. The physical consequences of the intercultural encounter bear similarities to the physical characteristics of abjection, with its emphasis on vomit and bodily fluids, and to the experience of sensory perception through which Idriss and Amar encounter French society in Chapter Two.

From the outset, both François and Manuel are against the war. After François leaves for Algeria, and the round-ups of Algerian men in Paris increase, Manuel takes up the Algerian cause and surreptitiously begins circulating copies of Henri Alleg's *La Question*, the suppressed account of the torture suffered in Algeria by a concentration camp escapee, and then of François's war memoirs, entitled *Oradours en Kabylie*. The comparison between the conduct of the Nazis and the French is also picked up in Daeninckx's novel, which appeared four years before *Le Figuier*. This recourse to literature is the response of both François and Manuel to the need to protest against the war:

'Que faire?' dis-je à Manuel. [...] 'Tout ce qu'on peut encore faire, une fois qu'on est pris dans la machine, c'est de témoigner, et encore: où et comment élever un témoignage qui soit davantage qu'une voix isolée et perdue? C'est en France même qu'il faut organiser, politiquement, collectivement, la protestation et le refus.'<sup>36</sup>

Thus when the availability of anti-war texts becomes restricted by the application of state censorship against publishers, Manuel takes advice and opens his own small publishing house, defying the immediate bans placed on his texts, risking reprisals in order to make public the painstaking scripts of political prisoners. Their faith is in the effectiveness of information:

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<sup>36</sup> Maspero, *Le Figuier*, p. 48.

Je lui répète que le seul combat que nous puissions mener, et le plus efficace, c'est avec nos armes à nous qu'il faut continuer à le livrer, l'information, l'explication, les livres, les articles, une lutte sans cesse recommencée.<sup>37</sup>

The response of François and Manuel recognises that the written word has the potential to challenge and transform the individual reader in the act of reading, allowing otherness, and new perspectives, to impact on the existing assumptions which constitute reality. Their opposition to the war does not take the form of violent combat – although Manuel flirts with the idea of becoming a militant, he is always out of his depth – as they recognise the transforming potential offered by the introduction of a new discourse. In this sense, Manuel's publishing house is a *mise en abyme* of Maspero's own project, for by including the account of Hocine Rachid's torture, and the details of 17 October 1961, albeit in fictionalised form, Maspero is engaged in the same process of influencing attitudes, this time in late 1980s France.

In addition to emphasising the potential of literature, Maspero recognises the power of the photographic image to challenge preconceptions. Mary, a Franco-Irish photographer, takes endless photographs of the consequences of the war, in the Nanterre *bidonville*, in Algeria and most notably during the night of 17 October. As with Manuel's texts, the images bear witness to the experiences of those otherwise deprived of a voice. By demonstrating the positive function of photography, Maspero's text contrasts with the intellectual tradition outlined in Chapter Two, which emphasised the reifying power of the (photographic) image. Mary's use of photography as a means of bearing witness is at odds with the experiences of Lalla, Malika and Shérazade in Chapter One, all of whom are photographed by men as a surrogate means of possession. Their images are commoditised, featuring in fashion and travel magazines. However, it is worth noting that the rehabilitation of photography cannot be linked to gender, since the photographer who precipitated Idriss's journey to France was also a Western woman. Instead, it is her motivation, to shed light on the hidden experiences of those whose voices remain unheard, which distinguishes Mary's photography from others in this study. The power of her work is acknowledged by the French authorities who raid her lodgings; more grimly, her

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<sup>37</sup> Maspero, *Le Figuier*, p. 142.

photographs and militancy finally lead to her death at the hands of the government of Nueva Cordoba. By its actions, the French establishment is thus paralleled with a brutal and unelected military junta.

Just as van Cauwelaert emphasised the potential of storytelling to create new forms of discourse, so Maspero underscores the potential of the literary process for creating new forms of reality. He achieves this by embedding examples directly within his plot. The significance of the creation of the literary object through the process of editing and typesetting – a process surrounded by a Benjaminian sense of aura – is most powerfully conveyed through the character of F G, the man whose publishing house provides the title of the novel, and whose experience inspires Manuel both politically and creatively. Yet nothing about this central character, from his name(s) to his many translations, is as it seems.

Peu avant Noël, F G pose sur le dessus de la pile hebdomadaire une enveloppe qui porte, écrit de sa main, le nom de Manuel Bixio. Celui-ci l'ouvre et en retire une plaquette brève et mince à la couverture bleue pâle: il s'agit de *l'Ode à la baleine franche* du grand poète irlandais Oohnagh Parmantier, 'adaptée du gaélique par F G'. L'achevé d'imprimerie précise que le tirage en est limité à 99 exemplaires, 'au seuil de cette nouvelle année 1958, pour saluer ses amis et compagnons de travail'. Manuel voit qu'il lui est échu le numéro 91.

Il ne lui vient pas à l'esprit que le célèbre Oohnagh Parmantier n'a jamais vécu que dans l'imagination de son adaptateur. Plus tard, il sera vigilant: il apprendra à déjouer ces masques.<sup>38</sup>

In his publications, and in the stories he recounts, F G remakes an alternative history, one full of absences, but seductive and convincing to the unaware. As a character, he encourages questioning and the absence of an easy acceptance of the past. This is something of which Manuel becomes aware as he recollects F G's advice on publishing. What he remembered as elegantly-phrased paragraphs of guidance, he now realises were delivered quite differently: the reality has been corrupted by memory:

Dit-il vraiment les choses ainsi? Piège classique de la mémoire. En fait il ne parle jamais si longtemps. Il s'exprime par courtes rafales inachevées et c'est toujours à l'occasion d'un détail – qui peut être la couleur du ciel ce jour-là, comme la longueur

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<sup>38</sup> Maspero, *Le Figuier*, pp. 23-4.

d'un titre sur une couverture – qu'il lâche quelques phrases sur un ton qui en gomme l'importance.<sup>39</sup>

It is clear here that memory is prone to becoming corrupted over time, and not through some detached and disinterested process. More frequently it is contaminated by the ideologies of the present, as we seek to avoid dissonance between our memories and our present realities. To accept memories unquestioningly is therefore to take on board a reality which may be quite different from that which was true at the time, as F G is aware:

'Je crois bien que j'ai connu, dans ma vie, quelque chose qui ressemble à cela: comme un sentiment de liberté qui vous prend lorsqu'on touche le fond.'

'Quand?' interroge Manuel.

F G hésite, puis répond, à regret:

'Je ne sais pas. Je ne sais plus. Quelques jours avant la libération du camp, par exemple.' Il hausse les épaules: 'Mais c'est probablement le genre d'histoire qu'on s'invente après coup. C'est si facile, à quinze ans de distance.'<sup>40</sup>

The elusiveness and corruptability of memory is an issue to which Maspero returns repeatedly. Its evolution over time is not something to be easily accepted; characters must struggle to bear witness faithfully to what they have seen, as François affirms on his return from Algeria:

Je veux témoigner. Je m'y étais engagé. J'écris pour Manuel ce que j'ai vu, ce que nous avons fait là-bas. [...] Il me faut écrire pour mener une lutte, me faire une violence qui m'épuisent. Ne pas céder à l'oubli, au bienfait du brouillard qui noie le passé: se battre avec les images, pour les maintenir vivantes. Les cerner, les ordonner, les nommer à voix haute, et ne pas les refouler comme on évacue les cauchemars au réveil.<sup>41</sup>

Without the effort to recall, as François says, 'jusqu'à l'obsessionnel', memory will deteriorate and become deceptive. Contrary to Todorov's criticisms, obsession with memory is here presented as necessary, even crucial, to the preservation of the past. However, Maspero is clear that this obsession is not simply a question of passive commemoration, but is an active engagement, needed to combat the natural tendency

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<sup>39</sup> Maspero, *Le Figuier*, p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> Maspero, *Le Figuier*, p. 97.

<sup>41</sup> Maspero, *Le Figuier*, p. 57.

of memory to corrupt over time in order that an accurate representation of the past may be possible. Literature offers a unique means of bearing witness to the ephemeral memory of events, since literary language offers the inventive potential to create new meanings and associations. However, the openness of literary language also implies an equal potential for ambiguity, which may work either for or against memory. Throughout the text, therefore, Maspero implies that we must learn to be cunning, to be constantly alert and questioning our assumptions about the past as we remember it, following the experience and example of his characters: '[Manuel] apprit à ruser. Ruser avec le temps, ruser avec les pièges de la mémoire.'<sup>42</sup>

Written twenty-five years after the events it records, *Le Figuier* calls us to interrogate our assumptions about history. By combining details of 17 October 1961 (based, no doubt, on Maspero's own eye-witness accounts of that night) with the fictional histories of F G and other characters, history and fiction are shown to be two different forms of narrative, both of which are permeated with unreliability and ideology. The certainty of the accepted discourse around the Algerian War is directly challenged through the account of arrests and torture carried out in Paris, undermining the established belief that the war took place 'là-bas', and destabilising the categories of 'civilised' and 'savage'. Maspero's text is thus a fundamental call to reconsider France's colonial past.

### Victim or perpetrator? French conceptions of self

While Maspero exposes the weaknesses in the discursive signifying system that is history and offers an alternative to the selective tradition of the Algerian War, Didier Daeninckx's novel, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, issues a different challenge to dominant conceptions of France's past. The opening two chapters of the novel deal directly with the events of the October 1961 massacre, told from the point of view of the Algerian workers involved. Thereafter the focus moves to Franco-French characters, and the investigation of a murder committed twenty years later in Toulouse.

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<sup>42</sup> Maspero, *Le Figuier*, p. 236.

Daeninckx's regular protagonist, Inspector Cadin, discovers that the murder of Bernard Thiraud is linked to that of his father, Roger Thiraud, who was assassinated in 1961 by the French authorities under the cover of the October demonstration. Both men were killed because of their historical investigations into the deportation of French Jews, initially held at Drancy before being put onto the trains to Auschwitz. The character responsible for their deaths is a thinly-veiled reference to the figure of Maurice Papon, the Paris *préfet* who ordered the curfew against the Algerians and commanded the police who suppressed the demonstrators in 1961, and who was tried in 1997-98 for his part in the deportation of Jews during World War II. Much historical analysis of Papon's actions has already been carried out, and I do not propose to go into it here.<sup>43</sup> However, he plays a pivotal role in Daeninckx's text, linking the treatment of both Jews and Algerians at French hands. This section examines the ways in which Daeninckx stages the literary witnessing of the massacre, in part by establishing the relationship between these two historical periods, and assesses the effects of this on French self-image.

The preparations for the October demonstration with which the novel opens, and the description of the resulting massacre, are the text's most direct references to the Algerian conflict; indeed the plot centres around the crimes committed under Vichy. The Algerian characters vanish after the two brief opening chapters, and both they and the massacre appear to serve only as background colour, the cover under which Roger Thiraud was murdered, ostensibly for being an FLN agent. As we have seen, Anne Donadey has criticised Daeninckx for including the 1961 massacre only obliquely, and in the process erasing the immigrant memories around the events. However, given that the focus of the novel is on French history, it can be argued that in highlighting the degree of official suppression which surrounds records of the wartime deportation of Jews, and which ultimately costs the lives of Thiraud *père et fils*, Daeninckx draws attention to the lengths to which the State is willing to go in order to keep certain facts out of the public domain, as in the case of 17 October. The implication is that Vichy is not the only case of State suppression.

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<sup>43</sup> See in particular Richard J. Golsan, 'Memory's *bombes à retardement*: Maurice Papon, Crimes Against Humanity, and October 1961', *Journal of European Studies*, 28 (1998), 153-73.

While the Algerian massacre is incidental to the plot of *Meurtres pour mémoire*, as in Sebbar's text it is reinserted into French temporality and geography as Cadin's investigations lead him to follow the route of the demonstrators of October 1961. Ostensibly he is tracing the last movements of Roger Thiraud, the historian murdered under cover of the demonstration, but he soon becomes aware of another lost layer of history, and realises that he is retracing the footsteps of many disparate people whose lives ended violently that night, and whose murders have been covered by the amnesty relating to the Algerian War.

Like Sebbar, Daeninckx also uses the concept of graffiti to illustrate the way in which the successive and competing interpretations of history overwrite previously dominant views. Graffiti and posters operate as spaces of political statements, whose declarations, although made in public, are subject to being overwritten, partially hidden, and interpreted in multiple ways. On a wall graffitied with the word 'Solidarité', Cadin notes the traces of former, conflicting declarations: 'Solidarité avec l'Iran' has been replaced with 'Palestine', and then 'Israel' before being finally overpainted.<sup>44</sup> Daeninckx also signals the possibility of multiple interpretations of the past in another remaining fragment, which reads, '...I AU RÉFÉRENDUM', with the reader left to decide whether the I belongs to the final letter of 'OUI' or the last stroke of 'NON'. The novel closes with a similar image of successive layers of old posters being peeled away by an Algerian immigrant worker, to reveal the remnants of a Nazi poster, a reminder of France's collaboration in the deportation of Jews.<sup>45</sup> For Daeninckx, history is never fixed or finished; it is a narrative of competing discourses and his aim is to draw the reader's attention to aspects, such as the lives of Algerian immigrants, which have been overlooked by the dominant tradition.

In effect, Daeninckx is calling for a reconsideration of France's recent past, and he goes to some lengths to make the connection between the treatment of the Jews under Vichy, and that of the Algerians under Papon and de Gaulle. Cadin's moment of realisation, when he understands that the motive for the murders has been

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<sup>44</sup> Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, pp. 253-4.

<sup>45</sup> Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, pp. 336-7.

the need to conceal details of the deportations, is followed by an uneasy dream in which Jews and Algerians are expressly conflated, and the occupants of the trains destined for Auschwitz are revealed, as '[d]es centaines d'Algériens ensanglantés sortirent des wagons'.<sup>46</sup> The implication is that the treatment of Algerians on 17 October 1961 is as serious a crime as the deportations, for which Papon was tried in 1997-98. Daeninckx is not alone in implying this: in 1987 the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet went further when he claimed in an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* that the racist suppression of Algerian demonstrators was a crime against humanity and should be judged accordingly.<sup>47</sup>

As Golsan points out, the comparison between crimes carried out by the Nazis and Vichy, and the acts committed by the French during the Algerian War is nothing new.<sup>48</sup> The brutality of the police repression of demonstrators, and the number of detentions in the Palais des sports, provoked almost immediate comparisons with the round-up of 12,884 Jews at the infamous Vélodrome d'Hiver on 16 July 1942.<sup>49</sup> During Papon's trial, cartoons in the Paris press revisited the comparison, showing two buses side by side in the 'police museum', the first used to carry Jews to the Vel d'Hiv in 1942, and the other to move Algerian protesters in 1961. The caption reads: 'Ils sont bien conservés. C'est comme si ils [*sic*] n'avaient jamais servis [*sic*]'.<sup>50</sup> The conflation is also present in the dedication of Einaudi's *La Bataille de Paris*, which is addressed 'à Jeannette Griff, 9 ans, déportée de Bordeaux à Drancy, le 26 août 1942. Déportée de Drancy à Auschwitz, le 7 septembre 1942' and 'à Fatima Bédar, 15 ans, noyée dans le canal Saint-Denis en octobre 1961'.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the popular conflation of acts committed during Vichy and the Algerian War, Golsan and Rouso have attacked it on the grounds of the different historical contexts, arguing that the logical conclusion of this would be the identification of Gaullism with Vichy.<sup>52</sup> This is clearly an unsustainable position, but

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<sup>46</sup> Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, p. 298.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 'Ce qui accable Papon', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23-29 October 1997, pp. 56-7.

<sup>48</sup> Golsan, 'Memory's *bombes à retardement*', p. 149.

<sup>49</sup> Petition signed by, amongst others, Michel Butor, Simon de Beauvoir, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Louis Aragon, André Breton, quoted in Einaudi, *La Bataille de Paris*, p. 225.

<sup>50</sup> *Le Monde*, 19-20 October 1997, quoted in Golsan, 'Memory's *bombes à retardement*', p. 149.

<sup>51</sup> Einaudi, *La Bataille de Paris*, dedication.

<sup>52</sup> Golsan, 'Memory's *bombes à retardement*', p. 149.



it is difficult to believe that this was Daeninckx's aim. Rather than dealing with the facts from a historical perspective, he uses Cadin's reactions for rhetorical purposes, as a means of provoking his readers to reconsider the significance of French actions. The dream, that most symbolic of representations, is not intended as a conflation in historical terms, but as a literary device aimed at challenging received notions around the repressed massacre. Indeed, his other comparison between the Algerian conflict and World War II goes even further, as Cadin tries to ascertain the scale of the event which took place in October 1961:

Ils parlent de deux cents morts le soir des troubles et autant au cours de la semaine qui a suivi. Ce que j'essaie de souligner, c'est qu'il s'agit d'une histoire importante. Un Oradour en plein Paris: personne n'en sait rien! Il doit bien exister des traces d'un pareil massacre...<sup>53</sup>

Cadin's reference is to the Nazi massacre of 642 men, women and children of Oradour-sur-Glane on 10 June 1944, in which all but eight of the villagers present that day were murdered. Those inhabitants who had been away that day returned to find that the SS soldiers had gathered the men of the village in barns around the market place before shooting them, while the women and children had been herded into the church which was then set on fire, together with the rest of the village. In this case, the comparison with the massacre of Algerians goes far beyond simple conflation. It draws on and reverses the myth which has grown up around one of the most notorious events of the Nazi occupation of France. Sarah Bennett Farmer points to the immediacy with which this symbolism was created by the French State:

Almost immediately after the war, the massacre at Oradour became the preeminent example of French suffering at the hands of the Germans. In 1946 the French parliament passed a special law classifying Oradour as a historic monument and mandated that the vestiges of the old town be preserved for eternity. [...] The forty acres of crumbling houses, farms and shops became France's 'village martyr,' a testament to French suffering under the German occupation.<sup>54</sup>

The designation of Oradour as an historic monument has helped to ensure that the national memory of the massacre is preserved along with the blackened buildings. However, Farmer draws attention to the way in which, over time, the crumbling

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<sup>53</sup> Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>54</sup> Farmer, 'Oradour-sur-Glane', p. 30.

vestiges have required increasing intervention from the State in order to ensure their preservation, to the extent that the damaged landscape has been transformed, its harshness becoming softened, over time. The 'authenticity' of the village's history has necessarily been sacrificed to the preserved memory of the event, serving the cause of a particular interpretation of events:

The history of the commemoration of the massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane is, to a large extent, the story of how this incident was emptied of its political particularities in order to become the archetypical atrocity that could stand as a symbol for the suffering of France. Today, those who make the journey to the ruins of Oradour see a landscape and hear a commemorative narrative telling of an ideal French village which, through no fault of its own, became the target of Nazi barbarism. The story of villagers uninvolved in the Resistance and nonetheless massacred by the Germans gives the implicit message that, regardless of their political choices or war-time activity, all the French were at risk or were potential martyrs. The commemoration of Oradour as a 'village martyr' thus served to mitigate the humiliation of defeat and French passivity during the Occupation and played a key role in the reconstruction of French national dignity, which the policies of Vichy had seriously damaged.<sup>55</sup>

Oradour has been emptied of its political specificity in order to become the bearer of an alternative myth, that of the innocent French nation martyred at the hands of the invading barbarians. This language is remarkably similar to that used by contemporary far-right groups in France to describe the situation around the integration of Maghrebi immigrants, and demonstrates the extent to which the French perception of France as an innocent victim suffering at the hands of others has become an entrenched and powerful discourse.<sup>56</sup> As a successful strategy for mitigating the humiliation of defeat, it also makes the violence perpetrated by the French security forces in October 1961 more difficult to accept.

By associating October 1961 with Oradour, Daeninckx challenges the status of the mythical purity of the French martyr-nation, and throws open the possibility that the victim may also in some cases be a perpetrator guilty of barbarous crimes. The text therefore moves towards bringing France to an awareness and

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<sup>55</sup> Farmer, 'Oradour-sur-Glane', p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> Stora gives the following examples of this discourse:

"Il y a 30 millions de musulmans en France alors que les Allemands dans les années 1940-1945 n'étaient pas plus que 500 000." [...] Le public, à forte composante pied-noir, est âgé et n'a qu'une obsession en tête, "les Arabes", qui "nous envahissent";

'La liturgie d'une France enracinée dans la pureté d'une identité mythique, sans cesse menacée, voilà qui légitime d'avance toutes les mesures de "guerre", de violences pour se défendre des "envahisseurs", les "Maghrébins". Stora, *Le Transfert d'une mémoire*, p. 12; p. 137.

acknowledgement of its responsibility for past deeds, part of a first step in coming to terms with the legacy of the past. In this way the amnesia surrounding the massacre of 1961 is revealed as being less about the experiences of Algerian immigrants, and rather about a challenge to the simplistic (self-)conceptions of France as victim, now ambivalently revealed as guilty of crimes against humanity. What is not yet clear is whether the presentation of this new image of France will be sufficient for the country to move on.

### Counter-memory and discourse

Seen in the light shed by these three texts, literature offers an alternative means of interpreting the past, one based on memories which have been excluded by the dominant narrative of history. This raises questions about the nature of the historical narrative, often accepted as objective. As Hutcheon shows, the line between the 'fact' of history and the 'fiction' of literature is imprecise:

What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past ('exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination'). In other words, the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'. This is not a 'dishonest refuge from truth' but an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs. [...] Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity.<sup>57</sup>

Lowenthal, quoting Vidal, puts it more succinctly: 'There is no history, only fictions of varying degrees of plausibility'.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps more than any other theorist, Foucault has developed our understanding of the way in which discourses compete for acceptance. He refers to

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<sup>57</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 89, p. 93.

<sup>58</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p. 225.

the endlessly repeated play of dominations, the competing forces which operate in the non-place of emergence, and reveals that that narrative of the past known as history is not a unified tale, as was once thought, but is constituted of overlapping fragments which compete, and which leave marks on memories, and even on bodies:

Mais qu'on ne s'y trompe pas; cet héritage n'est point un acquis, un avoir qui s'accumule et se solidifie; plutôt, un ensemble de failles, de fissures, de couches hétérogènes qui le rendent instable, et, de l'intérieur ou d'un dessous, menacent le fragile héritier.<sup>59</sup>

Le rapport de domination n'est pas plus un 'rapport' que le lieu où elle s'exerce n'est un lieu. Et c'est pour cela précisément qu'en chaque moment de l'histoire, elle se fixe dans un rituel; elle impose des obligations et des droits; elle constitue de soigneuses procédures. Elle établit des marques, grave des souvenirs dans les choses et jusque dans les corps.<sup>60</sup>

In this essay Foucault discusses the development of humanity as a series of interpretations, each emerging as an event within history, none of which are the final word. This history of changing interpretations he refers to as 'genealogy'. The question of dominance reveals an unstable hierarchy between the prevailing discourse, and those counter-memories which compete with it for authority. More recently, Bhabha has built on the notion of heterogeneity suggested by these narrative interpretations, and has claimed the existence of a fundamental split within the ethnically-diverse modern nation.<sup>61</sup> This split results from the ambivalence of a national identity based on the mythic origins of the nation, such as 1789, the Rights of Man, and the Gaullist narrative of 'la France éternelle', but enacted through the daily performance of a range of practices which lie outside of the traditional Hexagonal space.

The result is 'a cultural liminality within the nation' which is based on two separate temporalities, and which disturbs established expectations, allowing new forms of identity to emerge: 'Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which "imagined communities" are given

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<sup>59</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire', in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 145-72 (p. 152).

<sup>60</sup> Foucault, 'Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire', p. 157.

<sup>61</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

essentialist identities'.<sup>62</sup> Bhabha's theory of the ambivalence of the nation-space seeks to account for the persistence of a counter-memory of the kind referred to by Jim House and Neil MacMaster amongst the families of Algerian immigrants, and anti-racism groups during the thirty years of official denial of the massacre.<sup>63</sup> It is this counter-memory which provides the source for literary representations of the massacre.

Whilst Foucault's account of genealogy insists that this play of forces is not controlled by any group – 'Nul n'est donc responsable d'une émergence, nul ne peut s'en faire gloire; elle se produit toujours dans l'interstice'<sup>64</sup> – Raymond Williams identifies a more conscious aspect to the way in which the dominant discourse both produces and limits forms of counter-culture. He points to the functioning of selective traditions, which he defines as

an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification. [...] From a whole possible area of past and present, in a particular culture, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded.<sup>65</sup>

Whilst Williams is clear that a range of traditions is possible, like Foucault he indicates that within a particular hegemony a selected version will be presented as the significant past, no longer simply a version but an authoritative account of the past which offers continuity with, and legitimates, the present. In the case of 17 October 1961, this is a selective tradition which maintains that the Algerian War took place overseas and which has substituted Charonne as the example of police brutality towards civilian demonstrators. But, as Williams affirms, this selective tradition is at once powerful and vulnerable:

It is at the vital points of connection, where a version of the past is used to ratify the present and to indicate directions for the future, that a selective tradition is at once powerful and vulnerable. Powerful because it is so skilled in making active selective connections, dismissing those it does not want as 'out of date' or 'nostalgic', attacking those it cannot incorporate as 'unprecedented' or 'alien'. Vulnerable because the real

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<sup>62</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 149.

<sup>63</sup> House and MacMaster, "Une journée portée disparue", p. 268.

<sup>64</sup> Foucault, 'Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire', p. 156.

<sup>65</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 115.

record is effectively recoverable, and many of the alternative or opposing practical continuities are still available. Vulnerable also because the selective version of 'a living tradition' is always tied, though often in complex and hidden ways, to explicit contemporary pressures and limits.<sup>66</sup>

This is important because the official version of history has encountered a contemporary social reality, in the face of which it has started to unravel. The official history of the Algerian War maintains that the conflict was resolved at a given moment, allowing de Gaulle's government to move on to issues, such as France's place in Europe, which were deemed to be of greater significance for the nation. However, the pressures in contemporary society which derive from the daily performance of the nation's identity, such as issues over integration of Maghrebi immigrants and their descendants, increased racism and the rise of the Front national, have exposed the weaknesses in this dominant tradition. Like the return of the repressed, these vestiges of the colonial era will not be silenced; they are concerned with changes in the meanings and values which are actively lived and felt, which Williams refers to as 'structures of feeling'.

This has prompted what might be termed an 'emergent' movement (using Williams's vocabulary rather than Foucault's), that is, a reconsideration of received wisdom and its replacement with new meanings, values and relationships. This growing call to address the implications of France's colonial history is not, of course, entirely new – as a 'living tradition' it has been sown and nurtured by the social context of the contemporary period – but it runs parallel to and challenges the hegemony of the existing tradition of amnesia about the events of the war, and October 1961 in particular.

Williams's view of emergence again differs from Foucault's in his rather less abstract understanding of how emergent movements come into being. Like all traditions, emergent movements depend on formal cultural, political and economic institutions, which have a profound effect on the formation of social realities. However, as Williams points out, the shaping of emergent movements is now limited to institutions but also depends on what he refers to as 'formations': 'those effective

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<sup>66</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 116-7.

movements and tendencies, in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture, and which have a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions'.<sup>67</sup> In a country such as France, which has a well-developed tradition of public intellectuals, it is not difficult to see how this might influence the selective nature of an emergent tradition. Moreover, the repeated selection of 17 October 1961 for inclusion in literary texts suggests that writers are choosing to recover this event both as a means of addressing the amnesia surrounding it and, in order to present it as exemplary, as a means of compelling France to come to terms with its recent history and the implications of this for its present.

This suggests that, in novels written over twenty-five years after the events which they treat, the writers' concern may be only partly to bear witness to the facts of the massacre. More significantly, the texts treat the massacre as a symbol of the relationship between France and its closest North African colony, both historically and at the time of their writing. They select, create and stage images and historical elements in a way that invites their contemporary readers to respond to the events which are witnessed, and which prompts French society to re-evaluate its present in the light of its past. In doing so these novelists construct an emergent and imaginative counter-tradition which joins with similar calls from historians and anti-racism groups, and which may yet challenge the status quo of the dominant discourse on the Algerian War.

### Assessing the literary contribution

So how successful have been these attempts to recover this forgotten episode of French history? By remembering 17 October 1961, the date that the Algerian War crossed the Mediterranean, Sebbar, Maspero and Daeninckx are confronting their French readers with the reality of what France was prepared to do as a colonising power, that is, to use force to impose order on the perceived threat from the

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<sup>67</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 117.

thousands of Algerian workers invading the *grands boulevards* at the heart of the nation. By basing their novels on eye-witness accounts of the massacre, they are building on what House and MacMaster have identified as a counter-memory kept alive by immigrant communities and French political activists, which has escaped incorporation into the dominant national narrative.<sup>68</sup> By setting their novels in the 1980s and 1990s, Sebbar and Daeninckx demonstrate the relevance of the massacre to contemporary society, and thus invite readers to engage imaginatively with the issues of 1960s France, as participants rather than simply spectators. However, the way in which they emphasise palimpsest rather than outright challenge to the hegemonic order raises questions about the degree of success which can be expected.

The chapter began with the observation that memories of the Paris massacre and the Algerian War have been characterised by denial and repression. Having looked at the novels, we might ask whether there is any indication that this is changing? And indeed, there are signs of a shift in French attitudes. Neil MacMaster points to the Papon trial of 1997-98, in which Papon faced accusations of his role in the 1961 massacre, as a watershed, underscored by the official recognition on 10 June 1999, that the conflict in Algeria constituted a war (before this it was simply classed as 'opérations effectuées en Afrique du Nord').<sup>69</sup> More recently Henri Rousso has claimed that amnesia has been replaced by a frenzy of commemoration which he refers to as 'hypermnésie'.<sup>70</sup> This might be taken as evidence that, according to the model of his 'syndrome de Vichy', France is moving from the period of amnesia with regard to Algeria, to one in which the repressed has returned, or even to the final phase of obsession. As evidence, he points to the erection, in 1996, of a national monument to the dead of the Algerian War, and the unveiling, in 2001, of a plaque on the banks of the Seine to the dead of 17 October 1961. A further monument, to *La France d'outre-mer*, was unveiled in Marseilles in 2006.

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<sup>68</sup> House and MacMaster, "Une Journée portée disparue", p. 268.

<sup>69</sup> 'One important element, among the complex factors at work, was the transition from an obsessive concern with the 'Vichy syndrome' to what might be termed an 'Algerian syndrome', a watershed that was marked by the Papon trial of 1997-1998.' Neil MacMaster, 'The Torture Controversy (1998-2002): Towards a "New History" of the Algerian War?' *Modern and Contemporary France*, 10 (2002), 449-459 (p. 450).

<sup>70</sup> Henri Rousso, 'La Guerre d'Algérie et la culture de la mémoire', *Le Monde*, 5 April 2002, p. 17.



The moves toward a memorialisation of this period suggest that France is engaged in the process of recovering and acknowledging repressed memory which Freud, and the experiences of South Africa, Peru and Brazil, have indicated is necessary for progress to be made. However, the notion that this represents a genuine will to address openly the events of France's colonial era is belied by the law of 23 February 2005. Article 4 of the text, which decrees that both secondary and university education curricula acknowledge the positive contribution of French colonial rule, particularly in North Africa, suggests that memories of the past are being recovered only to be incorporated into a selective historical tradition, which corresponds to the preferred version of the national narrative.<sup>71</sup> The invocation of education in attempts to influence, if not control, the narrative of France's colonial past is particularly significant, given the historic reliance on 'l'Education nationale' in integrating immigrants. If, indeed, the past is being recovered only to be reincorporated into a revised national narrative, then France's hegemonic neo-colonial discourse would merely be shifting ground in order to reassert itself more firmly. However, it does raise questions about how the national narrative can effectively confront and subsume events, such as military defeat, collaboration, torture and massacre, which refuse to be repressed indefinitely and which appear fundamentally to contradict the nation's sense of itself.

The valorisation of the French presence in North Africa comes as little surprise when it is viewed in the context of a belief in the grandeur and destiny of the nation. The work of Anthony D. Smith and Robert Gildea has been important in tracing the narrative of French grandeur and destiny back to the Revolution and beyond, to the origins of France's monarchy and the celebration of Clovis, the first king of the Franks to convert to Christianity.<sup>72</sup> Over time the religious element of French election, particularly as it operated in the divine right of the king, was

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<sup>71</sup> 'Les programmes de recherche universitaire accordent à l'histoire de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, la place qu'elle mérite. Les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l'histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l'armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit'.

<<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/Visu?cid=2829315&indice=5&table=LEGI&ligneDeb=1>>  
Accessed 17 January 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 106-115; Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

replaced by belief in *la patrie* and the special mission of the nation, values which were incarnated by the French Revolution. The sacred communion of the people formed the basis of a new secular religion which, from Napoleon onwards, was accompanied by the ideal of national grandeur achieved through military force. These notions of liberty, equality, mission, and grandeur were fundamental to France's *mission civilisatrice*, as she set about acquiring an overseas empire.

Indeed, so fundamental has this tradition been to national identity that it has been able to incorporate apparently contradictory aspects of French history. According to Gildea, individual catastrophes such as the defeat of 1870, and the wars and occupation of 1914 and 1940

were subsumed in what has been asserted as a continuity of French greatness, going back to the earliest periods of the French monarchy, if not to the Roman inheritance. [...] a collective amnesia tended to overtake the French, who inclined to persist in the cult of their own national greatness even when all objective grounds for it had ceased to exist.<sup>73</sup>

According to this view of the nation, France is founded on an eternal and unchanging grandeur which lies beneath the flux of historical change.<sup>74</sup> Faced with France's military defeat in 1940, de Gaulle appealed to the myth of French rank in the world to persuade his countrymen to continue fighting. As Gildea says, 'At the very moment that French greatness ceased to exist as a reality, it had to be recreated as a myth to give the French a sense of obligation to their own history'.<sup>75</sup> The reality of defeat therefore becomes less significant than the sense of French identity and destiny. Similarly, France's republican principles of liberty and equality have been used to justify her actions as a colonial power, despite the apparent contradiction between the rhetoric of bringing civilisation to unenlightened peoples, and practices which included massacre and torture. Gildea argues that the strength of this rhetoric was such that it survived and denied the accounts of veterans of the Algerian War.

It might be imagined that the Algerian war finally destroyed the myth of the Year II and exposed French ambitions for what they were. But this was not the case. The

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<sup>73</sup> Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p. 112-3.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, p. 213.

<sup>75</sup> Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p. 128.

language of liberation and civilisation seemed to have a life of its own, and to coexist with a reality that was entirely different.<sup>76</sup>

This serves to demonstrate that the national narrative is created and maintained through the selection of certain elements of the national history, and the omission or suppression of others. Indeed, as Ernest Renan argues, amnesia is necessary to the construction of a nation's identity: 'L'oubli, et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d'une nation, et c'est ainsi que le progrès des études historiques est souvent pour la nationalité un danger'.<sup>77</sup>

In this context, then, it seems that if the work of novelists and historians has succeeded in confronting sections of French society with unpalatable details of its past, such as the massacre of October 1961, this has only led the hegemonic national narrative to reassert its dominance. The move, through the law of February 2005, to revalorise the colonial period suggests that it has done so by readdressing these aspects of the recent past, not in an attempt to produce a new narrative that would include the voices of those previously silenced, but in order to incorporate these events into a renewed and stronger version of the existing tradition. Indeed, although recent research suggests a greater public awareness of the Paris massacre, there appears to be little consensus as to the place this should occupy within the national consciousness.<sup>78</sup> In light of this, what then is the hope for a version of history that will include the silenced voices of the past?

Whether the rereading of history being proposed by Sebbar, Maspero, Daeninckx, and others will develop seriously to challenge the hegemonic tradition of thinking about the Algerian War is as yet unclear. Some of these novels were published twenty years ago, and as yet have failed to have a decisive impact, raising questions about the time which must elapse before defining artistic representations of any momentous political event can be produced. But the sea-change that has taken place in French society with regard to the Algerian War may yet lead to a reawakening of interest in these texts, and it may be that in addition to bearing

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<sup>76</sup> Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p. 153.

<sup>77</sup> Ernest Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?' in *Oeuvres complètes*, 10 vols (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1947 [1882]), I, pp. 887-906 (p. 891).

<sup>78</sup> Poll, *L'Humanité*, 13 October 2001.

witness to the events, their staging of the act of witnessing may prove more powerful in an emerging climate which accepts that the massacre took place.

Moreover, the novels which were the earliest form of imaginative remembering of the massacre have more recently been joined by cinematic texts such as Alain Tasma's *Nuit noire: 17 octobre 1961* (2005), and Michael Haneke's film *Caché* (2005). With the televising of *Nuit noire*, which coincided with the 2005 riots, details of the massacre were brought to a wider audience than before, drawing parallels with contemporary society which were not easily dismissed, even if the interpretations were conflicted. These fictional texts offer a means of recovering memory, one which inevitably speaks to contemporary realities because it is shaped, written and read within them. As works of imagination, they offer a compelling means of re-engaging with the past, and so it may be that ultimately they prove better able to resist the incorporating drive of the traditional national narrative. If this is the case, these novels, and others like them, might offer a small step towards the understanding and acceptance of the past, without which the social tensions so prevalent in French society will remain unresolved.

## Chapter Five Writing from Algeria

As the last chapter indicated, France's collective attitude towards Algeria in recent years has been characterised by denial and repression, with the limited emergent memories of immigrant communities and anti-racism groups harnessed by novelists and film directors to challenge the dominant narrative. Despite this, however, the example of Vichy demonstrates that the repressed episodes of history do not remain buried indefinitely, but are liable to return to disturb the established tradition. The return of Algeria as ghost is evident not only in the work of Sebbar, Maspero and Daeninckx, but was also apparent in the *piéd noir* character, David Paul-Martin, in *Malika*. Its effects are also seen in the recollections of Prévost's Denis and Bouraoui's Nina, both of whom are haunted by the post-memory of atrocities committed during the war, events they did not personally experience, but which continue to trouble them.

This final chapter moves beyond the focus on collective memory to consider the personal recollections of two novelists, Marie Cardinal and Hélène Cixous, whose childhood was spent in Algeria. Their memories reveal an ambivalent relationship with their motherland, which they experienced both as a place of conflict and otherness, and as a site of desire and longing. While the conflict within Algeria drove both writers to emigrate in early adulthood, their writings suggest that neither achieved complete separation from the country of their birth, which haunts their writings and leads them to return there, physically or metaphorically, later in life. The experiences of that return are explored through the texts analysed in this chapter: Cardinal's *Au Pays de mes racines* (1980) and Cixous's *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* (2000).

Although both novelists are best known for their writings on women and the feminine, this chapter argues that it was their childhood experiences of conflict and difference in Algeria which were fundamental in shaping their attitudes towards the oppression of women, and conceptions of feminism, and that Algeria acted as a primary influence on their development as writers. This argument involves a return

to the relationship between difference and the ambivalence of the feminine which has been present in earlier chapters. In support of this, the chapter examines the ways in which each writer reconstructs her childhood memories of conflict and longing, and shows how Algeria operates as a site of irreconcilable difference for its various Algerian, *pied noir* and Jewish communities. Developing this, I argue that, as a site of difference and hybridity in both texts, Algeria represents the failure of French Republican ideology to assimilate the different into the same, through the colonial policy under which Algeria was considered to be an integral part of France, and constituted its southernmost *départements*. The failure of the Republican ideology to extend this policy of assimilation of the land to its inhabitants, through political representation and citizenship, led to the violence and bitterness of independence and, as we have seen, means that France is now haunted by its Algerian past.

Having traced the way in which the writers revisit their memories through literature, the chapter then examines how the authors reverse this process to consider the part played by literature in imaginatively recovering and reconstructing memories of the past. An exploration of the way in which the process of literary creation is intimately linked to a return to Algeria suggests that writing may offer a means of coming to terms with the past. For Cardinal this reconciliation takes place on a personal level, while Cixous's different relationship to writing means that she uses it creatively as a means to manifest the irresolvable impasse of Algeria's difference, and invite the reader to engage in the experience of that otherness. The chapter concludes by suggesting that these literary memories offer the potential to respond to otherness with a view to deriving what Chapter Three referred to as Kristeva's 'éthique du respect pour l'inconciliable'.<sup>1</sup>

### Cardinal: Algeria or the Algerians?

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<sup>1</sup> Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 269.

Both texts examined here centre on a return to Algeria, many years after the writers left for a life in metropolitan France.<sup>2</sup> In Cardinal's case, the return is a literal one, as the text initially recounts the narrator's anxiety at the prospect of seeing Algeria for the first time in twenty years, and then her relief during her 1980 visit at rediscovering the country which she knew and loved as a child. The text takes the form of an autobiographical travel diary, and consequently there is a strong sense of Cardinal the author identified with Cardinal-as-narrator.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Cardinal draws attention to the constructed nature of her narrative when in the closing pages she refers to

le tri que j'ai opéré en prenant mes notes [...] je recevais des images, des mouvements, des mots, des impressions, des sensations que je ne transcrivais pas tous dans mon cahier. Cela, pas uniquement parce que je n'en avais pas le temps. Plutôt parce qu'il me semblait que certaines de ces informations faisaient partie d'une toile de fond.<sup>4</sup>

The process by which certain elements are selected and combined is fundamental to the narrator's conception of the Algeria in which she grew up. As a young child of a well-to-do *pied noir* family, her view of her home is unproblematic: 'Cette terre était à moi, c'était chez moi, depuis toujours'.<sup>5</sup> However, as she grows up, she becomes aware of deep-seated divisions in the society in which she finds herself. The divisions between the narrator and her Arab friends are ostensibly economic and religious, but serve to reinforce the ethnic separation between France and Algeria. Religion plays a part in the narrator's emerging identity, as she notes that there is not a single Christian amongst the crowd of Arab beggars muttering their requests for money outside the Catholic church while, after her first communion, she feels that 'je suis devenue plus française'.<sup>6</sup> The conventions of religion are intimately bound up with the expectations and behaviours associated with belonging to a French,

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<sup>2</sup> Cixous left Algeria to study in Paris in 1955. After teaching in French lycées in Salonika, Lisbon and Vienna, Cardinal left Algeria definitively in 1958. In 1984 she left France for Canada, where she became a Canadian citizen.

<sup>3</sup> Lucille Cairns omits it from her study of Cardinal's writing on the basis that '[it] is not a novel but a travel-journal [...] its concerns are prominently political rather than artistic, and my main interest in this study is in Cardinal the novelist'. Lucille Cairns, *Marie Cardinal: Motherhood and Creativity* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1992), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Marie Cardinal, *Au Pays de mes racines* (Paris: Grasset, 1980), pp. 190-91.

<sup>5</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 15; p. 59.

bourgeois family. Religion also dictates the cultural development of her former Arab friends as they grow up: the boys are sent to Koranic school, while from puberty onwards the girls are hidden from view.

However, while initially the divide seems to be between the *pieds noirs* and the indigenous population, she quickly becomes aware that there are other elements which contribute to its complexity, most importantly the relationship with the French motherland: ‘La France créait la différence en nous haussant, puisque tout ce qui venait d’elle était “meilleur”’.<sup>7</sup> This imposition of cultural norms leads her to conceive of France – which she has never visited but whose shadowy influence permeates her life – and Algeria in typically binary terms: cold and warmth, restriction and pleasure, rationalism and sensuality. In an echo of the West-desert binary in Tournier and Hocquenghem’s novels, here the Algerian term is consistently valorised. The relationship between France and the European population in Algeria is problematised by the *pieds noirs*’ passion for the idealised motherland, to which they offer tributes of wine and harvests. France is depicted as a coquettish and manipulative goddess who exploits the devotion of her people. Although initially the narrator had seen the *pieds noirs* simply as colonising, the complexity of this relationship brings her to consider her family as both colonised and colonising, ‘victime et bourreau à la fois’.<sup>8</sup> The Franco-French may be distanced from the *pieds noirs* because of their ‘foreign’ origin; nonetheless, it is clear that this is one instance in which it is better to be a foreigner than a native. In contrast, the *pieds noirs* are dismissive of the Algerian natives, with their lowly status.

The narrator’s childhood experience of the unity of self being split leads to pressing questions of identity which, in contrast to her later feminist preoccupations, she formulates in terms of nationality. ‘La coupure avec moi-même a commencé tôt: Arabe-Française, Française-Arabe?’<sup>9</sup> This contradiction is partially responsible for her withdrawing her identification from her family and their *piéd noir* identity, refusing to share their colonial attitudes.

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<sup>7</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 50.



Je n'ai rien à me faire pardonner. Bien que pied noir, je n'ai jamais été pour l'Algérie française. Dès mon enfance j'ai été en conflit avec ma famille pour des raisons personnelles d'abord, ensuite ces raisons sont devenues politiques.<sup>10</sup>

This passage hints at the other issue which leads her to distance herself from her family. The mother who inflicts on her ten-year-old daughter the knowledge that, on learning of her pregnancy, she had wanted to abort the foetus who became her daughter is a recurrent figure in Cardinal's work, most famously in her 1975 novel *Les Mots pour le dire*. The experience of rejection, indeed, of abjection, parallels that of Prévost's Denis at the hands of his mother, Louise. In reaction to this unforeseen rejection, the narrator turns to her surroundings for reassurance:

Je me suis accrochée à ce que j'ai pu, à la ville, au ciel, à la mer, au Djurdjura. Je me suis agrippée à eux, ils sont devenus ma mère et je les ai aimés comme j'aurais voulu l'aimer, elle.<sup>11</sup>

As in Denis's case, Algeria thus occupies the maternal space left vacant by the biological mother, and becomes the source of identification for the narrator. However, it is arguable that for Cardinal's narrator, the replacement of the 'bad' biological mother with the 'good' Algerian mother results in the creation of a strongly binarised mentality which, as we saw, was evident in her attitude towards France and Algeria. The experience of abjection is powerful and lasting: the narrator returns to this incident at the end of *Au Pays de mes racines*, where she reprises the passage from *Les Mots pour le dire*, groping gingerly towards the buried, painful memory which she has been fearful of confronting after years of separation from her beloved country. But she need not have worried: she finds that the love between her and Algeria is still strong. 'Mais non, je suis bien là, cette terre est toujours ma mère'.<sup>12</sup>

### Distance and nurture: Algeria as mother

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<sup>10</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 153.

<sup>11</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 181.

<sup>12</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 181.

The narrator's identification with Algeria as mother is at the root of what critics such as Winifred Woodhull and Lucille Cairns have identified as one of two 'contradictory' or 'parallel' attitudes towards the country.<sup>13</sup> It allows her to distance herself from both France and the *pied noir* community, and from the divisions which the Algerian War created, and to justify her closeness to Algeria on the basis that she is innocent of the crimes committed against it.

La colère me reprend. Jamais je n'avalerais la guerre d'Algérie. Ni celle menée par la France, ni celle faite par les pieds-noirs. C'était une guerre infâme, dégradante et stupide.

Et douloureuse... douloureuse...

Ma belle terre, ma mère, ma génitrice, de quelle manière ignoble et basse je t'ai perdue!<sup>14</sup>

However, this attitude, which is on one level a political act of acknowledging the injustice and violence of colonialism, and of valorising the oppressed Other, is revealed to be both more selective and more personal than it initially appears. The narrator's relationship with Algeria is based on a nostalgic wish to retreat to the plenitude of the state of oneness with her home which she experienced as a child.

[...] par moments, fugacement, l'impression que j'existe, que je suis là, que je suis entière, comme dans mon enfance. Mais, dans mon enfance, il n'était pas question d'impressions ni de moments, j'étais, c'était tout. Et le fait d'être se liait totalement au lieu où je me tenais.<sup>15</sup>

As both Woodhull and Cairns have commented, Algeria here represents a force of maternal nurturing which the narrator enjoyed as a child, and which she experiences again on her return to the country:

Ce matin, le bruit des vagues. Elles entrent dans mon berceau comme des nourrices pleines de lait. [...] Bercez-moi encore, j'ai besoin de vos seins lourds, de votre rengaine murmurée, de votre sérénité. Je ne me lasserai jamais d'être bercée par vous.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*, p. 154; Lucille Cairns, 'Roots and Alienation in Marie Cardinal's *Au Pays de mes racines*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 29 (1993), 346-358 (p. 347).

<sup>14</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 161.

Such passages raise questions about the effect which her mother's abjection of her has had on the narrator's psychic development. In 'On Narcissism', Freud questions the relationship between the developmental stages of auto-eroticism, narcissism, and object-love.<sup>17</sup> He points out that

The first auto-erotic sexual satisfactions are experienced in connection with vital functions which serve the purpose of self-preservation. The sexual instincts are at the outset attached to the satisfaction of the ego-instincts; only later do they become independent of these, and even then we have an indication of that original attachment in the fact that the persons who are concerned with a child's feeding, care, and protection become his earliest sexual objects: that is to say, in the first instance his mother or a substitute for her.<sup>18</sup>

The biological mother's confession about her desired abortion precipitates the narrator's substitution of her motherland of Algeria for her biological mother, driven by the urge for self-preservation. Algeria therefore forms her earliest object-choice, and one which proves enduring, for it is to Algeria that she returns later in life when in need of nurturing. Freud refers to this as primary narcissism, since it is motivated by the desire to meet the needs of self.

In the light of this, whilst the narrator repeatedly claims that it is her motherland which is the source of this life and energy, her words call into question the extent to which the nurturing source can be geographically located. Indeed, it appears that the narrator's longing is for a return to the state of childhood unity which she knew in Algeria, rather than to the country itself. Her need is for a sense of that archaic existence before the separations of identity, which has nothing to do with the process of birth:

Impuissance et puissance du premier grain de vie. Pour moi c'est en Algérie que ça se passe. Non parce que je suis née là – ma naissance n'a pas d'importance –, mais parce que les rythmes de l'univers qui sont communs à tous les humains sont entrés en moi là, c'est là que je les ai connus.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth, 1961), XIV, pp. 73-102.

<sup>18</sup> Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, pp. 87-88.

The acknowledgement that she is seeking access to experiences which are universal rather than being geographically specific also calls into question the extent to which her valorisation of Algeria extends to its inhabitants. During her parents' divorce – another of the many experiences of separation which occurred during her childhood – the household servants formed an extended family. Like the narrator, they have suffered at the hands of the  *pied noir*  colonisers, and so share a common bond, and their children are also subject to the constricting demands of culture and religion. Yet despite this, the narrator is not interested in them because they cannot offer her access to the source of nurturing which she craves:

Oui, je l'avoue, c'est ce qu'il y a en moi d'archaïque que je recherche et j'ai l'impression que c'est par la terre elle-même que je l'aborderai, pas par les gens. Les gens portent une culture qui embrouille l'archaïsme; je le voudrais brut.<sup>20</sup>

Passages such as this raise questions about the extent of the narrator's concern for the Algerian people whose fate she nonetheless claims to care about on her return to Algeria. Yet the text contains multiple references to the narrator's interest in Algeria's postcolonial situation. Parallel, or simply contradictory, this political aspect is strongly developed. Unlike Woodhull, I maintain that there is no contradiction in the different facets of Algeria, which serve to reveal different aspects of the narrator's attitudes towards identities of Self and Other. While the narrator is distanced from her  *pied noir*  community, she also finds herself cut off from her Arab neighbours, through the influence of religion, economics, language, and ethnicity. She is an isolated figure, relating to the Algerians through the experience of oppression. Although she refers to Algeria as 'mon pays' and feels that her longstanding opposition to colonialism means that the Algerians have nothing to forgive her for, her experience in the Algerian quarter of the Casbah is that of a foreigner – 'touristes dans notre propre ville' – where 'notre' clearly refers to the  *pied noir*  community.<sup>21</sup> In one of the few instances in which Cardinal's Algerian characters are given names and identities – that of the worker, Barded – Marie-Paule Ha observes that she follows an established literary pattern:

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<sup>20</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>21</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 56.

These Uncle Tom characters are almost permanent fixtures in colonial literature whose function serves to prove the 'humanness' of the colonizers' and the colonized's relations. Some of Barded's counterparts are the Corporal in Margurite [sic] Duras' *Barrage contre le Pacifique* and Kamante in Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*.<sup>22</sup>

## Post-independence Algeria

Nonetheless, returning to Algeria in 1980 after so many years spent abroad, Cardinal is keen to learn about the country's developments since independence. At first the situation appears promising: Cardinal sees the Algerians as still motivated by the revolutionary zeal which led them to independence over two decades earlier. The narrator notes with approval the educated women who are engaged in the task of constructing their country, continuing what the narrator refers to as the 'miracle' of the revolution. She speaks positively of how a combination of socialism and Islam will both define and empower the Algerian people, enabling them to develop their national economic and political identity. But the narrator also has concerns about aspects of the country's development, particularly about the neo-colonial international consultants who are advising the Algerian authorities, and whose attitude of paternalistic Western superiority ignores the inability of their own countries to address their failings on issues such as racism and pollution.

The narrator's conception of herself as belonging to neither the Algerian, French or former *pied noir* communities means that she sees herself as commenting independently, even objectively, on the situation of the developing Algerian nation. However, as we saw in Chapter One with Le Clézio's treatment of the desert, there is no neutral place outside of discourse from which we can 'objectively' speak, and Cardinal's comments disclose her own attitudes and prejudices. She observes that the Algerians are unaware that the revolution which continues to motivate them is increasingly being erased and systematised. The moment of revolution and independence continues to act as the point of reference for the Algerian people, but

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<sup>22</sup> Marie-Paule Ha, 'Outre-mer/Autre mère: Cardinal and Algeria', *Romance Notes*, 36 (1996), 315-23, (p. 321), n. 5.

as each day passes it recedes further from the present, whilst the bureaucrats work to formalise the present. However, as Woodhull has commented, Cardinal-as-narrator here appears to be unaware that she is adopting a similarly paternalistic tone in claiming to see realities of which the Algerians themselves are oblivious: 'At this juncture, the observations of Cardinal's narrator imply that Algeria is autonomous only in the sense that it produces its own problems; it must still rely on first-world observers like herself to theorize them'.<sup>23</sup> A similar attitude is in evidence in her reaction to a letter to the state newspaper, written by a woman who blames the oppression of women on the effects of the colonisers who left twenty years previously. The narrator's tone is scathing, suggesting that Cardinal the feminist writer is the unassailable authority on the status of women. There is a definite suggestion of omniscience about this first person narrator:

Quelle chance de pouvoir encore croire que l'opresseur c'est l'étranger et qu'il suffit de le chasser pour que ça aille mieux du côté des femmes!

Ça m'a laissée rêveuse. Voilà bientôt dix-huit ans que les oppresseurs sont partis et cette brave dame va bientôt se rendre compte de ce que c'est que la condition féminine.<sup>24</sup>

The extent of the narrator's engagement with the political challenges of Algeria's postcolonial present thus emerges through her criticism of Western attempts to support the newly born country. She is disdainful of the attempts of Western feminists to help Iranian women by going to Tehran, implying that they are merely acting under, and thereby perpetuating, colonial attitudes which are of no use to Muslim women.

Elles y sont allées avec les meilleures intentions du monde chrétien, sans savoir que les meilleures intentions du monde musulman n'ont rien de chrétien. Elles ont parlé au nom de leurs soeurs opprimées et elles se sont plantées comme on dit vulgairement. [...] L'Occident est un colon qui a perdu ses terres, ce qui n'empêche pas d'avoir une mentalité de colon.<sup>25</sup>

Many feminists, particularly those of the developing world, would no doubt be in accord with this sentiment. Nonetheless, it does raise the question of what the

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<sup>23</sup> Woodhull, *Transformations of the Maghreb*, p. 166.

<sup>24</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 52.

appropriate response should be to injustices such as the oppression of women. The issue is particularly pointed in the context of Cardinal's text, in which a heavy and repeated emphasis is laid on the maternal, nurturing function of Algeria, an emphasis which is difficult to square with passages which describe the circumstances in which Algerian women live in the 1980s. Cardinal describes the male scrutiny to which women are habitually exposed and, in a striking passage, contrasts the manner in which Algerian women accompany their families to the beach with the experience of her and her daughter.

Toujours les regards des hommes sur nous comme si nous étions de la marchandise ambulante qui se juge, se jauge, s'évalue.<sup>26</sup>

On en voit quelquefois qui arrivent surchargées de couffins, le haïk en bataille, le hadjar de travers. Elles restent tout habillées sous le soleil de plomb à s'occuper des enfants, à préparer les repas. Elles ne bougent pas de leur place.

Bénédicte et moi, nous sommes sur la plage dans des costumes de bain une-pièce tout ce qu'il y a de plus corrects. Nous bavardons, nous écrivons, nous lisons, nous rêvassons. Autour de nous, au moins vingt paires d'yeux qui ne nous quittent pas...<sup>27</sup>

This experience could hardly be further removed from the earlier sea scene in which the narrator was gently rocked by the nurturing waves, and despite her condemnation of Western neo-colonialism, Cardinal's language ('surchargées'; 'tout habillées'; 'le soleil de plomb') underlines the extent to which her narrator's attitudes are culturally dependent. The narrator may not agree with the interventionist actions of Western feminists, but by her language she does not dismiss the situation as simply an instance of cultural difference, although in this Cardinal may be attacked for holding a Eurocentric view. The passage shows her awareness that her maternal Algeria also exists as an inhospitable environment in which the feminine body becomes an object of oppression under the gaze of endless male spectators.

### Cardinal's response to Algeria

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<sup>26</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 171.

<sup>27</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 172.

The question of how to respond to 1980s Algeria is therefore fraught with cultural tension. Cardinal's reaction appears to be non-interventionist, in that she advocates listening to the educated Algerian women who are engaged in building their country, rather than joining them in their efforts. This strategy of non-intervention may seem problematic, given the struggles which Algerian women continue to face. Cairns argues that since feminists repudiate notions of nationhood as patriarchally-based, it is difficult to argue that their priority should be to respect national and therefore cultural boundaries. She criticises Cardinal's assertion that Algerian women should be left to initiate their own stand against male oppressors as acquiescence to an impotent religion of cultural relativism.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, an examination of Cardinal's attitudes towards the women reveals a lack of active engagement with their cause. She meets with them as an author, not as a fellow woman, with the intention of receiving approbation, or at least feedback, on her writing.

In Cardinal's writing, therefore, Algeria functions as a nexus of utopia and dystopia; its conflicted nature is evident in Cardinal's own ambivalent attitude towards it. Having been distanced in her childhood from each of the resident communities, from the Algerians as from her own *pied noir* community, and ultimately from France, she turns to the land itself, in a circle which parallels the journey of Lalla, and her return to the desert, in Chapter One. It is clear that, for her, Algeria is the source of nurturing pleasures, yet as we have seen, these are more closely linked to a return to childhood experiences than to the geographical specificities of North Africa. Her motivation in returning to Algeria is to further her own sense of well-being, hence her relief at finding that Algeria is still her loving mother. Since her passion is for Algeria, rather than for the Algerian people, it appears that she continues to perceive those Algerians she meets in terms of what they offer her, rather than as equals in the struggle for recognition and autonomy, emphasising her needs rather than theirs:

Réunion dans le hall de l'hôtel avec un groupe de femmes algériennes.

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<sup>28</sup> Cairns, 'Roots and Alienation', p. 355.



Encore une fois les larmes me montent aux yeux. J'éprouve de la reconnaissance pour elles. Pourquoi? Il me semble qu'elles me font un cadeau magnifique. Pourquoi? Il me semble qu'elles me pardonnent.<sup>29</sup>

There is a sense, therefore, in which Cardinal's complex and ambivalent vision of Algeria can be criticised as narcissistic. Discussing the state of narcissism, Freud states that 'the aim and the satisfaction in a narcissistic object-choice is to be loved';<sup>30</sup> elsewhere he speaks of the intensification of the original narcissism in women, and says that their needs 'lie [not] in the direction of loving, but of being loved'.<sup>31</sup> Arguably, it seems that the early shock of abjection has forced Cardinal's narrator to forge an unbreakable bond with Algeria which, as long as the country continues to offer the nurture which she craves, will continue to shape her sense of identity, and provide her sense of self-worth. While it is evident that for the narrator this is experienced as plenitude, persisting in a state of narcissism arguably also has a negative aspect. Narcissism is presented as an interim stage of psychic development, located between the auto-eroticism of early subjectivity, and the state of object-love in which the individual arrives at a developed relationship with the outside world. Cardinal's narrator persists in a state which is fundamentally centred around her self, and which therefore conditions her view of the world around her.

From this point of view, her narcissistic experience is responsible for her attitude, in which she is unable to identify with any entity or grouping ( *pied noir*, Algerian, or French) other than Algeria the land, and herself as writer. It accounts for her binary views on the oppositional relationships between France and Algeria, and between French, Algerians and  *pieds noirs*, from whom she stands apart. Trammelled by conventional categories, Cardinal is unable to move beyond the isolated position in which she finds herself; her narcissism thus provides an explanation for her attitude towards the Algerian people, whose progress she admires but whose struggles she does not share (despite her feminist convictions and her attachment to Algeria). Because she remains in a state which is centred on herself, she struggles to respond to the de-centring which is occurring around her in post-

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<sup>29</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 153.

<sup>30</sup> Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 89.

colonial Algeria, and to engage with the struggles of Algerian women as they attempt to develop a new form of identity for themselves. Narcissism is therefore responsible for the occasionally paternalistic attitude which she exhibits, which implies that with her superior knowledge and experience, she is able to see implications and consequences of which the general population remains unaware. Ultimately, the narcissism which has been vital to the maintenance of her psychic well-being seems to hold her back, and prevents her from exploring the creative potential of post-independence Algeria.

### Cixous: inescapable conflict

Despite their common aim of giving a voice to feminine experiences, Cardinal and Cixous are often seen belonging to two contrasting schools of feminist thought. While Cardinal has been linked to the 'social realism' of writers such as Annie Ernaux and Christiane Rochefort,<sup>32</sup> and has arguably been neglected as a 'serious' or 'intellectual' writer,<sup>33</sup> Cixous's early and influential theory of *écriture féminine* has ensured her inclusion with Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva in the triumvirate of what is often referred to, particularly in Anglo-Saxon circles, as 'French feminism'. Influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction, Cixous has called for a new practice of feminine writing which would refigure the hierarchical structures of logocentrism through the inclusion of the revolutionary pulses of the body.<sup>34</sup> Although Cixous's primary concern is usually taken to be the relationship between the sexes, this new economy would have the potential to conceive of new relationships between the Self and the Other, making it of interest to this thesis. Although closely linked to the female body, Cixous rejects

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<sup>32</sup> Emma Webb, 'Introduction', *Marie Cardinal: New Perspectives*, ed. by Emma Webb, *Modern French Identities*, 43 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 13-30 (p. 17).

<sup>33</sup> See Colette Trout's analysis of the obituaries which followed Cardinal's death in 2001. Colette Trout, 'Marie Cardinal's Legacy: Quels mots pour la dire?' in *Marie Cardinal: New Perspectives*, pp. 227-54 (p. 227).

<sup>34</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune née* (Paris: L'Union Générale d'Éditions, Collection 10/18, 1975). On p. 169 Cixous states: 'Impossible à présent de définir une pratique féminine de l'écriture, d'une impossibilité qui se maintiendra car on ne pourra jamais théoriser cette pratique, l'enfermer, la coder, ce qui ne signifie pas qu'elle n'existe pas. Mais elle excèdera toujours le discours qui régit le système phallogentrique', emphasis in original.

the accusation of essentialism, claiming that although this economy of writing is more accessible to women because of their proximity to the archaic mother, it is also available to male authors, examples of which include Shakespeare, and Jean Genet.<sup>35</sup> Her emphasis on the sensuous nature of the body is reminiscent of the way in which reality is formed by sensory perception, both in Le Clézio's desert, and in Amar's 'parallel world'.

However, Cixous has been criticised for her insistence on poetry at the expense of politics, and for failing to analyse the material factors which prevent women from achieving autonomy.<sup>36</sup> Critics have questioned the usefulness of her approach to the feminist project, with Rita Felski arguing that 'there exists no obvious relation between the subversion of language structures and the processes of social struggle and change'.<sup>37</sup> Her insistence on the reinsertion of the experience of the feminine body has also led to criticism that she focuses on herself at the expense of the oppressed subject, transforming exploitation into an exploration of narcissism.<sup>38</sup> Certainly, her writing is marked by the celebration of the experience of the feminine writing subject and the *jouissance* achieved through the recovery and reinsertion of bodily pulsions evidenced in the feminine economy. This is clearly seen in her early and influential contribution to *La Jeune née*, as this passage, typical of much of her early writing, shows:

Impétueuse, déchaînée, elle est de la race des vagues. Elle se lève, elle approche, elle se dresse, elle atteint, recouvre, lave un rivage, coule épouser les moindres plis de la falaise, déjà elle est une autre, se relevant, lançant haut l'immensité frangée de son corps de pierre avec de doux reflux qui ne désertent pas, qui reviennent à la non-origine sans bord, comme si elle se rappelait pour revenir comme jamais encore...<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In contrast, for Cardinal the gender of writing occurs at the level of the reader, whose reception and interpretation of language varies with the gender of the author. She cites the example of the work 'table', arguing that if a woman writes 'dans la pièce il y avait une table' then 'on lit cette table comme si elle était servie, nettoyée, utile, cirée, fleurie ou poussiéreuse'. On the other hand, if the words are written by a man, 'on lit cette table comme si elle était faite de bois ou d'une autre matière, l'oeuvre d'un artisan ou d'un ouvrier, le fruit d'un travail, le lieu où on va s'asseoir pour manger ou pour parler'. Marie Cardinal, *Autrement dit* (Paris: Grasset, 1977), p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Routledge, 2002) p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> As Verena Andermatt Conley observes, commenting on Cixous's treatment of the torture of Steve Biko, the black African tortured by the South African government, 'While questioning the limits of writing and reading, the reader cannot fail to notice that she ends up writing about herself'. Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 109.

<sup>39</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 167.

This view of Cixous's work is summed up by Ian Blyth, who argues that it is not until 1977 that, 'her writing moves beyond "the scene of the unconsciousness" and engages with the other in "the scene of history"'.<sup>40</sup> However, I want to argue that while Cixous's early writings have been subject to the same accusations of narcissism that I have levelled at Cardinal, in fact these early Cixousian texts are marked with a political concern that, although it only becomes overt in her more recent texts, is the result of her childhood experiences in Algeria, and which is fundamental to the conceptions of otherness which run throughout her work. This is evident in some of her earliest writing:

Biographiquement, je pars, dès l'enfance, d'une révolte, d'un refus immédiatement violent et angoissé d'accepter ce qui se passe sur la scène au bord de laquelle je me trouve déposée au terme d'une combinaison d'accidents de l'Histoire. J'ai eu cette étrange 'chance': quelques coup de dés.<sup>41</sup>

Although her theoretical work was to become associated with feminine difference, it appears that, far from being dehistoricised, her childhood introduction to difference and otherness was in fact profoundly rooted in the political and economic realities of wartime Algeria. As an example, one might turn to the opening pages of her section of *La Jeune née*. Although this text is best known as her manifesto for *écriture féminine*, an examination of its early sections reveals the influence of her Algerian childhood: 'Donc, j'ai trois ou quatre ans, et la première chose que je vois dans la rue c'est que le monde est divisé en deux, hiérarchisé; et qu'il maintient cette répartition par la violence'.<sup>42</sup> Like Cardinal, for whom 'la mort, l'amour, le travail, l'argent, le hasard sont, dans ma tête, algériens',<sup>43</sup> Cixous's earliest experiences of life are marked by their Algerian context: 'j'ai appris à lire, à écrire, à hurler, à vomir, en Algérie. Je sais aujourd'hui par expérience qu'on ne peut pas l'imaginer: ce qu'était l'algérifrançaise, il faut l'avoir vécu, subi'.<sup>44</sup> Just as these children were beginning to acquire the knowledge which will shape the formation of their identity, so they are

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<sup>40</sup> Ian Blyth and Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, pp. 127-8.

<sup>42</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 129.

<sup>43</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 99.

<sup>44</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 128.

made aware of difference, a different that is produced by the specificities of their Algerian context.

## Encirclement and exclusion

As a Jew growing up first in Oran and then Algiers, the specificities of Cixous's experience were inevitably different from those of the *pied noir* Cardinal, yet their common sense of division and conflict is striking. In large part, Cixous's experiences stem from her complex family, which she discusses in her article, 'Mon Algérie'.<sup>45</sup> Descended from Spanish Sephardic Jews on her father's side, and from German Ashkenazi Jews from her mother, her family all have French nationality, although as she says, 'jamais personne ne s'est pris pour français dans ma famille'.<sup>46</sup> The nature of 'Frenchness' for French citizens who have never lived in the Hexagon, and whose French status has been shown to be precarious, vulnerable to political winds, has repeatedly been questioned by both Cixous and Jacques Derrida, also an Algerian Jew.<sup>47</sup>

Their liminal status meant that when the family moved to Algiers, Cixous's father Pierre chose not to live in the *pied noir* quarter, but instead settled on the edge of the Arab housing, in the area of Clos Salembier. Just as Cardinal struggled with the desire to distance herself from her *pied noir* family but was unable to identify completely with the Arab community, so Cixous's experience is one of rejection by the two majority communities. However, whilst Cardinal responded to the difficulties of her conflicted identity by identifying wholly with her motherland, Cixous's relationship with Algeria is more complex. Like Cardinal, she also conceives of Algeria as maternal, particularly through the perpetually pregnant figure of the domestic servant Aïcha, because, as she says,

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<sup>45</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Mon Algérie', *Les Inrockuptibles*, no. 115, 20 Aug – 2 Sept 1997, 71-74 (p. 71).

<sup>46</sup> Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous: Photos de racines*, p. 206. Cixous's German family lived in Strasbourg in 1918, where they were granted French nationality. They preserved this despite moving back to Germany; their French nationality saved them from Nazi persecution in 1938, but in 1940 France withdrew French citizenship from its Jews in Algeria, along with the right to go to school, and the right for Cixous's father to practice medicine.

<sup>47</sup> Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*.

c'est la seule Algérie que j'aie jamais pu toucher froter tâter palper arquer mon dos à son mollet fourrer ma bouche entre ses seins ramper sur ses pentes épicées. [...] il n'y a pas d'autre femme qu'Aïcha, ni ma mère ni Omi [her German grandmother] n'étant des femmes.<sup>48</sup>

Aïcha represents the embodiment both of Algeria and of femininity itself. However, like Cardinal's ambivalent relationship with the 'good' mother Algeria, and the 'bad' biological mother, who also represents France, Cixous's maternal relationship with Algeria is ambiguous and fraught. It transpires that Aïcha, for twenty years a much-loved domestic figure, is in fact called Messaouda. Cixous is mortified at the discovery, for she and her brother have been at pains to avoid the widespread but violent appropriation of Arab names, but the incident is revelatory of the distance which characterises her relationship with Algeria.

Indeed, the ambivalence which characterises Cardinal and Cixous's relationship with their motherland is representative of the way in which the feminine has operated throughout this study. The feminine functions repeatedly as a mode of difference, through the exoticism of the desert girls, and the abjection of the mother who repulses her unwanted offspring, thereby demonstrating that issues of femininity are bound up with representations of otherness. In the writing of Cardinal and Cixous, the particular relationship between France and Algeria is characterised in terms of the ambiguous, shifting relationship with the motherland, which can be simultaneously positive and negative because the mother (France or Algeria) is alternately 'good' or 'bad'. The feminine represents the ambivalence of difference, being both endlessly alluring, and yet inferior and lacking; nurturing, and yet threatening.

*Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* is Cixous's exploration of her ambivalent attachment to Algeria, which opens with the following words: 'Tout le temps où je vivais en Algérie je rêvais d'arriver un jour en Algérie'.<sup>49</sup> To describe her relation to Algeria, the country which she longs to be part of, to which she does not truly belong and yet which she cannot leave, she employs the figure of pregnancy. Perhaps the

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<sup>48</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage: scènes primitives* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), p. 90.

<sup>49</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 9.

image of otherness within *par excellence*, this recalls the incidents of threatened abortion in *Les Mots pour le dire*, and *Le Passé sous silence*, in which Marie and Denis's respective mothers rejected the Other within them, and longed to rid themselves of it. For Cixous, however, the image is of an impossible expulsion: the *placenta previa*, which prevents birth from taking place and the baby from emerging by obstructing the birth canal, 'le placenta devant la tête comme une porte'.<sup>50</sup>

The expulsion which takes place naturally through birth here is impeded, with the mother and the Other which is the unborn child joined by a third element – the placenta – which is neither Self nor Other and which acts as a (closed) door to the outside where the pregnant mother and child, presently at once united and different, will become separate subjects. Cixous left Algeria in 1955, although it was an abortive attempt at departure, since the ties binding her to the country of her birth were not broken. According to her mother, the only means of removing the obstruction caused by the *placenta previa* is to break the waters surrounding the child. For the narrator, this means tears and mourning for the unknown country of her birth, tears which she has never shed. In the absence of tears, memories begin to stir, followed by the arrival of 'le Venant', the literary inspiration which spurs her into the process of writing the impossible text about Algeria.

The image of impeded pregnancy is a powerful image of Cixous' position in Algeria, for after her father's early death the family comes under a form of siege from their Arab neighbours, who throw the corpses of cats and dogs into the garden, and hurl stones at their terrified, howling dog. Cixous and her brother long to escape the situation – indeed, if the metaphor of pregnancy is extended one might say that it is their destiny to escape – yet the exit is blocked and escape thwarted, at least temporarily. Cixous herself acknowledges the influence of the image when she refers to the opening line of *Dedans*, her first fictional text, in which the house, encircled and surrounded by fifty thousand, is shown to be an echo of the 50,000 indigenous people of her childhood, who lived fifty metres away but who only now appear explicitly in her writing.<sup>51</sup> The metaphor of pregnancy, of being both Other and one

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<sup>50</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 164, emphasis in original.

<sup>51</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Dedans* (Paris: des femmes, 1986), p. 11.

within the same body, stretches to accommodate the state of being Jewish, French and Algerian, excluded and yet surrounded and unable to leave. For Cixous, then, Algeria is the perfect demonstration of the complexity and provisionality of otherness:

Le paradoxe de l'altérité, c'est bien sûr qu'à aucun moment dans l'Histoire elle n'est tolérée, possible, comme telle. L'autre n'est là que pour être réapproprié, repris, détruit en tant qu'autre. Même l'exclusion n'est pas une exclusion. L'Algérie n'était pas la France, mais elle était 'française'.<sup>52</sup>

In Cardinal's text, the narrator's sense of being perceived as Other is limited to her gender difference, which emerges only in specific circumstances such as when being gazed upon, bathing at the beach. At other times her perspective can be described as Western, as she demonstrates control and authority in her relationships with those around her. While she identifies with Algeria, her valorisation of the Other does not extend to the indigenous inhabitants who, as we have seen, remain Other to the narrator. She may not be comfortable with French norms but she is content to draw on them when necessary, and has no wish to make her life in present-day Algeria.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, it is clear from Cixous's text that her narrator sees herself and her family as Other, caught between two opposing communities, both of which reject them. This becomes evident through a gradual exploration of the narrator's childhood memories. Cixous structures these recovered memories around a number of everyday objects, which hold multiple associations with her life in Algeria and provide a gateway into remembered realities. They function as an emblem of the otherness of Algeria but, unusually for Cixous's often figurative language, they are also the material, embodied objects which are central to a child's life.

### Material signs of Algerian memory

The first of Cixous's material signs is 'le Vélo', the children's bicycle which the narrator and her brother long for as a means to explore and possess the Algeria

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<sup>52</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 130.

<sup>53</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 159.



which surrounds them but which remains out of reach. Here, Algeria itself is what remains unknown and unknowable while, at a later stage, it appears that the Arab Algerians are equally unknowable to the narrator. 'Le Vélo' does nothing to change this situation, initially because of its own continually deferred arrival. The longing for the bike is a longing for an answer – 'la demande de l'Objet absolu'<sup>54</sup> – which the children believe will open to them the hitherto locked country. The longing becomes a messianic act of faith, a promise to be fulfilled, for the bike does not come, just as their dead father does not return. And when it finally arrives, it brings disappointment: for the brother, who feels symbolically castrated because his mother has bought a girl's bike without imagining that this would trouble her son, and for the narrator, who loses the brother who has been her other self. The brother takes off on the bike; the narrator, scared by the hostile Arabs around her as she cycles, chooses to remain at home, encircled.

A similarly disappointing episode follows the arrival of a puppy, a gift of the dying father to his children. Fips, the dog, becomes the embodiment of the rejection and suffering experienced by the narrator. Kept in a cage outside, he becomes the innocent victim, whom Cixous refers to as 'Job taken hostage'. Like the narrator, who refers to him as her twin, blurring the distinction between human Self and animal Other, he is caught between the warring sides. Hit by stones thrown by the surrounding Arabs, his howls bear witness to the double suffering: his own fate, caged by the family, and their fate too, surrounded and attacked on all sides. His predicament is a microcosm of the narrator's wider experience of Algeria:

Au Clos-Salembier [...] mon coeur hurlait dans ma cage, Le Chien comme moi. Je me disais si jamais elle s'ouvre je fuirai, je ne connaissais ni courage ni espérance. Et Le Chien comme moi [...] Nous étions tous des chiens enragés les uns contre les autres mais des chiens en liberté. Le Chien, lui seul, prisonnier.<sup>55</sup>

Fips colludes in his own imprisonment, for each day he is briefly let out but chooses not to escape, voluntarily returning to his cage, hungry for the food which has been placed there. In the same way, the narrator describes how she and her brother are

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<sup>54</sup> Cixous, *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 28.

<sup>55</sup> Cixous, *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 78.

'fous et malades du besoin d'Algérie',<sup>56</sup> whilst at the same time she struggles vainly with leaving her painful situation: 'Je partirai, je laisserai toute l'Algérie Clos-Salembier derrière moi, je ne reviendrai plus jamais, même en pensée'.<sup>57</sup> For the whole family, the death of the father has turned Algiers 'en lieu d'expulsions multiples et interminables'.<sup>58</sup>

Algeria, then, is a place of division, conflict and arbitrary otherness, its borders interrupted only occasionally by gate-keepers like 'le Vélo' and 'le Chien', which allow the narrator access through memory. Until his death, the father acted as a gatekeeper for the family, facilitating passage between the inside and outside. He offers hospitality to two Arab hitch-hikers, who accept his offer with astonishment, taking him to be a Frenchman, although the narrator knows better. His presence as the local doctor maintains an uneasy peace between the communities, while after his death it is the gate itself ('le portail') which becomes the boundary between groups, albeit a doorway which occasionally opens. It separates the narrator from her brother, just as 'le Vélo' also separated them by allowing the brother access to the outside world, and it separates them as Jews from the little Arab children outside. However, this is a boundary which is porous, at least for the male, as Jennifer Yee has pointed out,<sup>59</sup> and it allows the brother to pass through, so that the 'Nous nous regardons. Entre nous le portail, impossible' of the brother and sister becomes

Je suis mon frère de l'autre côté. Ensemble nous poussons lentement le portail. La grappe de gosses se détache. Le portail impossible passe entre nous, à nouveau, entre nous les enfants à deux pains et nous les enfants sans pain.<sup>60</sup>

A similar incident (re)occurs later in the text, when the narrator passes bread to a little Arab girl through the 'portail ouvert-fermé'.<sup>61</sup> Cixous plays with the word 'volé' to reveal the tension between gift-giving and stealing. In the process of giving, the narrator becomes aware that her stolen bread has become restitution: she is giving

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<sup>56</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 61.

<sup>59</sup> Jennifer Yee, 'The Colonial Outsider: "Malgérie" in Hélène Cixous's *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 20.2 (2001), 189-200 (p. 194).

<sup>60</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 113.

back bread that has been stolen from the Arabs who are the dispossessed occupants of the land.

These incidents introduce the narrator's fascination with and desire for acceptance from the Arabs who are her neighbours. In the later sections of the narrative, Cixous introduces the reader to the three Arab girls who begin attending the narrator's school. Ostracised as the only Jew, the narrator is glad of the presence of other 'outsiders' in the French school community, and longs to make friends with them. In her disappointment at being rejected by them also, she gives voice to feelings which reveal her simultaneous longing for Algeria and its people, and her inability to separate herself from it even after it has rejected her:

J'étais attachée à leurs trois présences. J'étais avec elles et elles n'étaient pas avec moi, j'étais avec elles tenue loin d'elles par tous mes fantômes et tous les mots de barbarie qui nous obligeaient à prendre des morceaux de pneus comme gants, j'étais avec elles sans elles moi qui à moins d'elles ne pouvais être moi. Je voyais toutes mes algéries face à face.<sup>62</sup>

Although the narrator longs for these girls because, in the school setting, they represent the multitude of her 'Algéries', Cixous's text shows her real interest in individual Algerians. Unlike Cardinal, for whom Algerians are 'les Arabes' or 'les Algériennes', here Cixous gives the individual names, together with a recollection of the part played by one of them, Zohra Drif, in the independence and subsequent development of Algeria. Despite, or perhaps because of, the constant rejections, Cixous identifies completely with the Algerians; they play a crucial part in the construction of her own identity: 'Comment aurais-je pu être d'une France qui colonisait le pays algérien alors que je savais que nous-mêmes juifs allemands tchécoslovaques hongrois étions d'autres arabes'.<sup>63</sup> As a consequence of this she is condemned to endless and incomplete expulsion: the *placenta previa*. This state of (not be)longing is what Cixous refers to with one of her many neologisms, as she says 'pendant dix-huit ans j'étais réellement inséparable'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 151.

<sup>63</sup> Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Photos de racines*, p. 206.

<sup>64</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 89, emphasis in original.

While these passages make clear the segregation and exclusion experienced by the narrator in 1940s Algeria, Cixous is careful not to suggest that the Jews were the sole affected group; instead, she is at pains to illustrate the shifting and ambivalent power relations at work in Algerian society, which oppress the Algerians economically even as the latter lay siege to the Jewish family's house. She criticises the way in which a system of multiple exclusions operates, affecting different groupings. The gate which is both border and opening illustrates Cixous's impatience with boundaries, and her desire to penetrate the exclusionary categories which they contain so that the edges become blurred. This is evident in the 'bisexualité' which she advocates in *La Jeune née*,<sup>65</sup> and in the 'nous' of the gate, which becomes transferable, signifying both the brother and sister, and the Jewish and Arab children. Similarly, in her identification with Fips the dog, which is explored further in her essay 'Stigmates',<sup>66</sup> she challenges the boundaries between the human and the animal. In doing so she again blurs the divide between Self and Other for, as she stated explicitly in a recent interview, 'for me, there is no separation, no *strict* separation between animals and human beings'.<sup>67</sup> Her strategy here is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's 'devenir-animal', and of Nina's contemplation of 'devenir un rat' in *Garçon manqué*, each of which challenge the constantly reinforced boundary between human and animal. Here, as in all of her work, she seems to be reaching beyond, over and through, the barriers which divide sameness and difference, barriers which she first encountered in Algeria.

### Cardinal, Algeria, and writing

For Cardinal, too, the otherness which she experienced in Algeria emerges through the creative (re)invention of her work as a writer. Treated primarily as an autobiographical author by critics, she has explicitly drawn attention to the construction of her past, and the ways in which the literary version deviates from her

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<sup>65</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 156.

<sup>66</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Stigmates', *Lectora* 7 (2001), 195-202.

<sup>67</sup> Ian Blyth and Susan Sellers, 'English language interview with Hélène Cixous, June 2002', in Blyth and Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory*, p. 109, emphasis in original.

own experience. This is most notable with regard to her mother's revelation of her attempted abortion, which assumes a literary significance which Cardinal has said it did not have in her life.<sup>68</sup> It can also be seen in *Les Mots pour le dire*, where she recounts at length the detailed memories of the mother's confession to her daughter, only to immediately undermine it:

A la vérité, cela ne s'est pas passé comme ça. Nous n'étions pas à la ferme, dans le salon, en face d'un feu de bois. Tout son monologue, toutes les précisions, les révélations et les instructions qu'elle me donnait sur la condition des femmes, sur la famille, sur la morale, sur l'argent, c'est dans la rue qu'elle me les débitait.<sup>69</sup>

Algeria as a place and source of otherness appears to be of great importance to Cardinal's writing. Not only is it the place where she first became aware of socio-political difference, but it also functions as a recurrent motif throughout her work. Furthermore, in *Au Pays de mes racines*, Algeria is shown to be intimately linked to the creative process of writing. Cardinal reveals that her experience of writer's block, and her inability to complete her current novel, was the catalyst for her return, after twenty-five years, to the country of her birth, in search of something that would transform her writing. 'Il faut que je dise quel enjeu est ce voyage. Retrouver mes racines. Me confronter avec moi-même. [...] Impressions que je me suis trop francisée, que j'ai oublié quelque chose, quoi?'.<sup>70</sup> However, it is not until the closing pages of the text that Cardinal makes clear why Algeria offers a solution to her writer's block:

Je voulais jouir d'Alger et de l'Algérie. Cette volonté de jouissance était énorme, je m'en rends compte maintenant. C'est probablement elle qui me faisait si peur avant de partir, elle qui m'a tenue si longtemps loin de ma terre. [...] Ainsi, dès la première heure, j'ai été libérée du passé. Il était là, partout, il aurait fallu que je sois aveugle pour ne pas le voir, mais il ne me pesait pas. J'étais certaine de ne pas être venue pour lui. Ce que je désirais retrouver était au-delà de lui, c'était à la fois plus ancien et vivant, je désirais retrouver l'essentiel de ce pays, son souffle, son feu, son dedans. Ils étaient là, intacts eux aussi, et je m'y suis livrée dans la joie et la sérénité.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Cardinal, *Autrement dit*, p. 28.

<sup>69</sup> Marie Cardinal, *Les Mots pour le dire* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), p. 86.

<sup>70</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, pp. 83-4.

<sup>71</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, pp. 192-3.

Cardinal seems to connect with the jouissance and archaism of Algeria, which enables her to surmount the constraining memories of the past; it acts as a source which re-energizes her writing. According to Woodhull, 'Cardinal casts "Algeria" both as an experience of presymbolic pleasures *and* a force capable of disrupting oppressive power formations and fueling struggles to reconfigure the modern nation'.<sup>72</sup> Enviously watching the Algerians rejoicing in being an independent people, the narrator is conscious that the forces which have disrupted colonial power formations are now agents in the emergence of the Algerian nation. In her Kristevan reading, Woodhull argues that the revolutionary effects of these forces are seen not only in political action but in poetic language. They are what Cardinal hopes to see at work in her writing, in an attempt to overcome her writer's block: 'La Révolution Permanente: quels mots! Mais ils ont déjà été récupérés, piégés, emprisonnés, par l'habituel aveuglement et l'habituelle avidité des pouvoirs. Pourquoi ne pas en trouver d'autres?'.<sup>73</sup>

Cardinal thus locates the inventiveness and otherness of literary writing in a semiotic space intimately associated with Algeria. This draws her view very close to that of Cixous's early theoretical writings, in which she speaks of feminine writing as a space in which the Self can explore new ways of relating to the Other, in a non-violent context:

Je cherche donc, de façon pressante et plus angoissée, une scène où se produirait un type d'échange qui serait différent, un désir tel qu'il ne serait pas complice de la vieille histoire de la mort. [...] Il y aurait au contraire reconnaissance de l'un par l'autre, et cette reconnaissance se ferait grâce à un intense et passionné travail de connaissance justement: chacun prendrait enfin le risque de l'*autre*, de la différence, sans se sentir menacé(e) par l'existence d'inconnu à découvrir, à respecter, à favoriser, à entretenir.<sup>74</sup>

However, while Cardinal is evidently aware of the revolutionary potential of this semiotic realm for the transformation of Algeria and its people, her attitude towards it indicates her long-term relationship with the country. Because of the narcissistic aspect of her relationship to Algeria, she is primarily seeking its

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<sup>72</sup> Woodhull, *Transformations of the Maghreb*, p. 162, emphasis in original.

<sup>73</sup> Cardinal, *Au Pays*, p. 184.

<sup>74</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 143, emphasis in original.

resources in order to revolutionise her writing, just as her eagerness to meet the women at the university in Algiers stemmed not from a wish to know and support them in their struggles, but from her desire to receive their admiration for her work as an author. Cardinal therefore relates to Algeria either in an instrumental sense, in order to benefit her writing, or as part of a psychodrama about her own subjectivity. Writing, in contrast, offers Cardinal a potential means to better self-understanding. Her longing for the transformative power of Algeria at once underlines its importance to her writing, and yet establishes the limits of her ties to the country itself, as it becomes clear that her focus is on the writing, which will take place away from Algeria.

### Cixous: language, writing, and the irresolvable impasse of Algeria

So far, we have seen how, in *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, Cixous revisits the memories of her childhood in Algeria through literature. In this complex text, however, Cixous also reverses the process and explores the part played by literature in imaginatively recovering and reconstructing memories of the past. The potency of language and writing has always been present as a fundamental element in Cixous's work, manifesting itself at an early stage in response to the exclusion which she experienced as an Algerian Jew. Literature offered an alternative to the sterile religious and ethnic categories, and on leaving Algeria for France, she adopted a position beyond boundaries: 'A partir de 1955, j'ai adopté une nationalité imaginaire qui est la nationalité littéraire'.<sup>75</sup>

Not only literature, but language itself offered her a means of escape from Algeria. Born into a polylingual family, Cixous found herself in an extraordinary relationship with language:

Je l'ai souvent raconté, on jouait aux langues chez nous, mes parents passant avec plaisir et adresse d'une langue à l'autre tous les deux, l'un depuis le français l'autre

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<sup>75</sup> Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Photos de racines*, p. 207. Cixous's comment is reminiscent of Aziz, in *Un Aller simple*, whose uncertain origins are replaced over time by his book of legends, which becomes 'mon vrai pays, mon pays d'origine' (p. 17).

depuis l'allemand, en sautant par l'espagnol et l'anglais, l'un avec un peu d'arabe et l'autre avec un peu d'hébreu. Quand j'eus 10 ans, mon père me donna en même temps un maître d'arabe et un maître d'hébreu.

Cette agilité, ce *sport* translinguistique et amoureux m'abrita de toute obligation ou velléité d'obéissance (je ne pensai pas que le français fût ma langue maternelle, c'était une langue dans laquelle mon père m'apprenait) à *une* langue materpaternelle.<sup>76</sup>

The linguistic ability gifted to her by her parents therefore released her from the conventions which bind monolingual speakers to a collective identity. Jacques Derrida has written about his personal experience of the difficulties in speaking a language which is alienated by association with a colonising power,<sup>77</sup> although the experience of alienation extends to each of us, as Jane Hiddleston points out: 'Derrida describes the metaphysical alienation experienced by all individuals in relation to language per se. Alienation and lack are not symptoms of a lost wholeness, but are constitutive of all language and culture'.<sup>78</sup> Cixous echoes Derrida's linguistic alienation when she says that although German was ostensibly her mother tongue, it was 'à jamais éloigné de la bouche de ma conscience par l'épisode nazi'.<sup>79</sup> Fortunate enough to have a choice of languages in which to write, she is not compelled to use a language from which she feels alienated. However, seeing herself as 'not French', she always remains at a certain distance from French, the language in which she has chosen to write. Comparing her situation to that of Derrida, she says,

Je reconnais son rapport étranger à la langue française. J'ai aussi un rapport étranger à la langue française. Pas pour les mêmes raisons; mais dès le départ c'était là. Lui, il a fait lui-même le portrait de sa propre étrangeté. Mon étrangeté est toute-puissante en moi. Quand 'je parle' c'est toujours au moins 'nous', la langue et moi en elle, avec elle, et elle en moi qui parlons.<sup>80</sup>

Cixous here speaks as if language is a separate entity with which she has an intimate relationship. Indeed, it is arguable that the distance that she experiences between herself and the French language, which is a space of difference, is what

<sup>76</sup> Cixous, 'Mon Algérie', p. 73, emphasis in original.

<sup>77</sup> Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*.

<sup>78</sup> Jane Hiddleston, 'Derrida, Autobiography and Postcoloniality', *French Cultural Studies* 16.3 (2005), 291-304 (p. 299).

<sup>79</sup> Cixous, 'Mon Algérie', p. 73.

<sup>80</sup> Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Photos de racines*, p. 93



allows otherness and creativity to enter her work, and so enables her to write. The exploration of Cixous's relationship with the French language is, on one level, the subject of *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, which opens with her description of writerly inspiration coming to her. As I will argue, it is also the exploration of the otherness of literary writing at the service of communicating the otherness of Algeria.

Commenting on the capriciousness of the French State, which has both given and retracted unlooked-for French citizenship to its Algerian Jewish subjects, she celebrates her experience of the French language: 'Hospitalité houleuse, intermittente de l'État et de la Nation. Mais hospitalité infinie de la langue'.<sup>81</sup> Since, as Attridge says, hospitality implies a willingness to accept the other into the domain of the host, and even to change that domain in order to accommodate the other, the French language, best known for the rigidity of the Académie française, would not appear to be the epitome of linguistic hospitality.<sup>82</sup> However, Cixous, perhaps more than any other writer in this thesis, pushes at the limits of the hospitality offered by language and accepted by the writer. The consequence of this is a call, in *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, for a corresponding depth of readerly hospitality, which occurs when the reader engages in a committed event of reading, to become open and responsive to the singularity and alterity of the creative text.

### Linguistic hospitality and literary otherness

The text opens as the narrator, awake in the middle of the night, receives inspiration for a new novel. Knowing that the inspiration will soon pass, she quickly begins to write as words come to her. Her term for this mysterious inspiration, 'le Venant', is reminiscent of Attridge's account of the process of literary creation, which acknowledges the existence of something outside of our normal experience:

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<sup>81</sup> Cixous, 'Mon Algériance', p. 72.

<sup>82</sup> See Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 152, n. 25. As the Introduction indicated, hospitality has developed into a broad field of research, and this study confines itself to a consideration of what might be termed linguistic and readerly hospitality.

'Motivated by some obscure drive, I sense that I am pushing at the limits of what I have hitherto been able to think'.<sup>83</sup> However, in the morning, of the five pages hurriedly written, only half of the first page remains, reproduced for us in italics. It speaks of her childhood longing for Algeria, which was never realised, and of how memory – and the presence of 'le Venant' – now permits, even obliges, her to return to Algeria for the first time. The search for the pages parallels her fruitless search for Algeria, and their loss reproduces the old aching loss of her country when she left, so that she relives her past: 'Cela ressemble tellement à cette sorte de *maladie algérie* que je faisais en Algérie ou qu'elle me faisait, cette sensation d'être possédée par une sensation de dépossession et la réponse que je produisais'.<sup>84</sup> This 'malgérie' nonetheless is the occasion for her to revisit the impossibilities of life in Algeria in writing.

The otherness of writerly inspiration acts as a gateway into the otherness of Algeria. Cixous hints at this in *La Jeune née* when she speaks of writing as a gateway which, unlike the gates in Algeria, is particularly accessible to women:

Je dirai: aujourd'hui l'écriture est aux femmes. Ce n'est pas une provocation, cela signifie que: la femme admet qu'il y ait de l'autre. [...] A l'homme, il est bien plus difficile de se laisser traverser par de l'autre. L'écriture, c'est en moi le passage, entrée, sortie, séjour, de l'autre que je suis et ne suis pas.<sup>85</sup>

Or écrire c'est travailler; être travaillé; (dans) l'entre, interroger, (se laisser interroger) le procès du même *et de* l'autre sans lequel nul n'est vivant [...] Parcours multiplicateur à milliers de transformations.<sup>86</sup>

La femme qui fait l'épreuve du non-moi entre moi, comment n'aurait-elle pas à l'écrit un rapport spécifique?<sup>87</sup>

In this Cixous suggests that writing, like the experience of pregnancy, is an encounter with otherness. Her description of the process of writing, of working and being worked upon by the slippage between Same and Other, and of the resulting possible

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<sup>83</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 18.

<sup>84</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 16.

<sup>85</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 158.

<sup>86</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 159, emphasis in original.

<sup>87</sup> Cixous, *La Jeune née*, p. 167.

transformations, arguably may be extended to the act of reading, since the writer is always the first reader. It is reminiscent of Attridge's argument that the event of reading inventive, literary writing is potentially the event of encountering otherness, and of the reader allowing herself to be changed, albeit momentarily, by an experience which is contrary to the familiar and everyday. Writing, then, would seem to be a wholly appropriate passageway through which to engage with the conflicted otherness of Algeria.

The narrator describes the process of beginning to write as the arrival of an expected and hoped-for guest. The patience of the expectant writer is an echo of the child-narrator's experience of waiting for 'le Vélo', and for the father who never comes. The image of the father as the Christ-figure whose promised return has not (yet) materialised is at once repeated and altered here, for 'le Venant' is a type of the Holy Spirit, received by the narrator as the Eucharist:

Puis une fois reçu le viatique absolu je m'aventurai à allumer, et comme si j'avais à la bouche, à la bouche de l'âme et de la main, et sur ma langue de nuit l'hostie qui répand chair et sang du Venant dans mon corps, tout en suçant et absorbant, j'avais écrit à la suite de la première semence quatre grandes pages de lignes serrées en caractères épais hâtifs<sup>88</sup>

From the opening of the text, then, the Jewish Cixous chooses to introduce the notion of the hospitality offered by writing, as the reciprocal welcoming of otherness figured in the Eucharist. As Mairéad Hanrahan points out,

L'aspect hospitalier de l'écriture est renforcé par le fait que la communion ne va pas sans évoquer le partage du pain, la scène d'hospitalité par excellence [...] La narratrice 'reçoit' l'hostie à la fois comme un don et comme un hôte, un invité.<sup>89</sup>

Cixous goes on to draw parallels between the hospitality shown by writing, and by the French language in particular, and by Algeria and its inhabitants. The degree of hospitality offered is in inverse proportion to the experience of boundaries. Her father's 'hospitalité inattendue', extended to the two Arab hitch-hikers, stems from the fact that he ignores Algeria's identity categories, being 'un véritable arabe sous

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<sup>88</sup> Cixous, *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> Mairéad Hanrahan, 'Les Réveries de la femme sauvage ou le temps de l'hospitalité', *Expressions maghrébines*, 2.2 (2003), 55-69 (p. 66).

les fausses apparences d'un jeune et beau médecin français, étant d'ailleurs juif'.<sup>90</sup> His hospitality is shared by the narrator's mother, the German-speaking Jew who refuses national labels, and who speaks of doors wide and welcoming:

chaque fois qu'il y a un nationalisme je ne vais pas, j'ai toujours été internationale [...] En tant que sage-femme j'ai toujours été internationale de mon côté. Le bébé est un nouveau-né international. A La Clinique il y avait deux portes qui étaient toujours ouvertes.<sup>91</sup>

Her experience of displacement has taught her to be suspicious of roots, and of her children's desire for them, as Cixous recalls:

Mais ma mère l'industrielle qui refaisait chaque fois un nid dans l'exil même, à la fourche même de l'exile, elle ne pouvait pas imaginer que nous voulions à tout prix entrer et arriver dans un pays. [...] Un lien pense-t-elle est fait pour être coupé, un désir sevré.<sup>92</sup>

Her vision of hospitality is radical: she refuses to visit Jews who might welcome her simply for her Jewishness. But the foreignness, the strangeness, which is responsible for her own proffered hospitality creates in others a suspicion of the different. She becomes the 'invitée-évitée', and consequently her children are 'des ininvités par contiguïté'.<sup>93</sup>

### Conflicts (un)resolved in language

In writing the conflicts which she experienced in Algeria, Cixous's narrator begins to push linguistically at the boundaries which constricted her life there. The long, fluid sentences allow Cixous to convey the process of memory as it develops out of recollections of key objects: le Vélo, le Chien, la Ville. She plays with language to find new ways to represent the slippery, often contradictory, aspects of life. As Heathcote says, 'Cixous's language does not create in order to register

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<sup>90</sup> Cixous, *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 46.

<sup>91</sup> Cixous, *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 107.

<sup>92</sup> Cixous, *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 58.

<sup>93</sup> Cixous, *Les Réveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 108.

change but in order to articulate unresolvable conflicts, paradoxes and divided allegiances'.<sup>94</sup> This is seen in the desire to belong whilst being held at a distance, which produces 'une relation invivable avec soi-même',<sup>95</sup> with associated neologisms ('séparéunir'; 'inséparabe'); the conditional hospitality often withdrawn ('invitée-évitée'; 'ininvités'); and the recovered memory of undivided childhood enthusiasm ('Yadibonformage'; 'yadlavachkiri'). Through her syntax she attacks the 'portail ouvert-fermé' which separates 'nous à deux pains' from 'nous sans pain' and imposes socio-cultural separation on childhood unities. Her success in this is unlooked-for, as Yee says,

The freedom of linguistic play (liberating or unlocking meaning) thus offsets the locked gates/doors that exclude the narrator-as-child from the various spaces of her childhood and releases her fiction from the narrowed space that threatened to imprison it in this piece of writing.<sup>96</sup>

As the narrator says, language is the vehicle (or the doorway) which takes her where she wants to be: 'La seule témoinne? La soeurtémoin la soeurt'aime mais non moins, il faudra bien que la langue me porte où je veux nous trouver'.<sup>97</sup> And while Algeria, the land of borders and boundaries, never offers her the hospitality she craves, it is nonetheless Algeria which inspires the writing which in the end enables her to overcome those boundaries. Her writing enables her to manifest the irresolvable impasse of Algeria's difference, with its borders and encirclements, while at the same time her creative use of language enables her to push beyond the boundaries into a space of linguistic otherness which expresses the stalemated conflict, yet is beyond it. The hospitality of the French language gives her the freedom to return to Algeria and in doing so, enables her to overcome the incomplete and multiple expulsions of the past.

In the Introduction, we saw how Alec Hargreaves and Charles Bonn considered, and rejected, the notion that 'beur' literature could constitute a development of 'minor literature' (to use Deleuze and Guattari's term). While 'beur'

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<sup>94</sup> Owen Heathcote, 'The Personal and Political: Algeria, Violence, Gender and Writing in Marie Cardinal, Hélène Cixous and Assia Djébar', in *Marie Cardinal: New Perspectives*, pp. 53-70 (p. 60).

<sup>95</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 45.

<sup>96</sup> Yee, 'The Colonial Outsider', p. 199.

<sup>97</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 26.

literature may be too linguistically conventional to represent the minorising of the French language, it can be argued that in challenging the limits of classical French, Cixous is engaged in the process of moving the language away from its Hexagonal centre. In this she follows Deleuze and Guattari's description of a minor language: 'Une littérature mineure n'est pas celle d'une langue mineure, plutôt celle qu'une minorité fait dans une langue majeure. Mais le premier caractère est de toute façon que la langue y est affectée d'un fort coefficient de déterritorialisation'.<sup>98</sup> As a writer who is generally considered to be French, writing about her explicitly non-French origins, Cixous is therefore engaged, through her use of both subject-matter and language, in a process of de-centring France, exploring the hospitality of the French language to produce a deterritorialised version of French which demonstrates that she, who is seen as French, is in fact the product of a hybrid country.

However, as Attridge indicates, Cixous's success in accessing the hospitality of the French language, which infuses her text with creative otherness, calls for a response from the reader. By choosing to read a literary text, the reader participates in the (re-)creation of the experience of otherness. This demands a committed reading, of the kind that Sartre refers to:

Ainsi la lecture est-elle un exercice de générosité; et ce que l'écrivain réclame du lecteur ce n'est pas l'application d'une liberté abstraite, mais le don de toute sa personne, avec ses passions, ses préventions, ses sympathies, son tempérament sexuel, son échelle de valeurs. Seulement cette personne se donnera avec générosité, la liberté la traverse de part en part et vient transformer les masses les plus obscures de sa sensibilité.<sup>99</sup>

This 'générosité' involves taking a risk in encountering the otherness within the text, of being open to its possible consequences, particularly those effects which it might have on our preconceived norms and values. To achieve this, literature requires what might be termed 'readerly hospitality', defined thus by Attridge:

Readerly hospitality, a readiness to have one's purposes reshaped by the work to which one is responding. [...] To read creatively in an attempt to respond fully and responsibly to the alterity and singularity of the text is to work against the mind's tendency to assimilate the other to the same, attending to that which can barely be heard, registering what is unique about the shaping of the language, thought, and

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<sup>98</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), p. 29.

<sup>99</sup> Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, pp. 64-5.

feeling in this particular work. It involves a suspension of habits, a willingness to rethink old positions in order to apprehend a work's inaugural power.<sup>100</sup>

In *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, Cixous calls the reader to a new encounter with alterity, with the invitation to engage in the experience of the otherness of Algeria. By presenting the conflicts which constitute the irresolvable impasse of Algeria's difference, the text invites the reader to allow the transformation of existing assumptions about Algeria. The dominant norms of thought which surround Algeria, and which project it either as part of the old, colonial Self, the conquered territory fully assimilated into the French Republic or, more commonly, as the essence of otherness which rejected assimilation in the most bitter and humiliating circumstances, are fundamentally called into question in Cixous's text. Instead, the reader encounters a complex site of multiple differences structured around the identities of various communities, which resist the imposition of totalizing Republican categories, whether Self or Other. In experiencing these manifestations of otherness through Cixous's linguistic inventiveness, the reader is invited to make space in which to accommodate inhabitual forms of difference, and to accept the notion of 'Algérie française' as a place of conflicted and irresolvable hybridity.

This notion of a hybrid Algeria poses a challenge to Republican norms, since in Cixous's recollections Algeria still forms a part of the French Republic. Moreover, it has been shown that the conflicts which she experienced in Algeria, which were the consequence of this irresolvable hybridity, have been instrumental in the development of her writings since leaving Algeria, writings which have been influential throughout the French academy. As Part Two of this study has shown, traces of the same conflicts, which are the legacy of France's Algerian past, continue to operate today. By its very nature, literary writing offers an appropriate medium for the exploration of difference, since it remains permanently open to re-interpretation. Like the impasse of Algeria, then, it never offers a definitive answer. It is in this sense that Cixous agrees with Tsvetayeva's statement that 'all poets are Jews':

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<sup>100</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 80.

For Tsvetayeva, all indications are that something of a Jew is in every poet or that every poet is Jewish. The point has nothing to do with religion but with what it means poetically 'to be Jewish'. She suggests that we are better off as wandering Jews, belonging where we cannot belong.<sup>101</sup>

Poets can be considered as wandering Jews to the extent that their writing never arrives at a definitive meaning, since poetic writing is open to multiple interpretations. The poet's relationship to writing is analogous with Cixous's relationship to Algeria, in the sense that there is never a definitive arrival, if we recall the opening sentence of *Les Rêveries*: 'Tout le temps où je vivais en Algérie je rêvais d'arriver un jour en Algérie'.<sup>102</sup> This experience of Algeria is the experience of messianicity; indeed, as Cixous says, the very word 'messiance' comes to her from Algeria.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, for Cixous, the experience of writing is a process of deferral, moving towards a point of arrival which is never attained, an experience which I argue stems directly from her Algerian past.

In *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, Cixous pushes at the conventional limits of the French language, splitting it apart and insisting that the otherness which operated in Algeria still has a place within contemporary French, and therefore contemporary France. Her text challenges the reader to make space for new and hybrid forms of otherness which escape totalizing categories, and to accommodate this difference with a respect which resists the urge to assimilate. In contrast, Cardinal's response to the conflicts present in Algeria is to become detached from the varied communities which surround her, focusing instead on the nurture available from the country itself. Her narrator's narcissism means that she retains a conventional subjectivity which, although binarised in complex ways, remains centred on her self, and consequently her writing is not open to the creative potential of the otherness which surrounds her. Cixous's writing, however, is inflected by and expresses the otherness and conflicts of her experience in Algeria. Whilst her text is ostensibly concerned with pre-independence Algeria, her linguistic practices therefore also have implications for notions of identity, sameness and difference

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<sup>101</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, ed. and trans. by Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 150. Abridged transcripts of seminars at the Centre de Recherches en Etudes Féminines, 1982-84.

<sup>102</sup> Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, p. 9.

<sup>103</sup> Cixous, 'Mon Algérie', p. 73.



within the French Republic at the time her text was published in 2000. What initially appears to be a text about history and memory, through the reader's engagement with its linguistic inventiveness, is therefore shown to have destabilizing consequences for French conceptions of the Republic.

## Conclusion

This study has examined issues of French identities, as they emerge from the contemporary relationship between France and its former colonies in North Africa, and has assessed the ways in which decolonisation and immigration from the Maghreb has reframed the historical relationship. It starts from the perception, widely held in French society today, that North African immigration presents a threat to French identity, and that it is responsible for the various socio-political issues which France has experienced in recent years, from 'l'affaire du foulard' to the rise of the Far Right and, more recently, the riots which took place across France during the course of this research, in November 2005. While previous sociological research by Hargreaves and others has demonstrated that the 'génération beur' is, in the main, eager to integrate, and poses no threat to French society, hostile and exclusionary attitudes persist in sections of the French mainstream. This study has sought to shed light on the reasons behind these attitudes, by examining the way in which discourses about the Maghreb and Maghrebis operate in contemporary literature. As such, it is the first study to have examined the effects of North African immigration as seen from the Hexagon, and specifically, from the perspective of novelists from the French *métropole*.

What emerges from the research is a sense of the specificity of the situation in France. This is largely due to the functioning of the French Republican tradition, and its response to difference which, as Todorov showed, equates that which cannot be assimilated into the same with inferiority.<sup>1</sup> The tension inherent in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen demonstrates the French difficulty in dealing with those who do not hold French citizenship. The same tension exists in the policy of assimilation, which promotes cultural uniformity but which, in France's colonies at least, was never fully applied. The consequences of the resulting lack of political representation were resentment, civil unrest and, ultimately in Algeria, the bloody war of independence which humiliated France and left a lasting bitterness on both

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<sup>1</sup> Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique*, p. 48.

sides. In assessing the extent to which France's relationship with its former colonies has altered since decolonisation, the particularity of Franco-Algerian history represents a privileged site, by virtue of Algeria's former status as an integral part of the French Republic. As the location of France's ultimately failed attempt to assimilate the different into the Self (albeit at the level of territory, rather than of inhabitants), Algeria represents a nexus of nostalgia and fascination, but also of failure and resentment for France. It therefore represents a privileged site of France's relationship with difference. As such, it offers a useful vantage point from which to assess the extent to which French identities and systems of representation have been problematised in the post-colonial era, and to consider the contribution which literature makes to our understanding of this changing relationship with difference.

## Overview of findings

The significance of Algeria means that to an extent, contemporary relations between France, and Morocco and Tunisia, are mediated through France's past relationship with Algeria, through the halo effect of the Algerian War. At the same time, however, French perceptions of Algeria, although marked by specificities of Franco-Algerian history, remain influenced by Orientalist tropes associated with the larger Maghreb, that is, tropes of the desert, exoticism, odalisques and harems. This inter-connected flow of influence was reflected in the structure of the study. Part One, consisting of two chapters, examined French attitudes towards the wider Maghreb, and considered contemporary updatings of Orientalist traditions within which French writers have explored other countries, as seen from the Hexagon. A review of the literary traditions, dating back to Montaigne and Montesquieu, which French writers have historically employed to represent the Other revealed the persistence of favoured Orientalist tropes of the desert, oases, and odalisques. Through textual analysis, these chapters demonstrated that colonial attitudes remain present within the French imagination. They are, to an extent, disrupted by the attempts of Le Clézio and Bona to de-centre the Hexagon by focusing on the desert and its inhabitants, although this was problematised by replication of modernist

tropes of individualism and exoticist convention. In contrast, Sebbar succeeded in appropriating the exotic images of the odalisque and, in an example of Said's 'travelling theory', used the colonial tradition to energise the creation of new, nomadic forms of identity through her protagonist, Shérazade. At the same time, drawing on the work of Célestin, we saw how the difficulties of translating alterity in literature were negotiated with varying degrees of success, given the inevitability of the writer's location within discourses which influence the representations possible.

Working within the tradition established by Montesquieu, Tournier and Hocquenghem critiqued Francocentric views of the *métropole* by juxtaposing it with desert cultures and presenting it through the distancing eyes of a North African immigrant. While their representations de-centred France, their appeal to the senses in critiquing French modernity was arguably less fruitful than van Cauwelaert's alternative approach. He employed humour to expose the incongruity of French immigration policy, juxtaposing the uncertain origins of the non-immigrant Aziz with the official discourse on repatriation, and so subjecting it to ridicule. Consistent with Freud's linking of humour and dignity, he engaged the reader's sympathy for Aziz, and proposed the power of storytelling as a means of shaping alternative realities.

Part Two was made up of three chapters which concerned the singularity of Algeria's relationship with France. In their writings, Daniel Prévost and Nina Bouraoui treated what is perhaps the central issue in discussions of the problematisation of French identity: that is, the presence in France of citizens who hold French nationality, but whose ethnic origins mean that they are frequently rejected as foreign by their fellow citizens. Their depiction of the hostility and aggression experienced by the 'foreigner' revealed the emotions behind the frequently reported claims that French identity is threatened by immigration. Kristeva's illuminating analysis revealed the forces at work within the psyche of individuals within France, as people struggle with the fear that the borders which constitute identity will be threatened and blurred by the presence of the foreigner.

The texts analysed in this chapter not only clearly outlined the problematic of difference within the Hexagon, but posited a number of possible responses.

Kristeva's work on the abject, and Prévost's description of the process of abjecting and being abjected, which demonstrated the overlap between the 'theoretical' and the 'literary', developed the emphasis on the sensory present in the writings of Le Clézio, Tournier and Hocquenghem, and demonstrated the material forms in which the encounter between cultures is made manifest. However, in contrast to Kristeva's advocacy of psychoanalysis, Deleuze's work showed that the way to a resolution of these identity conflicts may be rhizomatic and molecular in character. Finally, as writers, Prévost and Bouraoui themselves presented the power of literature as a means of enabling encounters with otherness which would be unthinkable in other circumstances, yet which offer the possibility of understanding and acceptance.

In Chapter Four, the work of Pierre Nora demonstrated the significance of memory and history in establishing a consensus around national identity. The history of the Algerian War, in particular, has left a legacy which continues to affect attitudes and behaviour towards Maghrebis within France today, and which is in part responsible for the particular relationship which now exists between France and Algeria, and their peoples. However, as Stora and Gildea argued, this history has been repressed as far as possible because it contradicts the national narrative of 'la France éternelle'. The part played by literary writers in recovering lost memories and reinserting them into the public domain through novels illustrates the way in which literature can bear witness to and, indeed, stage the act of witness to events which have been forgotten. In doing so, literature opens the reader to new possibilities of interpretation, which de-centre established traditions of the nation and its history.

While the discussion of national narrative dealt with the operation of collective memory on a grand scale, memory was used in more subtle ways in the work of Cardinal and Cixous. In their recollections of the conflicts which existed in the Algeria of their childhood, they revealed an Algeria which was characterised by division and hybrid identities. This challenged the assumption that because Algeria was an integral part of the Hexagon during this period, it conformed to Republican principles of a unified identity. By writing explicitly about their origins and sense of distance from France, and by demonstrating the extent of Algeria's influence on the development of their writing projects, both Cardinal and Cixous implicitly questioned their literary identity as 'French' writers. In doing so, they destabilised

notions of Frenchness, a process which was developed by Cixous in her inventive use of the French language. In her use of both subject-matter and language, then, Cixous engaged in a process of de-centring France, using the hospitality of the French language to hint at the possibility of new, deterritorialised forms of French.

One of the common means employed by the writers to figure the process of de-centring France has been the figure of the feminine. As discussed in the Introduction, critics have noted similarities in the construction of the colonial and the feminine, both of which function as modes of difference. In literary representations of the (post)colonial, it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the trope of the feminine should have figured throughout this study. As Bhabha's work on the stereotype has demonstrated, conceptions of the feminine, as of the black man, are inherently ambivalent. Discourses of the feminine are therefore well suited to representations of otherness, particularly when these concern France's relationship with its colonial Other, Algeria. The texts analyzed in this study therefore figure femininity in both its valorized and rejected forms, from the slipperiness of exoticism, which both objectifies and empowers femininity, to the abjection of the maternal, and the ambivalent relationship with the 'good' and 'bad' mother(land), alternately represented by France and Algeria. What emerges from such an examination is the problematised role which the feminine occupies within the gendered nation, and in particular, in relation to the French Republic. As a site of difference, the feminine, like the colonial, represents an issue for the Republic since its citizens are habitually gendered as male, although its symbol, Marianne, is feminine. Like ethnicity, therefore, gender represents a particular encounter with otherness within the French Republic.

In various ways, then, each of the novelists in this study has chosen to articulate the otherness which emerges from France's post-colonial relationship with Algeria. In doing so, they demonstrate the instability of discourses which continue to construct France as the Centre, and point to forms of otherness – exoticism, abjection, counter-memory, the feminine – which undermine monolithic conceptions of Frenchness. However, while their texts address the neo-colonial denial which refuses to recognize the need to embrace the implications of a changed era, they do not explicitly offer a solution to the social problems which result from economic and

political realities. This raises the question, then, of how we should respond to the otherness presented by the literary texts, and to the political realities of the contemporary French landscape.

### Possible responses to otherness

What emerges through this study is that, as with many subjects of French intellectual theorising, the central issue is that of difference, arising from the Republican policy of assimilation and from its consequences, first during the colonial period, then through the violence of the Algerian War and its legacy, and more recently with the increase in immigration from the Maghreb. In the face of growing tension between the established discourses of France as imperial power and the emergence of alternative counter-narratives, politicians, intellectuals, and individual citizens are faced with the question of how to respond to manifestations of difference. Theorists, sociologists, and the lived experience of thousands of youths in France's *banlieues* have demonstrated that the encounter with difference tends towards the development of oppression, if not murderous violence. The campaigns of organisations such as SOS Racisme, calling for 'la droit à la différence', have not succeeded in overturning the assumption that difference inevitably equates to inferiority. Moreover, as the Introduction showed, with the end of the grand narratives intellectuals such as Lyotard lost faith in the ability of politics to offer a solution.

As with other discourses of gender and race, the challenge here is to arrive at a position in which difference is subject to neither assimilation nor exclusion, but where individual differences can be respected and maintained. Kristeva has theorised these issues more fully than perhaps any other philosopher, drawing on her experience of the feminist struggle to understand the forces at work within French society, and their relation to the question of national identity. Speaking of the need for a discourse on the 'national' that does not descend into racism whilst still respecting difference, she suggests that psychoanalysis, philosophy and literature may all have a contribution to make in helping us to accommodate singularity and otherness:

Cependant, ce cheminement éthique que proposent *la psychanalyse*, mais aussi, et d'une autre façon, *la philosophie contemporaine* – attachée à analyser la singularité et le droit à l'exception comme aboutissement et dépassement des droits de l'homme –, ainsi que la *littérature* qui s'écrit comme une défense de la dignité de l'étrange, ce cheminement éthique, donc, qui peut élaborer des discours patients, complexes, engageant la méditation de chacun, ne nous dispense pas, bien au contraire, de reposer la question du 'national'.<sup>2</sup>

As an established philosopher, a practicing psychoanalyst and published novelist, it seems unlikely that Kristeva is suggesting that each discipline operates in mutual exclusivity; rather, she is referring to the contribution which each can make to complex questions of difference. We saw in Chapter Three how Kristeva uses psychoanalysis to reveal the difference located within each individual, and proposes to use it as a means of developing an ethics of respect for universal difference.<sup>3</sup> However, while I believe that her objective of an ethics of respect offers a possible resolution, the difficulties inherent in her proposed methodology, outlined also in Chapter Three, indicate that psychoanalysis may offer at best only a limited solution.

Kristeva's appeal to philosophy and literature as sources of understanding and reconciliation echoes earlier writers such as the theorist Abdelkebir Khatibi who, in *Amour bilingue*, argues that only philosophy and poetics are capable of bearing witness to irreducible otherness.<sup>4</sup> This poses a difficulty for critics such as Winifred Woodhull, who voices scepticism about such claims:

I think we should be suspicious of the fact that so many theory writers declare philosophical-poetic work – that is, their own work – to be the only activity capable of resisting capitalism and other oppressive systems, whilst remaining faithful to an otherness variously referred to as the feminine (or the maternal), intractable difference, singularity, the uncanny, and the unrepresentable.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kristeva, *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir*, p. 20, emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup> In *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), Kristeva identifies the foreigner's difference as a key to coming to terms with the difference that is within each of us; however, by the time of *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir* (1990) she is proposing an understanding of psychic difference as a means to resolving racial tensions:

En effet, je suis convaincue, qu'à long terme, seul un travail en profondeur sur notre rapport singulier à l'autre et à l'étrangeté en nous pourra conduire les hommes à abandonner la chasse au bouc émissaire extérieur à leur groupe (*Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir*, p. 19, emphasis in original).

<sup>4</sup> Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Amour bilingue* (Fata Morgana, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*, p. xii.



Instead, she points to social movements, such as the Algerian feminist demonstrations against a 1981 draft of the family law that would have required Algerian married women to obtain their husband's permission to work outside the home, as sites where grass roots activism continues to campaign successfully for political recognition.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, despite Lyotard's pronouncements, it seems not only plausible but necessary that political struggle continue in situations around the globe where injustice and oppression has been the experience of minority groups, whether in France, Algeria, Northern Ireland, or amongst the women of Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, as Kristeva argues, and as this study has shown, literature does have something particular to offer the debate, because of its singular relationship with otherness. It offers readers the opportunity to conceive of new ways of perceiving the world, through the sensory realms of Le Clézio's *le Hartani*, and Hoquenghem's *Amar*. It communicates new forms of identity, acknowledging the persistence of colonial stereotypes but showing how these can be transformed into the catalyst for Shérazade's nomadic vision of the world. It can challenge our assumptions about history, and the national narratives that can be accepted as established, staging witness to counter-memories of forgotten violence committed in the very heart of Paris.<sup>7</sup> It can also engage in the performance of theoretical issues, as Prévost, Bouraoui and Cixous have demonstrated. Texts such as these therefore operate to introduce otherness into the heart of France, using the relationship with North Africa as a means of de-centring France and allowing French readers to encounter French realities in a subtly different form.

Moreover, as Cixous, Prévost and Bouraoui show, literature can provide a medium in which to negotiate the otherness of which Kristeva speaks, which lies within individual identity. It bears witness to the fact that identity is frequently conflicted, yet beyond that, writing has a power to communicate the experience of that otherness within. The experience of that otherness, individualized and so divested of the threat that comes with the otherness of a collectivity, may be more

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<sup>6</sup> Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*, p. 198.

<sup>7</sup> As Chapter Four demonstrated, other media such as cinema, photography, and journalism, can also present counter-memory. It may be, however, that the inventive and non-representational nature of literary writing (in the sense that it exists as marks on a page rather than representational images) uniquely allows the reader to re-experience past events in their imagination.

easily accommodated. As Attridge says, in the individual event of reading, which is always singular because the experience is different on each reading, 'I encounter not the other as such (how could I?) but the remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer entirely other'.<sup>8</sup>

In their writing, Attridge and Cixous frame a particular aspect of hospitality, that is, the hospitality of language, which welcomes and enables the articulation of alterity as it is encountered in different aspects of experience. The ability of language to encompass this otherness brings us back to the ethical question of the appropriate response. The ethical obligation to respond rests in part on the understanding that the identity of Self is relational, and depends on that which is excluded as Other. The continuation of the identity of that which is known therefore depends on contact with that which is different since, as Attridge says, 'a culture which does not continually find ways of opening itself to the excluded other on which it depends can hardly be said to be ethical'.<sup>9</sup> And while there are never any guarantees that the otherness encountered through reading will be positive (and many readers can no doubt recall texts which challenged their view of the world, although in ways they would possibly prefer to forget), this is part of the responsibility of the reader. Attridge advocates the following response:

I cherish the other, not in spite of but *because* of its otherness, since its otherness is precisely what makes it valuable to me, and, without any guarantees, I undertake to realize and sustain this otherness as fully and enduringly as possible – which means being prepared to start all over again with each fresh encounter.<sup>10</sup>

My obligation is to refashion what I think and what I am in order to take the fullest possible account of, to respect, safeguard, and learn from, the otherness and singularity of the other, and to do so without any certainty about the consequences of my act.<sup>11</sup>

The response which Attridge calls for is radical, and yet it is not impossible to imagine choosing to encounter literature in this way. This is perhaps why Kristeva identified literature as one privileged site of the encounter with otherness, in which

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<sup>8</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 124, emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 125.

we are more ready to open ourselves to the challenge of the unknown. If this response to the otherness which we encounter in the event of reading were to be replicated in our other encounters with alterity, whether with those strangers who are not part of our community, or when encountering the inner strangeness that forms part of who we are, the effects would be potentially revolutionary.

However, it must be noted that the encounter with the Other in the form of a person is not the same experience as the encounter with the literary otherness or, indeed, the Other as a person in a book. Literature provides bridges and creates possibilities, but it is not subject to the same politico-historical forces that operate on individuals and communities. In some of his work, Attridge appears to come close to conflating these different forms of the encounter with otherness, and it may be that for that reason, his approach is too radical, too risky to contemplate undertaking. In the meantime, however, literature continues to hold out the possibility, through the experience of otherness that may one day be extended into other domains. The literary work of writers such as Sebbar, Prévost, and Cixous is one example of this, offering French readers both a new and de-centred vision of the Hexagon, and an opportunity to welcome the difference that both surrounds and lies within them.

### Implications for future research

This study began with a consideration of the socio-political situation regarding immigration and national identity in France, in order to understand how these politicised issues have been represented by metropolitan novelists. The theoretical framework underpinning this analysis has been postcolonial, dealing with Franco-Algerian relations as they have evolved since decolonization. However, as was noted in the Introduction, in the latter years of the period 1980-2000, new forces have emerged which overlay and further problematize the already complex connections between the two nations. These transnational forces, on which the primary texts are largely silent, arguably emerged with the outbreak of the Algerian civil war in

1992.<sup>12</sup> Beginning after democratic elections were cancelled when it appeared likely that the Islamist party, the FIS, was likely to win power, the violence which followed is estimated to have claimed between 150,000 and 200,000 lives. Given the Algerian dimension which we have seen operating in contemporary French identity, it seems likely that the renewed violence in Algeria will feature in the work of French novelists at some future point. Just as an understanding of the social perceptions of immigrants and Franco-French led this study to an appreciation of the discourses at work in literary representations of the period, so, therefore, an examination of the transnational forces operating in the contemporary period will be the starting-point for future literary research.

The initial reaction in France to the war was the association of Islam with terrorism, an association which appeared confirmed by the bomb blasts on the Paris metro which were carried out in 1995 by Algerian islamists, the GIA, and which killed eight people.<sup>13</sup> The attacks not only served as a reminder to the French public that its historical links to North Africa continued to resonate in the present but, with the Muslim population now numbering around five million,<sup>14</sup> they revived French fears dating back to the Algerian war that the community of immigrant origin represented a fifth column hostile to France. The failed attack on a Paris-Lyons high-speed train line in August 1995, which was traced to Khaled Kelkal, a 'beur' from a Lyons *banlieue*, appeared to confirm French anxieties.<sup>15</sup> The attacks led the French authorities to undertake a series of anti-terrorist initiatives targeting the immigrant community, which included increased policing of *cités*, the round-up of suspected Islamist militants, and the introduction of a system of de facto facial profiling that led to hundreds of thousands of identity checks of individuals of North African origin.<sup>16</sup> Anxieties continued, however, in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, particularly when Zacarias Moussaoui, born and raised in France of Moroccan

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<sup>12</sup> As noted in the Introduction, Prévost's *Le Passé sous silence* (1998), Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999), and Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué* (2000) do contain passing references to the Algerian civil war. Cixous's *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* (2000) is the only text published after the outbreak of violence which makes no specific reference to it.

<sup>13</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> These figures are approximate, since official figures gathered by INED and INSEE do not include ethnicity as a category.

<sup>15</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 1.

immigrant parents, was identified as the twentieth Al-Qaeda hijacker, and French anti-terror measures intensified accordingly.

The fear that Algeria has become part of a globalised Islamic network hostile to the West continues to haunt French nightmares and influence attitudes towards the community of immigrant origin. The development of Franco-Algerian relations from a primarily postcolonial relationship to one problematized by transnational forces is supported by the expansion of electronic media. The internet, in particular, has allowed the development of international connections, so that small extremist groups and individual radical preachers now exert an influence far in excess of what their small numbers could traditionally have achieved. The example of the cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, originally published in Denmark in September 2005, but reprinted and opposed in countries across the world in 2006, demonstrates that incidents, which previously would have attracted only limited geographical attention, can now provoke a global reaction.

Like other Western countries, France therefore has to decide how to react to the effects of a post-9/11 world. This is complicated by the difficulty in interpreting events in Algeria. As Silverstein argues,

While the Algerian civil war certainly transcends state borders and reproduces itself in the Algerian diaspora in France, it is more directed at establishing hegemony over the political field of the Algerian nation-state than in elaborating a new, transnational formation.<sup>17</sup>

While this may be true, research uncovering links between the Islamist veterans of Algeria's latest conflict and elements of Al-Qaeda suggests the development of a more internationalist ambitions on the part of certain Algerian groups.<sup>18</sup> In 2006, Al-Qaeda announced a new partnership with the fundamentalist Algerian network, the GSPC, which the French Anti-Terrorist Co-ordination Unit in September 2006 identified as one of the most serious threats currently facing France.<sup>19</sup> As a result, in October 2006 the GSPC renamed itself 'Al-Quaida au Maghreb', the name under which it has carried out subsequent attacks. Algeria is therefore closely linked to the

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<sup>17</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Newsnight, 'Interview with an Al-Qaeda operative', 10.30pm, BBC2, 16 November 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Craig Whitlock, 'Al-Qaeda's Far-Reaching New Partner', *Washington Post*, 5 October 2006.

new expression of difference which appeared in September 2001 to challenge fundamentally the assumptions of Western intellectuals, such as Francis Fukuyama, that history was at an end.

The French response to the emergence of Islam has been divided. On one hand, media portrayals have focused on the perceived threat posed by the radical Islamization of the disaffected youth of the *banlieues*. Silverstein points to two events, both occurring well before the attacks of September 2001, which suggested a possible connection between the marginalized youth of the *banlieues* and international politicized Islam.<sup>20</sup> The first involved the 1994 sentencing to death in Morocco of two 'beurs' from a Paris suburb, for their involvement in an armed attack on a Marrakesh tourist hotel. The second involved the summer 1995 bombings in Paris and Lyons attributed to the GIA in which two 'beurs' were accused of participation. 'These two events, taken together, appeared to confirm the existence of an international terrorist network that supposedly linked Algiers to Cologne to Sarajevo to Kabul via France's immigrant suburbs [cf. *Le Figaro* 16 August 1995]'.<sup>21</sup> Media reports focused on a homogenized version of Islam rather than its internal diversities and, by emphasizing the French location of street gatherings and prayers (through the inclusion of landmarks, street signs and car licence plates), presented a defamiliarized France, with the implication that these collective, uniform practices of prayer could develop into a mass uprising.<sup>22</sup> Islam therefore becomes totalized into a monolithic, fundamentalist movement, used by the media as justification for the continued anti-terror measures.

The second response, coming this time from the French state, has been to encourage a secular version of Islam with the aim of promoting it throughout the French Muslim community through organizations such as the Working Council on Islam in France, created by Pierre Joxe in the wake of the 1989 'affaire du foulard'.<sup>23</sup> This secular Islam, intended to be a public religion compatible with the norms of *laïcité*, was opposed in official rhetoric to the radical Islamism of fundamentalism.

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<sup>20</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 133.

<sup>21</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 133.

<sup>22</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 144.

However, as Silverstein notes, the multiplication of organizations speaking on behalf of French Muslims has thoroughly undermined attempts to develop a national Islamic organization.<sup>24</sup>

In a post-9/11 world it is arguable, then, that France occupies a unique position. The postcolonial issues of its Algerian past which, as we have seen in this study, remain unresolved, at least in part, have now been overlaid, and thus further problematized, by new transnational forces, composed of a combination of heterogeneous political and religious desire. Consequently, located outside the Anglo-American discourse on the so-called 'war on terror', and therefore less directly embroiled in the conflict in Iraq which arguably led to the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, France nevertheless continues to struggle with the social issues and resulting unrest amongst 'beur' groupings discussed in the Introduction. While much of this unrest is arguably driven by economic issues, resulting from the poor housing and employment prospects with which these young people live, France's secular stance and its decision to ban the wearing of Islamic headscarves in state schools has nevertheless attracted the condemnation of extremists affiliated to Al-Qaeda.

As this study has discussed, the French Republican tradition and its disavowed ethnocentrism was, in large part, responsible for the feelings of injustice which led to the end of colonial rule in Algeria, and the social issues around integration with which the French *banlieues* are currently struggling. Today, the Republican policy of *laïcité* again places France in a unique position vis-à-vis the emergence of Islam. The contradictions inherent in the French characterization of Islam as either homogeneously radicalized or secularized are consistent with the 'hard', essentialist definitions of identity which were observed in discourses of immigration in the early 1980s. Yet, as ever, the realities are more complex, more conflicted than this characterization suggests. The perceived threat from Islam is arguably not to the secular nature of the French state since, as Silverstein points out,

French *laïcité* does not imply the absence of the sacred in public life, but rather, as Etienne Balibar has argued, the 'sacralization of the state' [...] As gay rights activist

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<sup>24</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 145.

Guy Hocquenghem argued: “France” is to the French what Allah is to Muslims, indescribable, non-representable, since it is itself the foundation of all representation.<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that French conceptions of the state as secular may continue to be challenged by the emergence of Islam in France, which openly claims a place for the sacred in both public and private spheres. It also raises questions about the way in which literary texts will represent the evolving relationship the French state, supposedly secular yet sacred and untouchable to many of its citizens, and the new form of difference represented by Islam, in its various conceptions.

As this study has argued, the production of literary texts is something for which time is required, particularly when it concerns reactions to social events. The move to the postcolonial, which is a process of de-centring, has been gradual; it does not happen instantaneously, with the signing of a political treaty which grants independence. Similarly, the need for time to reflect is perhaps one reason why creative writers have been largely silent on the Algerian civil war, and on the emergence of Islam as a political issue within France. Although the requirement of time to reflect and assess necessarily restricts the conclusions which can be drawn at this point, in a post-9/11 world it appears that France, despite having modelled itself as a secular Western society, will be forced to re-encounter faith and religion both through its moderate Muslim population, and through the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalists. This may well lead France’s intellectual and ruling classes to debate the role of the Republican tradition in the twenty-first century, and to begin to theorise more fully the question of whether the Republican tradition is part of France’s current problems, or offers a solution. One potential source of debate is the nature of the public sphere, given that the French emphasis on the secular public sphere contrasts with the teachings of Islam, which recognises no such divide between public and private. In the light of this, the combination of French Republican principles and the country’s colonial history, notably its relationship with

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<sup>25</sup> Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, p. 143, quoting *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 94; and Guy Hocquenghem, *La Beauté du métis* (Paris: Ramsay, 1979), p. 22.



Algeria, is likely to mean that the emergence of political Islamism will be a singular experience within France.

Although we are at the beginning of the process, literary texts have begun to appear which problematize and deconstruct the 'hard' categories of identity which French society has constructed in response to the emergence of Islam in its population of Algerian origin. These new texts overlay the post-colonial realities with which this study has been concerned with new transnational and religious forces, seeking to represent the new forces at play, and to offer sites where this new difference can be encountered. The attempts of Western media to control the discourses and representations of identity are problematized in Michel Vinaver's play *11 septembre 2001/ 11 September 2001*.<sup>26</sup> In a different, yet related way, the limits of representation are probed by Frédéric Beigbeder in his novel *Windows on the World*.<sup>27</sup> Beigbeder's project continues the exploration of the singularity of literature in its attempt to re-imagine the experience of those who perished in the top floor restaurant of the World Trade Centre: 'Le seul moyen de savoir ce qui s'est passé dans le restaurant situé au 107<sup>e</sup> étage de la tour nord du World Trade Center, le 11 septembre 2001, entre 8h30 et 10h29, c'est de l'inventer'.<sup>28</sup> Literature here provides a means to encounter the otherness of terrorism which prevents other forms of representation: 'Les livres doivent aller là où la télévision ne va pas. Montrer l'invisible, dire l'indicible [...] La littérature est une "mission impossible"'.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, literature continues to perform the encounter with otherness which this thesis has argued for. However, as Vinaver's text indicates, it also resists the pressure to replicate essentialist forms of identity, and instead prizes these open to reveal the preconceptions and assumptions on which our responses to the world are based. It is too early to say what conclusions may be drawn from research into literary representations of these new transnational realities. However, it seems likely that developments in the transpolitical space constituted by France and Algeria may alter France's relationship with difference which, during the period of this study and until recently, has been mediated most strongly through postcolonialism.

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<sup>26</sup> Michel Vinaver, *11 septembre 2001/ 11 September 2001* (Paris: L'Arche, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Frédéric Beigbeder, *Windows on the World* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Beigbeder, *Windows on the World*, back cover.

<sup>29</sup> Beigbeder, *Windows on the World*, p. 360.

## Final conclusions

While it opens up potential avenues for future research, this study comes to a number of conclusions which enable it to make a distinct contribution to scholarship. This is partly due to the limitations of existing research on France and Algeria, which has tended to focus either on studies of sociological factors or, in the case of literary and cinematic research, on the artistic expressions of those groups marginalized by colonialism. As a consequence, extensive research is available on the literature of France's former colonies, in the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and elsewhere, whilst the artistic production of the 'beur' community within France has attracted similar levels of attention. However, as Hargreaves noted, no study of contemporary French fiction concerned with relations with the Maghreb existed thus far.<sup>30</sup> Given the level of political debate which has taken place in France concerning issues of immigration – debate which was heightened during the course of this study by the riots of November 2005 – the need for research on literature which views these issues from the perspective of the *métropole* is all the more important.

The original contribution of this study, therefore, is to show how established novelists from metropolitan France have responded to France's new status as a nation after colonialism, and to reveal how they frame and express contemporary France in relation to North Africa. In doing so, within its chosen field of the novel, the study has made no distinctions of genre, and has demonstrated that explorations of otherness exist within the anti-colonial novel (*Désert*) but also within less obvious genres such as the detective novel (*Meurtres pour mémoire*), and autobiographical writing (*Le Passé sous silence*; *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*). By examining texts from a range of genres, it has demonstrated that the cultural encounters between France and North Africa take place not only at the level of discourse, but are manifested in material forms. The individual cultural encounter is inscribed on the

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<sup>30</sup> 'There has as yet been no systematic study of French fiction dealing with the immigrant community'. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 4, n. 7.

body, through the senses, the act of being photographed, abjection, death, and pregnancy.

One of the aims of the study was to assess the extent to which France could be said to have become 'postcolonial'. With reference to the development of postcolonial theory, Forsdick noted the restricted influence which this has had within France, and suggested that one possible reason might be the illuminating effect which this could have on French culture and institutions, not least of which might be the implications for the Republican tradition.<sup>31</sup> The findings of this study support this suggestion on a number of levels. While postcolonial theory may not have been widely adopted within French academic institutions, textual analysis of the novels in this study demonstrates the existence of a complex interplay of discourses which works against the dominant narrative of French Republicanism. This indicates that metropolitan novelists are engaged in exploring the potential ambivalences which underpin postcolonial theory, albeit in a literary rather than theoretical mode. This is not to suggest a clear division between literary and theoretical texts – such a distinction would be difficult to support in the work of Prévost, Cardinal and Cixous, to name only a few writers – but to argue that literary writing makes a specific contribution to debates around the postcolonial. In certain cases this has taken the form of exploring the ambiguity inherent in (neo)colonial discourses (as in *Désert*, and *Shérazade*), whilst in others it involves the attempt to recover neglected counter-memories of the past in order to reinsert these into the dominant narrative of history (*La Seine était rouge*, *Le Figuier*, *Meurtres pour mémoire*).

In the work of Prévost and Cardinal, postcolonial realities are explored at one remove through a literary appeal to psychoanalysis, a theoretical approach which is more familiar to a French readership. Similarly, the issues of gender and femininity which are present in many of these texts demonstrate the problematised role which the feminine represents within the French Republic, but also the fact that within the contemporary Republic, feminism is a more acceptable approach to discussions of difference than is ethnicity. Perhaps for this reason, both Cardinal and Cixous explore the gendered nature of their relationship with Algeria as motherland.

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<sup>31</sup> Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*, pp. 35-6.

However, in Cixous's text, Republican notions of an assimilated Algeria are problematised by the hybridity and expressions of difference which operate there. The conflicted and destabilized Algeria which she depicts has direct implications for the Republican notion of an indivisible France, given the proportion of the population which is now of Maghrebi descent. Like many of the other novels in this study, the postcolonial issues which emerge from Cixous's text reveal that France is grappling with the consequences of decolonization in a literary, if not a theoretical, mode.

Finally, this study has argued that literature offers a privileged site for representations of the cultural encounter between France and North Africa. This is, in part, because it functions as a means of representing the phenomenology of the encounter with difference which, as we have seen, is perceived through the senses and through other material and bodily manifestations. However, through the experience of reading, literature also offers a direct encounter with otherness, one which is singular because it can be re-experienced, differently, with each event of reading, and which calls for the reader to respond. At their best, the texts in this study offer readers a de-centred vision of the Hexagon, and invite them to welcome the difference that is both within and around them.

# PAGE NUMBERING AS IN THE ORIGINAL THESIS

## Appendix      Biographies of the authors of the primary texts

### **Dominique Bona, *Malika* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1992).**

Born in Perpignan to a Catalan family, her father was the politician and writer Arthur Conte. Since 1985 Bona has been the literary critic for *Le Figaro littéraire*. She is the author of numerous novels, including *Le Manuscrit de Port-Ebène*, which won the prix Renaudot, and has written prize-winning biographies of subjects including Romain Gary, Stefan Zweig, and Berthe Morisot. The latter was awarded the Grand Prix de la biographie de l'Académie française. *Malika* was awarded the prix Interallié in 1992. In March 2003, Bona stood unsuccessfully for election to the Académie française.

### **Nina Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Stock, 2000).**

Bouraoui was born in Rennes to an Algerian father and a French mother. Shortly thereafter, her family moved to Algiers, where they remained until Bouraoui was thirteen. Having moved to Paris to pursue her university studies, she published her first novel, *La Voyeuse interdite*, with Gallimard at the age of twenty-three. It won the prix Inter in 1991. Bouraoui has gone on to make her living from writing, publishing a further eight novels, of which *Garçon manqué* is the sixth.

### **Marie Cardinal, *Au Pays de mes racines* (Paris: Grasset, 1980).**

Cardinal was born into a  *pied noir*  family in Algeria in 1929, and studied at the universities of Algiers and the Sorbonne. Between 1953 and 1960 she taught at lycées in Salonika, Lisbon, Vienna and Montreal, before going on to work as an editor and reader for Gallimard and Grasset, and as a freelance journalist. The author of numerous novels, her greatest success came in 1975 with the publication of *Les Mots pour le dire*, which won the prix Lettré. Having lived in France since 1958, in 1984 she left for Canada, where she lived until her death in 2001.

**Hélène Cixous, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage: Scènes primitives* (Paris: Galilée, 2000).**

Cixous was born in Oran to a German Ashkenazi mother and an Algerian Sephardic father. She left Algeria in 1955, and moved to Paris, where she gained her *agrégation* in English literature, on the work of James Joyce. In 1969 she published *Dedans*, her first novel, which won the prix Médicis. She holds a chair at the university of Paris-VIII, which she helped to found, and has published widely. One of the most influential contemporary French writers, her work includes plays, novels, and theoretical writings, particularly concerning women's writing, language, and post-structuralism. In her most recent work, she has returned to writing about aspects of her childhood in Algeria.

**Didier Daeninckx, *Meurtres pour mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, [1984] 1999).**

Born in Saint-Denis, on the outskirts of Paris, Daeninckx left school aged seventeen and spent ten years working as a printer. Eventually he moved to become a journalist working on local and regional publications, during which time he began to write. *Meurtres pour mémoire* is the first in a series of novels which combine the detective genre with contemporary social and political issues. In 1994, the Société des Gens de Lettres awarded him the Prix Paul Féval de Littérature Populaire in recognition of his work.

**Guy Hocquenghem, *L'Amour en relief* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1982).**

Born in the Paris suburbs in 1946, Hocquenghem's participation in the student demonstrations of 1968 led him to become a member of the Communist Party, which later expelled him for his homosexuality. He is best known for his work as a gay theorist, for texts including *Le Désir homosexuel* (1972), *L'Après-Mai des faunes* (1974), and *Le Dérive homosexuelle* (1977). Holder of a chair of philosophy at the university of Vincennes-Saint-Denis, his career as a novelist began in the 1980s, and continued until his death from an AIDS-related illness in 1988.

**J.M.G. Le Clézio, *Désert* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).**

Born in Nice, Le Clézio's prolific and celebrated publishing career began with the Prix Renaudot for *Le Procès-Verbal* in 1963. Since then he has published more than thirty novels, leading him to be widely viewed as one of the most influential contemporary French writers. Raised bilingual, with an English father and French mother, he has lived abroad in Panama and New Mexico, and many of his novels are set in far-flung parts of the globe, notably Mauritius, where his Breton ancestors settled in the eighteenth century. His novel *Désert* won the Grand Prix Paul Morand in 1980.

**François Maspero, *Le Figuier* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).**

A central figure in Parisian publishing, Maspero has worked as a bookseller, a publisher, a translator, and has also managed two journals, *Partisans* and *L'Alternative*. In 1959, during the Algerian War, he created *éditions Maspero*, which was to provide the model for Manuel's publishing house in *Le Figuier*. It quickly developed his reputation as a committed left-wing intellectual, and he played an important role in the development of Parisian thought in the 1960s and 1970s. His various published works include *Les Passagers du Roissy Express* (1990) and *Les Abeilles et la guêpe* (2002).

**Daniel Prévost, *Le Pont de la Révolte* (Paris: Denoël, 1995); *Le Passé sous silence* (Paris: Denoël, 1998).**

Although this study looks at his literary output, Prévost is best known as an actor and comedian who has appeared in over twenty films. His comic roles in *La Vérité si je mens! 2* and *Le Dîner de cons*, for which he won the 1998 César for Best Supporting Actor, have brought him recognition, but he has also demonstrated his acting abilities in more dramatic films such as *Uranus* and *Le Colonel Chabert*. Born in the Hauts-de-Seine, he only discovered late in life that his father was an Algerian, an experience that he was to draw on in his later writings.



**Leïla Sebbar, *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (Paris: Stock, 1982) ; *La Seine était rouge* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 1999).**

Born in Algeria to a French mother and Algerian father, Sebbar has lived in France since the age of seventeen, first in Aix-en-Provence and now in Paris. She is the author of more than ten novels, and various plays and critical essays, many of which concern the conflict of cultures and identity experienced by her immigrant and 'beur' characters. She has discussed the question of her origins in various interviews, and states that she considers herself to be French.

**Michel Tournier, *La Goutte d'or* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).**

Tournier was born and raised in Paris. After studies at the Sorbonne and four years spent teaching at the University of Tübingen, he wrote and produced for French radio and television. With his first published novel, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, he won the Grand Prix du roman de l'Académie française in 1967. His second novel, *Le Roi des aulnes* (1970) won the prix Goncourt, establishing his reputation as one of the leading contemporary French writers. It was followed by over twenty novels and essays. Tournier has been a member of the Académie Goncourt since 1972.

**Didier van Cauwelaert, *Un Aller simple* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994).**

Born in Nice in 1960 of Belgian origins, and now living in Paris, van Cauwelaert wrote his first novel, which remained unpublished, at the age of eight. Lacking a publisher, he spent time as a theatre director, before succeeding in having his first novel, *Vingt ans et des poussières*, published in 1982. Since then he has produced more than twenty novels, plays, and screen plays, of which *Un Aller simple* won the prix Goncourt in 1994. In 1997, he was awarded the Molière for best musical for his adaptation of *Le Passe muraille*, with Michel Legrand. His plays have received the Grand prix du théâtre de l'Académie française.

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