

A FAMILY AFFAIR: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FAMILY THROUGH
THE FRENCH-ALGERIAN WAR

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INTRODUCTION

[We broke] up the great traditional families of Algeria...Because we found them to be forces of resistance. We did not realize that in suppressing the forces of resistance in this fashion, we were also suppressing our means of action. The result is that we are today confronted by a sort of human dust on which we have no influence and in which movements take place which are to us unknown.

---Jules Cambon, 1894

Jules Cambon, Governor General of Algeria in 1894, anticipated the loss of French colonial possession of Algeria sixty years before the official beginning of the Algerian war for independence on November 1, 1954. The French had identified the large, traditional family as a potential foundation for anti-colonial collective action in Algeria. By breaking up these families, they had hoped to dispel pockets of resistance to their authority. However, by asserting their dominance and disrupting the family, the limits of France's hegemony were revealed. Cambon's words betray his fear of losing control over the non-European masses as a result of French interference and ignorance. After years of disenfranchisement and exploitation, the French had created a "human dust" out of the indigenous population that they could no longer read or influence. Politically, this fear of losing control over the non-European majority blocked subsequent social and legal reforms from passing. Dissatisfaction with French rule fueled by broken promises and interference into the civil sphere led non-European Algerians to create alternative forms of collectivity which gradually led to armed resistance. This was not only the result of a colonial/indigenous struggle over history as Ranajit Guha describes in the case of colonial India in *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*,

but a struggle over identity in the civil, family sphere. As French attempts at manipulation of the family increased, the Algerian family likewise changed form—sons violently resisted their fathers' traditions and sisters dropped their veils to go to war to shake off the yoke of colonial oppression.

Evidence of the changing Algerian family structure are visible in legal, literary, and cultural documents of the period. One of the most famous “Algerian” intellectuals, the Martiniquais Frantz Fanon, describes alterations in a number of family relationships in his 1959 essay “The Algerian Family” in *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*.¹ These shifts, Fanon argues, developed out of “direct” political action replacing political discussions or complaints of the “party.” The revolution dominated every aspect of life—including family relations:

The political party passes over to direct action, and the problems that the son faces are problems of life or death for the country. In a parallel way, his attitude toward his father and the other members of the family frees itself of everything that proves unnecessary and detrimental to the revolutionary situation. The person is born, assumes his autonomy, and becomes the creator of his own values. (101)

Disrupting the patriarchal relationship between father and son set the stage for shifts in other kinds of relationships. As soon as respect for the father and elders came into question, it revealed the unsteady foundation of other family relationships between daughters and fathers (105) and between brothers (110). This dislocation of the family's traditional foundation also changed the nature of social relationships between women and men (111), feminine society (116), and legal matters such as marriage and divorce (114).

1

In French, this was published as *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*.

By discussing different types of relationships, Fanon indicates that matters of the family relate directly to a variety of different discourses—particularly the political.

Representations of the family provide a useful lens through which to view the Algerian war for independence. The family structure was viewed as a potential threat early in the course of colonial rule as seen in Cambon's comments and France's actions. Although I would argue that relationships of the family inherently involve political, legal, cultural, religious, and literary concerns,² the family structure in the case of Algeria seems particularly relevant to a discussion of the politics of decolonization in part due to its unique relationship with France as both a colony and a state comprised of many different religions and ethnicities. Civil law was left largely in the hands of the people, so matters of the family were *de jure* dictated by Muslim law courts. This gave the people a vestige of freedom in their private affairs, so when the French interfered in civil matters such as forced unveiling and a new family code (as I will discuss later), the non-European majority did not react well.

Challenges to French colonial treatment appeared in various forms throughout the twentieth century in literature, newspaper articles, and conflicts between family members in the case of both indigenous and European Algerians.³ In this dissertation, I will look at a variety of these forms between the rise of anti-colonial nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the end of the French-Algerian War in 1962. By doing so, I will argue that this was a “civil” war embodying many meanings of

² As per Marx, Foucault, and Althusser to name just three of many theorists.

³ It would be inaccurate to suggest that only the non-European Algerian population sought reform in the colonial system and ultimately independence. Europeans such as Albert Camus, for example, called attention to injustices committed by the French in a series of articles he published before the war.

the word—a nation at war with itself, a conflict involving the private sphere of the family, and a struggle of ordinary citizens against systematic state and cultural oppression. However, as James D. LeSueur skillfully illustrates in *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (2005), the battles were also categorically “uncivil” in their divisiveness and cruelty. Perspectives became increasingly binary and often violently excluded those who suggested compromise or peaceful resolutions. Over the course of the war from 1954 to 1962, acts of torture and terrorism were perpetrated by both pro- and anti-colonial fighters on military and civilian victims. A closer investigation into the (un)civil aspects of this conflict reveals a tangled mess of relationships that ultimately ended in Algeria's painful divorce from France at the expense of moderation and peaceful coexistence.

Another critical aspect of Algeria's relationship with France that comprises a foundation for the following chapters is the distinction between the pedagogical and performative qualities of Algerian identity. Homi Bhabha invokes Fanon, Jameson, Anderson, Derrida, and many others in his analysis of the temporality of culture in *The Location of Culture* (1994) distinguishing between a relatively static temporality of the “pedagogical” and a fluid temporality of the “performative.” The gap between these two produces a space where “the people emerge” (228) in an ideal position for the construction of a competing national imaginary in the context of decolonization. The “enunciative 'present' of modernity...would provide a political space to articulate and negotiate such culturally hybrid social identities” (359). In a sense, Cambon describes the gap between a “pedagogical” and a “performative” temporality when he admits his

ignorance of non-European social configurations competing with the dominance imposed by France. The French understanding of the cultures that surrounded them in Algeria was limited and belated—mostly “pedagogical.” Cambon recognized the limitations of his perspective in decoding new forms of Algerian collective action in the “enunciative present” that extended beyond family configurations into the realm of the “performative.” Many of the texts that I examine in my analysis reveal both pedagogical and performative dimensions of Algerian identity during the war. After 132 years of French rule as a hybrid *département* and colony, Algeria's relationship with France was both intimately related and distinctly different. Pedagogically, many lessons were drawn from both the French and traditional Muslim cultures—particularly among the educated, non-European population. However, new possibilities for Algerian identity came into circulation through artistic productions, performative forms of participation in the resistance movement, and new domestic responsibilities that spontaneously arose living in a country at war.

Algeria's (Un)Civil War

It is easy to think that in order to conduct a war, there must be a clear idea⁴ of the distinction between ally and enemy. Who will share the victory and who will suffer from the defeat? In the case of Algeria, the distinction between ally and enemy, inside and

⁴ As will become clear in the case of Algeria (and many other wars), this idea does not reflect the complexity of the reality of the situation where double agents, traitors, internal divisions, and false promises are the order of the day.

outside was not clear. Allegiances changed over time and it was not evident that the threat was entirely external to any group.⁵ Algeria before, during, and after French occupation was far from a culturally homogenous place. Its unique position as a *département* of France and the sheer length of the occupation (132 years), put the family structures and traditions of Algeria's various ethnic and religious indigenous populations into forced contact with French culture. Even the way that Frenchness was understood by the European “French” Algerians was different than in the metropole. Any European whether Spanish, Italian, French, or Maltese was granted full French citizenship on Algerian soil regardless of the family's history. Non-Europeans occupying the land were excluded from these rights, but not from the responsibilities of being a subject of France. In this way, Frenchness was something that one could adopt legally without laying any particular claim to French cultural heritage. Being French was a legal category that entailed certain privileges for certain groups, but as a cultural category, it was more fluid and bled into the civil sphere.

Fanon attributes a shift in the family structure to the advent of nationalist parties and a discourse of separation from France (100). However, interference into the realm of the family began much earlier with the invasion of the French (and even earlier with Ottoman rule). Ideologically and legally, the French distinguished Muslim and Jewish Algerian civil matters from those of the French through the separation of Muslim from French civil courts. Although Muslims were given a certain degree of freedom in litigating and arbitrating their own civil matters through their local civil status, the

⁵ Even after independence, the threat of violence from the inside continued as citizens proved not Arab or Muslim enough.

differences between Muslim and Christian treatment led to a hierarchization of these differences. European (read: Christian) Algerians⁶ were given more legal liberties than Muslim citizens. So, it seems likely that Algerian family structures began to transform as soon as European settlers began receiving unequal beneficial treatment.

European Algerians manipulated indigenous identity categories periodically over the course of their rule to secure their hegemony. The French employed collective language in order to obscure various forms of social, legal, and cultural inequality and incongruities. At times, language of ethnicity and religious affiliation was strategically deployed by the French to emphasize or de-emphasize difference. For example, Jews were demonized during Vichy rule, but labeled French throughout most of the rest of the colonial period by order of the Crémieux Decree of 1870. In other contexts, local movements constructed their own collective identities with the same ends—to encourage support for or against political action. Pitting the Jews against the Muslims and subsequently against the French ensured that these groups would never fully unify and reduced the likelihood that they would be able to overthrow the French in a collective effort.

Despite French rhetoric claiming to educate, assimilate, and eventually integrate the colonized population, these promises never fully came to fruition before the beginning of the war in 1954. France's *mission civilisatrice* prompted its colonial expansion under the auspices of spreading civilization throughout the world, but Algeria was a special colony that quickly became *départements* of France—unlike the rest of

⁶ In fact, only the Europeans (and Jews depending on the time period) were given the right to call themselves “Algerian.”

France's colonial holdings. In theory, this relationship made the indigenous population eligible for French citizenship. Todd Shepard describes this relationship of subjection to the law and the relationship of France to Algeria in the construction of national identity in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (2008): “All male French ‘subjects’ in Algeria, unlike those in the new colonies of the late nineteenth century, were destined, their rulers said, to become French citizens” (23). In practice, the overwhelming majority of the population never achieved this status over the 132 years of French authority. All Algerians were French subjects, but only those of European⁷ descent were fully French citizens or legally considered Algerians.

Constructing a national identity entailed the creation of a collective imaginary comprised of myths, literature, and art that could bridge the cultural gaps between the non-European population. The creative image of a cohesive nation was just as much a part of nation-building as collective ideology or political action. Attempts at constructing an Algerian national consciousness came about in part through an engagement with French intellectual and political ideology by the educated elite who had lived, worked, or fought with France (such as Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib, etc.). French culture had become an integral part of the colonized people—particularly the educated elite who were, themselves, coming from a number of disparate cultural traditions. Jacques Derrida, for example, came from a family of Arab Jews who were naturalized under the Crémieux Decree as full French citizens. In “Circumfessions,” he

⁷ After the Crémieux Decree of 1870, Algerian Jews were granted French citizenship. However, this was revoked during Vichy rule in France when the Jewish Statute was passed. At the end of the war, their citizenship was reinstated. There are also limited opportunities for Muslims to achieve citizenship by renouncing Islam.

describes the adaptation of Judaism to French Christianity describing his circumcision as a “baptism” and his bar mitzvah as his “first communion.” Whether by forceful or peaceful means, French culture and ideology transcended local cultural distinctions during the period of Algerian colonialism. This pervasiveness made it difficult for the nascent anti-colonial nationalist movements to parse out the benefits and the dangers of any kind of identification with the French—from language to culture to ideology.

The colonization of Algeria helped call attention to the fissures in the concept of French *fraternité* legally and culturally. Over the course of the colonial period, most of the citizens of the colony-*département* of Algeria did not possess the same rights as their mainland counterparts—some brothers received more privileges than other brothers. In Chapter One, “Illegitimacy and the Birth of an Algerian Nation,” I trace the consequences of this unequal treatment through the rise of various pro- and anti-colonial political and cultural groups in Algeria and France. Despite assimilationist rhetoric promising to push the cultural evolution of the non-Europeans to full cultural and legal equality with the French, the reality reflected (at best), an associationism wherein different groups with different rights lived side by side under French rule. By the time France updated their strategies and pushed through *pied-noir* resistance to reform, it was too late to regain the hegemony they had lost. Attempts at integration during the war—allowing the non-Europeans to become fully integrated into French Algerian society without a loss of cultural identity—through legal reform and the construction of the *Centres sociaux* were seen as too little, too late by the non-European masses who were beginning to construct their own alternative national identities in political organizations such as the *Jeunes*

Algériens and the legacy of the *Etoile Nord-Africaine*, artistic groups such as the *Ecole d'Alger* and the *Génération de 52*, and religious groups such as the *Association des Oulémas*. Here too, French belatedness of understanding over civil matters contributed to the eventual loss of hegemony. Through engaging with the changing landscape of the Algerian family in a variety of cultural, historical, and literary representations, I will draw a connection between the family and the politics of decolonization—culminating in the independence of Algeria.

This concern with the family extends beyond the rhetoric of decolonization by the revolutionaries. As I will show in Chapter One, it was also a common trope among intellectuals more closely aligned with French Algeria. Many novelists wrote about the consequences of cultural hybridity on family life in semi-autobiographical form after World War II as non-European Algerians became more and more disillusioned with the power and virtue of being French and acquiring a French education. In Chapter Two, “Algerian Sons and the Question of History,” I look at three controversial Algerian intellectuals who sought to preserve Algerian unity through peaceful coexistence under French rule: Albert Camus, Jacques Derrida, and Mouloud Feraoun. All three remained silent or were silenced violently over the course of the war and all three discuss their relationships with Algeria in terms of their relationships with their parents. Perhaps most famously, in a lecture immediately following Albert Camus's acceptance speech of the 1957 Nobel Prize, he blamed his reluctance to publicly take a position for or against Algerian independence on his relationship with his mother. He did not want to see her or his family in Algeria injured as a result of his political or ethical positions. In 1960,

Camus died in a car crash with an unfinished manuscript for his final novel, *The First Man*.⁸ This largely autobiographical literary depiction of growing up in poverty as a *petit colon* in Algiers reveals the complexity of his family life and helps clarify his position with regard to his family. Jacques Derrida also came from a liminal colonial position as an Algerian Jew whose family had lived in the region for generations. He also described his silence during the war as a function of his relationship with his mother. Derrida, however, did not describe this until much later in his life in his more autobiographical texts such as “Circumfessions” (2004). Finally, Feraoun describes a rather different perspective as a Kabyle writer and activist educated in the French system. In his 1950 novel, *The Poor Man's Son*,⁹ he describes leaving his village to pursue a French education. This education leads him to return to his village, reclaim his family's (and his nation's) history. In life, Feraoun worked for a French Social Center aiming to foster mutual understanding between European and non-European populations in increasingly polarized times. Through this literature, we see that being French was neither a monolithic legal or cultural category that could easily or effectively be separated (by the European minority) or expelled (by the non-European majority) from Algeria.

These revolutionary political, cultural, and religious groups did not develop independently of French influence. One major component of French colonialism developed out of the shaping of the imagination and ideology of the people. Colonialism had shaped the culture of the colonized population of Algeria over the course of over a century of contact. The language, culture, religion, and political institutions of France

⁸ In French, *Le Premier homme*.

⁹ In French, *Le Fils du pauvre*.

had been valorized under the ideology of the *mission civilisatrice* to the extent that it was difficult to parse out authentic from inauthentic inheritances before, during, and after the war for independence from France. Legal rights and categorizations changed to reflect the most politically advantageous configurations for France. This meant the displacement of millions of people during and after the war—not simply in terms of physical space, but also identity. Much of the rhetoric over the course of decolonization morphed from solidarity in bloodline (like “brotherhood”) to illegitimacy (“bastardization”) and the breaking of family and legal categories (like “divorce”).

In Chapter Three, “Nedjma and the Illegitimate Children of the Revolution,” I investigate the changing valences of terms such as “bastard” and “divorce” in the context of the anti-colonial imaginary. From the end of World War II until the end of the French-Algerian War, non-European authors begin to describe this cultural mix more and more in terms of illegitimacy, bastardization, and severed family ties in literary texts. Most notably, Kateb Yacine's work deals with such issues in ways that contribute to a budding nationalistic imaginary depicting Algeria as a social patchwork with various cultural, legal, and political perspectives. Kateb's iconic character, Nedjma, occupies a similarly mixed cultural space. Her paternity is unknown (and either violent or incestuous) and illegitimate and she has no parental guidance. She floats through the world as the object of sexual desire for the men in her life in a loveless marriage. She is the antithesis of the idealized, humanistic picture of multiculturalism. This ambivalent turn away from traditional family forms (whether French, Berber, Jew, or Arab) signals a disillusionment with understanding colonial society as a singular and monolithic structure while

providing space for the possibility of the formation of new civil collectivities in opposition to French sovereignty. However, despite the potential for new civil configurations of resistance, the legitimacy of these new formations eventually ran up against the reality of the increasingly polarized war of decolonization. The positive potential of new cultural and political formations of coexistence as described by Camus, Feraoun, and the French government after the beginning of the war increasingly came into focus as idealistic projects with no practical foundation in Algerian political reality. Brotherhood between the French and indigenous Algerians could be theorized, but the illegitimate “marriage” of France with Algeria resulted in a messy and violent divorce.

In the party paper of the FLN, *El Moudjahid* (to which Fanon contributed and edited) there are several articles that discuss the political and social roles of women, wives, brothers, and “*bâtards*” in terms of the revolution. Nearly every issue from the inception of the paper in 1959 involved at least one discussion of these roles—whether descriptive or prescriptive.¹⁰ The very format of this newspaper suggests that political action takes place in a number of different realms from the descriptive to the imaginary. Alongside detailed descriptions of every action taken place by the revolutionaries including the location, number of casualties, and manner of conflict, there are excerpts from literary and theatrical pieces, philosophical pieces from contributor such as Fanon, historical pieces, and articles describing life in the *maquis*. In Chapter Four, “The Eloquent Silences of Algeria's Sisters,” I take idealized pictures of women from media sources such as stories in *El Moudjahid* and compare them with the accounts of women

¹⁰ See, for example, issues #3, #4, #9, #10, #11, #12, etc.

in interviews and those depicted in Assia Djébar's *Children of the New World*¹¹ (1962) to form a more nuanced account of the changing roles of women during the war. In Djébar's novel, the lives of a variety of characters and their relationships with their families during the war with France are brought to the forefront—particularly the changes in everyday, domestic life. Linking a more nuanced analysis of the political potential of domesticity to the idealized, politicized rhetoric of the family implemented by the French as well as the FLN brings my discussion of the family full circle. The ways in which discourses of the family were politicized by pro- and anti-colonial groups often overlooked or oversimplified the complex reality of civil life in Algeria. In particular, pro- and anti-colonial men used the status of Algerian women as pawns of their political rhetoric. In this chapter, I seek to allow their silences to speak in various forms by unveiling the political potential of their changing roles inside and outside of the home. Through my work in the following chapters, I undertake to recover a few of the silent (or silenced) voices that opposed the increasingly violent, increasingly polarized political project of decolonization in Algeria that took millions of lives and continues to be experienced to this day.

11 In French, *Les Enfants du nouveau monde*.

CHAPTER ONE: ILLEGITIMACY AND THE BIRTH OF AN ALGERIAN NATION

When the Muslims protest, you are indignant; when they approve, you are suspicious; when they keep quiet you are fearful. Messieurs, these men have no political nation. They do not even demand their religious nation. All they ask is to be admitted into yours. If you refuse this, beware lest they do not soon create one for themselves.

--Maurice Viollette, 1936

The development of Algerian nationalism came as no surprise to the colonists. For most of the twentieth century, the French and French-Algerians debated over how to appease the non-European majority who grew increasingly unhappy with their persistent exploitation and their poor living conditions. Time and again, they had been promised improved conditions and opportunities for citizenship. Time and again, they were disappointed when they received nothing. Governor-General of Algeria, Maurice Viollette, among others in the 1920s and '30s, recognized that legal inclusion would likely put an end to discontent among the masses. The *pieds-noirs*, however, did not seek *fraternité* with the masses. Instead, they hoped that their attempts at preventing indigenous groups from forming bonds of solidarity with each other would be maintained and that the urge to destroy their fatherly colonial oppressors would be suppressed by their continual desire to join the French family. History would prove Viollette correct in

predicting that the disenfranchised majority would eventually create a nation for themselves in Algeria. Politically and culturally, brothers and sisters would rise up to construct a new Algerian family at the expense of colonial and traditional constraints.

Algeria's changing political landscape was intimately related to social and cultural changes occurring in the civil sphere. As I will illustrate in the following pages, there was a wide range of groups contributing to the political atmosphere in Algeria before and during the war for independence from France: European and non-European intellectuals and writers, pan-Arabists, the French Communist Party (and the subsequent Algerian Communist Party), Islamic groups, and politicians in Algeria and in France to name just a few of the most important. Many of these groups employed language related to the family in promoting their projects or explicitly sought to change or preserve the space of the family. The historical account that follows will provide a starting point for a deeper, more detailed analysis of the development of the family structure during this period in subsequent chapters around specific relationships between parents and children, illegitimate children, and the couple displayed in all of their ambivalence and complexity.

A History of Civil Discontent

The region of North Africa invaded by the French had a legacy of civil disobedience in the face of foreign authority beginning with resisting Ottoman rule from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. So, when the French invaded Algeria in 1830, there was already a sense of nationhood and a heritage of colonial discontent among

some groups of indigenous people. One of the most famous heroes of Algerian history, the Emir Abdelkader, rallied the tribes from 1832-1847 in an attempt to overthrow the French. Abdelkader, hailed as the “modern Jugurtha,” (Mercier 36, 41) was often cited by twentieth-century rebels as a founding father of Algerian nationalism and one of its first freedom fighters. Both a spiritual and a military leader, he appealed to both the private beliefs and public sense of rebellion that the French tried to disrupt. In part, it was because of recent rebellions against the Ottomans that the people could not muster up enough strength to stop the French. To further complicate unified resistance, the French drew new borders for the state to coincide with their newly- gained possessions in the region—making tribes reluctant to join Abdelkader resist the French because he was nearly as foreign to them as their overseas invaders. In order to maintain some level of complicity in indigenous populations, France continued the Ottoman tradition of granting each tribe independent authority over their civil matters. By maintaining preexisting divisions between groups, the French simultaneously instilled a (false) sense of autonomy in the people and effectively maintained authority over the whole region for many years.

The Problem of “Local” Civil Status and the Crémieux Decree

Every person living on Algerian soil was a French subject. However, as briefly discussed previously, non-Europeans were subject to restrictions at the level of personal liberties and political representation. Ariella Azoulay describes citizenship in Israel/Palestine as a spectrum of rights available to only a portion of the population in

Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography (2012): “citizenship is restricted to a series of privileges that only a portion of the governed population enjoys and, even then, to an unequal degree” (1). In the case of Algeria, inhabitants of European descent enjoyed a great deal more privileges than their Arab-Berber counterparts. The indigenous populations were mostly ignored—neither deemed fit to be officially named “French” or “Algerian.” In many ways, Algeria was treated like a colony—with the French government claiming and redistributing millions of hectares of “uncultivated” or confiscated land and pillaging the land for mineral resources throughout the beginning of the twentieth century (Joly 7-8). Because of Algeria's status as both a state and an unofficial colony, non-Europeans were subject to worse treatment than in other French colonies:

Whilst the settlers took part in the running of the territory, the limitations imposed to Arab-Berber representation had rendered their participation ineffectual. The Arab-Berbers had the worst of both worlds: On the one hand they suffered the *code de l'indigénat* as though Algeria was the very same as other French colonies. On the other hand, Arab-Berbers were further disadvantaged by Algeria's official status as French *départements*, which delivered control to the settlers. The *indigènes* suffered more at the hands of the settlers whose interests directly conflicted with their own than if they had been ruled by decisions emanating from the Ministry of Colonies. (Joly 3-4)

Non-Europeans were subject to fewer civil liberties under the colonial *code de l'indigénat* while also suffering the paradoxical effect of living in French *départements* with the repressive European settler population representing them politically. They would have had to contend with the daily abuse of the settler population before their complaints could be heard. This left the non-European majority virtually no possibility for full-citizenship and made identification with France difficult at best and nonexistent at

worst.

This discrimination was largely justified among the European set as a concern for respecting cultural and religious difference at the level of civil identity. Following the inherited tradition of Ottoman rule and pressure from anti-colonialist uprisings at the time of colonization, the French allowed a parallel civil court system to coexist with the French courts in Algeria—enacting a legal division to reinforce the cultural and religious ones. Muslims and Jews were subject to their own religious courts through their “local civil status” that dictated and mediated civil matters such as marriage and inheritance rights. When full French citizenship did become available to select non-European groups, it was at the expense of their local civil status—which meant alienating themselves from their local communities.¹² Very few people opted for French citizenship because it meant a legal renunciation of their faith:

The Senatus-Consulte of 14 July 1865 asserted that every “indigenous Muslim is French” (thus recognizing their French nationality) and extended French citizenship to a small number of ‘indigenous’ men and their descendants. In exchange for full citizenship, these men abandoned their ‘local civil status’: the right, in personal or civil matters, to be governed by local laws, what the text termed ‘Muslim law’ for ‘Muslim natives’ and ‘personal status’ for ‘Israelite natives. (Shepard 24)

On the surface, this helped the colonized population preserve part of their cultural specificity, but it also enabled the French to distinguish the colonized from the colonizers at the level of rights and privileges. *De jure*, the Muslims and Jews were left to rule themselves in civil matters oriented around the family and interpersonal relationships while the French intervened in criminal matters. This early division of the civil courts

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And cultural and religious identities

from other legal and criminal matters contributed to the politicization of religious difference in Algeria. It also helps explain the political significance of the family as a sphere constructed by and for indigenous cultures to preserve and resist French occupation.

Since most people were unwilling to betray their faith, it could be argued, they were in some ways responsible for their own legal discrimination—removing the blame from the French administration and placing the path to citizenship in the hands of the people. Civil law, the area of law most applicable to family matters, was the arena where the decolonization of Algeria was the most complicated and the most heated. By distinguishing between “local” and common civil status, the French allowed a space for the indigenous cultures to attend to some of their own legal matters surrounding their private lives. It also helped to form a legal scapegoat for the disenfranchisement of the non-European majority and while discourage resistance to colonial authority by drawing lines of separation between indigenous communities. The Crémieux Decree (24 October 1870) legally alienated the Jews from the rest of the non-Europeans and “declared all Indigenous Israelites of Algerian French citizens”—imposing a line separating the Jews from the Muslim majority. This arrangement lasted for nearly a century, but as early as 1894, there was evidence of discontent such as that described by Cambon's “human dust” comment.

Eventually the French began to see that these disparate groups were not content with the limited amount of autonomy granted to them. Cambon's 1894 comments suggest that colonial resistance began at the level of the family unit before spreading to

larger configurations. By the time the French realized this, Cambon acknowledged that they could not necessarily see or understand the forms resistance was beginning to take. It was this blindness that made them act in a way that they eventually realized hurt more than helped them secure their possession of the region: “We did not realize that in suppressing the forces of resistance in this fashion, we were also suppressing our means of action.” Forcefully intruding into the realm of the family would do more harm to French hegemony than leaving them to shape their civil world themselves. Although the French had the power to dictate what was legally acceptable, “suppressing the forces of resistance,” they made it more and more difficult for themselves to “influence” the “human dust” upon which the French empire rested. Similarly to Guha's argument in the case of colonial India, sheer French dominance did not entail French hegemony in Algeria.

Cambon recognized that France's pedagogical approach to understanding indigenous cultures could not keep up with their perpetually changing performative aspects of culture. Beyond the blatant objectification evident in Cambon's comment, shared knowledge between the two groups seemed nearly inconceivable from the French perspective. In nearly seventy years of coexistence, the French had acquired very little cultural knowledge of the people they had ruled over. Cambon also notes that interference into the civil rights of the underrepresented resulted in constructing alternative collectivities and social mobilization that would be not only difficult for the French to understand, but impossible for them to even identify because of their lack of understanding. This suggests that social configurations can only be understood in the

context of a more general understanding of the culture—beyond the merely “pedagogical.” It also suggests that these “performative” civil configurations can provide spaces for new forms of resistance against oppression. As later developments will also help illustrate, official French understanding in the context of Algeria frequently came belatedly and as a result of the effacement of the shared civil or private spaces between the cultures.

One of the biggest dissonances in terms of French hegemonic rhetoric was along the lines of assimilation. Officially, France adopted a policy of assimilation with regard to Algeria. Hypothetically, by means of cultural and religious assimilation, the indigenous people would become more civilized. Eventually, this would open up the possibility of legal assimilation and full citizenship. Periodically throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,¹³ laws were proposed by France to assimilate the Muslim population legally into Algerian politics. However, each time political actions were attempted, the *pied noir* politicians and their lobbyists managed to block reforms.¹⁴ Eventually a compromise was struck when men returning from the battlefield after World War I were provided with a more restrictive path to citizenship through the Law of 4 February 1919—still requiring renunciation of local civil status (Vulor 12)¹⁵. By this time, non-Europeans were nominally allowed to participate in the *Délégations Financières* to determine the budget for Algeria that benefitted from relative autonomy from France, but these members were “carefully vetted by the 'Administration' ensuring

13 1887, 1890, 1897, and variously between 1913 and 1916 (Shepherd 36)

14 For a more detailed analysis see Sheperd 35-37

15 See also Shepard, 37 and Haddour, *Camus: The Other as an Outsider in a Univocal Discourse*.

their total loyalty to the Governor” (Joly 4) and only comprised 22 of the 66 members.

Alternative Algerian Communities

Fed up with their *de facto* inequalities in treatment, early forms of collective anti-colonial action in Algeria developed as a result of the failure of the French assimilationist project. The French made little to no effort to educate, assimilate, or include the non-European populations over the first hundred years of colonial rule. As Joly describes, peaceful means eventually gave way to violence when the possibility of liberal reform through traditional channels seemed foreclosed, “The Arab-Berbers lost faith in the finding of a peaceful solution to the problem, after they had tried in vain to use democratic channels. Violence presented itself as the reliable option. It would then be difficult to untie such a Gordian knot” (12). Algerian non-citizens demanded the rights promised to them by the French. When their demands for equality were not met, they resorted to violence.

Les Jeunes Algériens

The *Jeunes Algériens* was one of the first groups to form in the years before World War I (1907) with the relatively modest political goal of naturalization. Taking the lead from groups such as The Young Turks, The Young Egyptians, and the Young Tunisians, these “Young Algerians” fought to be more French by achieving equality

through legal reform. This perspective was premised along the lines of assimilation that the French had been employing for generations. The *Jeunes Algériens* simply wanted to see this rhetoric put into legal practice. However, as Ena C.Vulor persuasively argues in *Colonial and Anti-Colonial Discourses: Albert Camus and Algeria* (2000)¹⁶, real assimilation would entail a collapse of the colonialist system. Full assimilation would erase the distinction between colonizer and colonized, so it was not a realistic expectation to hold as long as the culture was unwilling to let go of colonialism.

Because of the variety of perceived threats to cultural, economic, and political hegemony, most of the European population of Algeria was not very responsive to the idea of naturalization of the non-European population. So, they neither took the reforms proposed by the *Jeunes Algériens* seriously nor allowed legislation to pass that would allow these kinds of reforms to occur. Conversely, the non-Europeans also failed to take the group very seriously because of their loyalty to the French culture. They sought out reforms, not a revolution. Peter Dunwoodie describes this as a cultural fusion in *Writing French Algeria*, “Islamic and French cultures were to fuse as a new Algerian solidarity was forged between the communities” (25). This group of French-educated Muslims garnered support from French intellectuals, schoolteachers, and even the Governor-General Marucie Violette. With the mandatory conscription of all Algerian Muslims to do military service in 1912, the *Jeunes Algériens* took this opportunity to make demands such as more Muslim representation at home and in the metropole and easier naturalization (by abandoning Muslim civil status). However, their requests were met

16 See also Fanon, etc.

with resistance from a large segments of the French Algerian population who feared the cultural and economic consequences entailed by an elevation of Arab culture.

Critics in France, too, questioned whether full assimilation was desirable and whether “starting work too quickly in Muslim schools” would “produce[d] young Algerians with a foot in two civilizations.” This duality was seen as decidedly negative by Orientalist scholar, Octave Dupont in 1925: “It is, therefore, easy to see that an unenviable fate awaits individuals unhinged by teaching which is not accompanied by its essential partner, education” (52). These educated non-Europeans with “a foot in two civilizations” would exhibit a kind of hybridity that did not exactly conform to the assimilationist project of shaping the indigenous into a specific type of French subject. In Bhabha's terms, the *mission civilisatrice* was a “pedagogical” one not a “performative” one. How to be French and who had access to these rights was not something that was up for debate in the colony or in the metropole. “Education” into respecting these categories and the hierarchical structure must accompany “teaching” French values or the entire system might collapse. Challenging the hegemony of the French and their decision to withhold access to certain rights and privileges of being French was not what the French purveyors of culture had in mind when they entered Africa.

One striking figure embodying this tension between “teaching” with a certain openness to the future and “educating” as a form of inscribing discipline and hierarchical structures is Captain Khaled, the grandson of Abdelkader. Joly describes Khaled as “a signpost of the Algerian people's national awakening” (following Abdelkader) and a champion of assimilation (13). In line with the *Jeunes Algériens* principles of peaceful

civil and legal reform, Khaled straddled the line between nationalism and reform.¹⁷

Despite his commitment to French forces in World War I—a true sign of Algerian desire for assimilation with the French—the colonists annulled Captain Khaled's victory in the Algiers municipal election of 1920:

The colonists had the vote annulled and the Mayors' Congress successfully lobbied Paris to agree to prior consultation with the European population before making any future changes which might affect French supremacy in Algeria. This was a measure which was to enable them to block or deflect nearly all subsequent attempts at reform. (Dunwoodie 28)

When reform at the level of political participation was eventually achieved, politicians from the European settler population ensured that the voices of the voters would remain unheard. Despite Khaled's moderation and clear commitment to the French, his reformism was not palatable by the European majority—a common theme in Twentieth Century politics in Algeria.

Ferhat Abbas, another major name in the development of Algerian indigenous nationalism also straddles this line of reform and anti-colonial nationalism. He wished to elevate the social and civil status of the Muslim culture without giving up the benefits of his education and his commitment to the French culture—asking only for gradual integration of the non-European elite in his *Recueil d'études* written from 1921-1930. He had been educated in the French system and had served for two years in the French army. Until 1938 he had favored integrationism and reform—fittingly writing a book called *Le Jeune Algérien*. However, after years of being ignored and blocked reforms, Abbas later

¹⁷ For more on this debate, see Mostefa Lecharaf's *L'Algérie nation et société* (1976), André Nouschi, *La Naissance du nationalisme algérien*. (1962), and Joly, *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War* (1991).

joined with Messali Hadj to call for Algerian independence—ultimately becoming the first president of the Provisional Government of the Algerian People (GPRA) in 1958 and the President of the National Constituent Assembly of Algeria after the war, in 1962.

As we see in the cases of Abbas and Captain Khaled, early attempts at political enfranchisement of the non-European majority were relatively peaceful and measured. There was no talk of a break with France. Instead, positions tended to focus on peaceful reform and inclusion into the existing political system. However, French fear that the non-European version of history would return to haunt them rather than remain closed compelled them to set up their own secret mechanisms to reinforce the French “education”—a system that ensured that their “teaching” would remain pedagogical rather than performative. As time progressed and anti-colonial consciousness began to develop among the non-European majority, it was perhaps this tension that contributed to a complete break with France. Providing the unrepresented masses with a static, French-centered “education” led to increased discontent and desire to participate in their political milieu. However, the French foreclosed this possibility for fear of losing their sovereignty. The colonial machine was beginning to lose its aura of permanence as France became involved in wars that increasingly revealed its vulnerability and as the masses began to feel and understand their exploitation more acutely. Rather than scrap the machine and develop a peaceful, federalist solution to the pervasive inequality, the European settlers focused on repairing the machine and hoping that brute force could secure their dominance without any large-scale concern over their hegemony.

Les Algérianistes

Another group that collectivized under the banner of their Algerian specificity was *Les Algérianistes*. The European-Algerian writer Jean Pomier coined this term in the founding issue of his journal, *Afrique* in 1921, valorizing European-Algerian identity over that of mainland European or indigenous Algerian groups. Partly in response to the increasingly vocal non-European Algerian majority, partly as a result to feeling culturally underrepresented themselves in France, *Les Algérianistes* formed to ideologically defend and reinvigorate the colonialist project through mostly literary means (Vulor 14).

Founding members including French Algerian writers such as R. Hughes, L. Lecoq, J. Pomier, Louis Bertrand, and Robert Randau hoped to reinvigorate French hierarchical “education” structures in Algeria and metropolitan interest in the colonial pursuit. They framed their project not in terms of value, but in terms of “conversion” from a “primitive state” to the European. As Randau describes: “The European and the native...are of equal human value, and the role of colonization is not to shape subjects or a commercial clientele, but to convert to our mentality, with tact, moderation, and intelligence, people still in a primitive state” (Randau in Dunwoodie 125). Instead of referring to the lack of good “education,” the operative verb here is “conversion,” suggesting that the particular form of underdevelopment of the indigenous population was of a religious nature. Religiously, they hoped to subtly shift the mindsets of the non-Europeans to conform to their standards of good, Christian citizens.

This particular group of *pied-noir* intellectuals sought to fight a political battle by

the literary means available to them to convert both the French public and the non-European majority into becoming believers in the colonial project in Algeria. They saw their positions as already inherently political: “The artist is an implicated party in the political arena...One prepares the future through his thoughts, the other through his acts” (Pomier in Vulor 15). For Pomier, the artist was responsible for laying a groundwork for the ideological future of his people through artistic representation. In the case of Algeria, there was a great deal of explicit overlap between the legal/political and the cultural. It was not simply Pomier's words that illustrate this, but the very creation of a literary movement to counter a political movement suggests the intimacy of this relationship. Through their effort to reinvigorate the crumbling political project of colonization, they tried to rehabilitate the crumbling title of “Algerian” as an identity of the colonizer.

In a sense, the Algerianists also shared certain political aims with their rivals, the *Jeunes Algériens* in seeking to raise the esteem of the Europeanized components of their Algerian identities. They also strove to distinguish themselves as a unique culture such as had been historically part of the regionalist heritage of Brittany or Alsace. They adopted rhetoric of “assimilation” very different from that of the *Jeunes Algériens*. Vulor argues that this definition “was much more in tune with the nineteenth century colonial objective, namely 'the assimilation of property'” (16).¹⁸ This illustrates the rather striking significance of the appropriation and reappropriation of terminology leading to Algerian independence. The Algerianist movement provides an excellent example of the confusion and interrelationship between the different registers of language and discourses

¹⁸ See also Vulor, 23.

in the struggle. This group of writers seemed not only attuned to the interrelationship between discourses—particularly between the political and the literary—but manipulated this relationship to serve its own political aims to preserve a dying and increasingly unjustifiable colonial position.

In order to defend themselves ideologically, the Algerianists likened the colonization of Algeria to the construction of the Roman Empire. In order to build a strong, culturally- and economically-rich empire, they would need to dehumanize the non-European population in the eyes of their readers. They accused metropolitan intellectuals of a form of vulgar humanitarianism that prevented France from its post-war recovery project: a “rejuvenation of France and Rome: a Latin Algeria” (Vulor 17). The Algerianists would be in the avant-garde of the rejuvenation of France because of the characteristics they had acquired over their exposure to the Algerian climate and landscape—“rebarbarisation.” By another act of rhetorical savvy, they omit the human landscape of the non-European majority whose name they also share. Vulor attributes this to a “reverse assimilation (barbarization) [that] is due not so much to the Arab, but to the North-African landscape. The transformation of the Indigenes' negative traits into creative forces in the European is contingent upon the physical milieu; the sun, the wind, the endless desert” (Vulor 18). The indigenous population is not so much demonized as ignored—blurred into the characteristics of the landscape. The *pieds-noirs* take on the characteristics of the landscape over time rather than assimilating in any way with the non-European population. Furthermore, by evoking a cultural heritage that precedes that of the indigenous Muslim population, the European settlers claim their rights to the land

and culture of North Africa and valorize the project of colonialism

For Pomier, cultural unification could exist in France, but not in Algeria because the culture had not yet evolved to that “stage”:

Algeria is not France, nor the extension of France..., not because there are Spaniards, Maltese, Jews, Berbers, Mozabites, Italians and Arabs, but because Algeria is not yet a unified nation. Here, the races live side by side; they do not mix. Religions are still, almost, at the stage of medieval fanaticism. (Pomier in Vulor 20)

Consistent with Rondeau's suggestion, Pomier points to a specifically religious underdevelopment as the cause for this division between the populations—the only way to really underline the distinction between European and non-European in a way that allows for the existent divisions in Algeria. Despite this irreconcilable division between groups, there is a sort of assimilation of the landscape that takes place which results in behavioral similarities that are categorically negative when observed in the non-Europeans and viewed as a form of strength in the Europeans. The hypocrisy of this position points to the simultaneous proximity and distance between populations and the ease with which positions could be manipulated with the manipulation of language. By adopting the characteristics and newly-appropriated name of the people they wish to dominate, they erase the non-Europeans from the Algerian landscape entirely.

L'Association des Oulémas

For some Muslim, non-Europeans, religious reform was the key to political reform. They took a cue from the condescending rhetoric of the *mission civilisatrice* to

turn their critical reflections toward their religion and Islam's slow reform in the region. Resonating with Pomier's implication that religious stagnation was dividing the populations, the Islamist Reform Movement (*Association des Oulémas*) publicly announced their position in an editorial on July 11, 1925. Led by the increasingly influential nationalist, Sheikh Abdulhamid Ben Badis (one of the few figures regarded as a national hero long after the revolution¹⁹), they promoted unity among the indigenous populations through “ethnic nationalism” as opposed to “political nationalism” of their Communist counterparts (Vulor 13). In 1931, the movement simply sought religious reform in order to illustrate to their European countrymen that their religion could evolve over time under the continued “protective wing of a strong, just, and civilized country...France” (Dunwoodie 30).

By 1936, however, after having been met with continued rejection from the French, they declared that “this Muslim Algerian nation is not France” (Dunwoodie 31). Despite their claim to be more scholastic than overtly political, their revitalization of the Arab culture and Islam held significant political overtones. Religion, language, and politics were intimately related in a way they made more explicit: “Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, Algeria is my country...Independence is a natural right for every people of the earth” (Horne 38). For the Reform Movement (as with the *Jeunes Algériens*), assimilation became undesirable when it became clear that French interests were not compatible with the interests of the non-European masses:

We have searched both the present and the pages of history. And we have realized that the Algerian nation was born and exists just as all the nations of

¹⁹ See, for example, Horne 38.

the world were born and exist. This nation has its own history, marked by innumerable noble moments; it is united through religion and language; it has its own culture, traditions, and customs, with their strengths and weaknesses, just like all other nations. (“Déclaration nette” of 1936 in Dunwoodie 31)

The Algerian history that France had constructed to justify colonial conquest was not the same history that the Reform Movement had read for itself. Here, again, the non-Europeans learned lessons inspired by French pedagogy without the hierarchical “education.” This time, their lessons translated into something more performative—using their education to advance their own political goals. The Reformists did their own research regarding history and nation-building to develop their own conclusions. Furthermore, they put the present at the same level as the “pages of history” and looked to both for finding justification for their conclusion. “Algeria cannot be French and does not want to be French” (Vulor 13). They emphasized cultural decolonization to assist in breaking free from French rule. Rather than assimilate to the colonial culture and reform the political system from the inside, the Islamic reformists recognized that their path to freedom from oppression lay in reforming their religious heritage and fighting an ideological battle to supplement the political through a cultural separation from the French.

Recognizing the significance of education in shaping their pursuit, they established Koranic schools coupling religious and political reform throughout Algeria with students numbering 40,000 by 1954 (Ageron in July 15). Many scholars point to religion as the crux of nationalism from Abdelkader through the defeat of the French by the FLN. Certainly, the Islamic Reformist movement and its educational efforts support

this hypothesis. However, reform at the levels of religion and education would not prove sufficient in fixing the problem of political participation. Horne criticizes the movement for failing to be effective at a pragmatic level, “The Ulema did more than any other body to rekindle a sense of religious and national consciousness among Algerians, but, tied up in their own theological coils, they failed to find pragmatic applications of their doctrines” (Horne 38). Their calls for social and religious reform were largely ignored until they, too, began to take a more extreme posture vis a vis the colonialists.

From L'Etoile Nord-Africaine (ENA) to the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN)

Eventually, much of the reformist rhetoric in political forums became more and more polarized and anti-French after having been met with reluctance and refusal on the part of the French government and the European settlers involved in Algerian politics. The most overtly political, militant group of nationalists who first called for North African independence from France in 1927 developed out of the French Communist Party (PCF) as *L'Etoile Nord-Africaine* (ENA)—a conglomeration of North African war heroes who had fought for France and had become disillusioned with their unequal treatment in the colonies and in France. Comprised largely of immigrants who had come to France from all parts of North Africa for economic opportunities, the North African Star developed out of an encounter with Marxist discourse that was largely unknown at this point in the colony. In his seminal 1977 historical account of the French-Algerian War, *A Savage War of Peace*, Alistair Horne describes this as a much more explicitly political

group than the reformist *ouléma*, “It differed from the Ulema both in a more modernistic interpretation of Islamic dogma and in its social demands, which included the redistribution of land among the *fellahs*.” (Horne 39). The ENA was interested in a return to religion, but also in the economic interests of the non-European majority. Reform was absolutely necessary, but it must be implemented at the level of power-sharing, providing a foundation for economic equality, and social reforms.

Initially led by working-class Messali Hadj (who had never received a French education) in 1926, the Algerian nationalist faction split from the French Communist Party (PCF) when they called for Algerian independence from France before the PCF was fully supportive of this idea. By 1933, the group was already discussing a complete break from France, so it was no surprise that the ENA was dissolved by the French in 1937. At this time, the group was still looking for a peaceful way to resist French colonialism and did not include a military branch when it re-formed as the *Parti du Peuple Algérien* (PPA). However, when it was dissolved again by the French in 1946 as the *Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Liberté Démocratiques* (MTLD), the group became increasingly militant. Eventually, the pacifist leader, Messali Hadj isolated himself from the party by refusing to support the decision to resort to violent strategies and enact a full-fledged revolution.

The *Organisation Spéciale* (OS), the secret paramilitary organization affiliated with the MTLD, was founded in 1947 and eventually reorganized as the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) that would later achieve independence from France in 1962. It is significant that the group that eventually broke free from French colonialism

developed out of the French Communist Party, but was also a direct descendent of a military organization. The Algerians turned increasingly toward force to achieve their political goals. When unity and political action failed to materialize by peaceful means, it was ultimately secured through violence. What began as a struggle for participatory reform morphed into a project for complete separation from France by any means necessary and at the expense of hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides.

The Blum-Viollette Proposal of 1936

Amidst this divisive, increasingly tense atmosphere of the development of nationalism, one French Governor-General of Algeria, Maurice Viollette, called for the immediate implementation of assimilationist reforms to integrate the communities more thoroughly into the French family. Viollette could sense the increased impatience with political reform by the non-European majority and foresaw the catastrophic result to dragging their feet any longer. After witnessing the mixed enthusiasm of the Algerian population in the wake of the French centenary celebration of the conquest of Algeria, Viollette predicted in 1931, “before twenty years are up we will know the gravest of difficulties in North Africa” (Viollette in Horne 36). The Blum-Viollette Bill was proposed to appease increasingly collective Muslim impatience with the inequality of their treatment. Under this bill, citizenship would be extended to a select few Muslims (around 25,000) including those who had fought in wars for the French, without having to renounce their religion or civil status. The bill also opened up political offices to

Muslims where they had previously been excluded. This would basically amount to the French admitting their wrongs and a gradual move away from colonialism.

Viollette presented the bill in assimilationist terms suggesting that legal equality (and the educational equality entailed by it) would result in citizens that even the most racist among the *pieds-noirs* would accept with open arms: “Muslim students, while remaining Muslim, should become so French in their education, that no Frenchman, however deeply racist and religiously prejudiced he might be...will any longer dare to deny them French fraternity” (Viollette in Horne 37). Viollette's aspirations for the bill operate under the assumption that education is what separated the Europeans from the Muslims. In a sense, this was consistent with the call for naturalization from the French-educated *Jeunes Algériens* movement. However, it was not consistent with the attitude of colonial domination and exploitation coming from the voting *pied-noir* community to protect their economic and political influence. This could only be possible through foreclosing the performative, transformative element of their education into colonialist values and denying their right to achieve meaningful reform or political representation. Viollette not only underestimated the importance of maintaining this distinction between the communities in terms of both the *pied-noir* identity and economic dominance as well as the more general functioning of the colonialist system. The European settlers would not stand for this kind of reform since it would mean the collapse of their economic stranglehold on the region. Furthermore, they had no interest in sharing a civil space with a people they had spent so long discriminating against. This bill set off a media frenzy in the Algerian press with *pied-noir* outrage over the thought of their power being

taken from them: “we will never tolerate that in even the smallest commune an Arab might be mayor” (Horne 37) while the French metropole became increasingly tolerant of this kind of reform. This outrage resulted in the failure for this bill to be implemented in Algeria but signals a split between colonial, settler interests and the interests of metropolitan politicians.

To shift the balance of *pied-noir* power was unthinkable for the European Algerians—who fought until the bitter end to maintain their control. Horne describes this rejection of integration as an important component in understanding the events of the war for independence: “At the time of the projected Blum-Viollette reforms, a *pied-noir* financier remarked to Viollette”:

Monsieur le Gouverneur-General, you reason in the French of France, but we reason in the French of Algeria.” It was not at all the same language, as was to become tragically plain later, and in order to understand events from 1954 onwards it is necessary to accept the existence of three totally distinct peoples—the French of France, the French of Algeria, and the Muslims of Algeria. (Horne 53-54)

The problem seems to revolve around language and cultural translation—although most of the key players involved in this struggle spoke the same language: French. However, their language meant different things in their different cultural, religious, and legal contexts. As seen above, “assimilation” and “Algerian” resonated differently in different contexts. The most obvious problem came about as a result of those contexts overlapping with one another—either becoming hybrid spaces, conflicting spaces, or spaces that assimilated into one another.

Viollette evoked brotherhood in the context of a broken (at best) or nonexistent

family structure. Horne describes the failure in terms of an “abortion”—a child that was conceived, but dies before birth: “the abortion of the Blum-Violette Bill undoubtedly marked a vital turning-point for the Algerian nationalist movement. At the same time it also bestowed on the *pieds-noirs* a first dangerous awareness that they could call the tune on any reform initiated by a government in Paris” (Horne 41). In terms of the language of family planning, it is much easier to abort a child than to follow through with the pregnancy—nourishing the fetus, planning for its financial security, and accepting responsibility for his or her future. The blocking of the Blum-Viollette Bill by the *pieds-noirs* illustrates that despite French readiness to accept the consequences of the birth of a new Algerian nation founded in relative equality under French ideals, the settler population was not. This confused and angered Viollette who predicted the consequences of this kind of exclusionary reaction to assimilation:

When the Muslims protest, you are indignant; when they approve, you are suspicious; when they keep quiet you are fearful. Messieurs, these men have no political nation. They do not even demand their religious nation. All they ask is to be admitted into yours. If you refuse this, beware lest they do not soon create one for themselves. (Viollette in Horne 37)

The non-European masses constructed an Algerian nation to counter the colonial one after they were fed up with not being allowed to participate in France's Algeria. The budding discontent of the *Jeunes Algériens*, the Islamic Reform Movement, and the *Etoile Nord-Africaine* was seen as a threat to hegemony by the *pieds-noirs*, but as a threat to the existence of French Algeria by Viollette. Either colonial rule or France would have to leave Algeria. Ultimately, they turned out to be so integrally related that they were both expelled as Viollette predicted.

L'Ecole d'Alger

Around the same time as Viollette's legal proposal, another literary movement comprised largely of European Algerians was developing out of the failure of *Les Algérianistes* with a more universal, humanistic rhetoric. Here we see another attempt at restructuring the political imaginary through literary engagement. However, unlike their predecessors, they took a more inclusive approach to Algerian identity. *L'Ecole d'Alger* revived certain components of the Algerianists such as the mythology of the Mediterranean, but with a focus on ancient Greece rather than Rome. In the same vein, they oriented their mythology around their love and devotion of the space of Algiers rather than in the communities populating the space. In *La Génération de 52*, Samira Sayeh describes this largely European literary movement in terms of their desire to relay their lived experiences to a French public rather than anything overtly political:

Ces artistes en herbe ont été réunis par leur passion commune pour Alger, “La Ville Blanche,” qu'ils se sont risqués à décliner sous différentes nuances et à restituer dans toutes ses formes. Pour leur part, les écrivains de l'Ecole d'Alger, dont bon nombre étaient nés en Algérie, ambitionnaient également de traduire leurs réalités algériennes le plus fidèlement possible. (35)

These artists shared a love for Algiers and strove to “translate their Algerian realities” in more disparate ways than the Algerianists. The Algiers School sought to represent the nation in a more inclusive, less politicized way than their overtly colonial predecessors. For the *Ecole d'Alger*, as Sayeh suggests, reality was plural and inclusive of at least *some* of the non-Europeans—most notably, Jean Amrouche, a French-educated writer born to Kabyle parents who had converted to Christianity before his birth.

Two divergent myths dominated the movement: Gabriel Audisio's "eternal Mediterranean" and Amrouche's "eternal Jugurtha." Audisio, once an adherent of the Algerianist movement, publicly announced his break from them under a humanistic guise shortly before the Blum-Viollette proposal,

Que l'on nous fasse grâce de la trop facile latinité! La politique la littérature, le sentiment, se la discutent. On sait avec quelle allégresse...M. Louis Bertrand, supprime ces douze siècles d'Islam qui ont pesé sur le Maghreb, avec quelle foi il fait appel à la conscience latine des musulmans nord-africains. Je n'ai guère d'indulgence pour les autres généralisations qu'on impose à ma mer; l'hellenique, la byzantine, ou la phénicienne...ne sont que des "moments," des aspects transitoires de l'éternelle Méditerranée. (Audisio in Vulor 37)

Audisio's conception of the Mediterranean was premised upon a paradoxical universal humanism coupled with a concern for the specific geographical space of Algeria. He accused Bertrand as "erasing two centuries of Islam" in imposing "generalizations" on his nation. The characteristics of Audisio's Mediterranean, however, still resonate with the dehumanizing Algerianist concern for the uniqueness of the European settler population:

Encore que la fusion des races ne soit qu'à son début, l'Algérien a déjà conscience de sa particularité ethnique et mentale. Il croit au climat et à l'influence du milieu, parfois il n'hésite pas à trouver en soi-même quelque chose de Berbère (on pourrait aussi dire quelque chose d'Arabe...mais le Berbère habille mieux, on a pour lui le préjugé favorable.) Il sait qu'il est un mélange spécifique. Il faut toujours en revenir à la fameuse réponse de Cagayous: "Êtes-vous Français?" – "Algériens, nous sommes." (Audisio in Vulor 38)

Clearly, when Audisio used the term "Algerian" he meant Algerians of European descent. He distinguishes "Algerian" from "French" here, but the confusion between the two seems more likely than Audisio confusing "Algerian" with "Arab" or

“Berber”—“races” that he is in favor of “fus[ing]” in a more hypothetical than realistic way. Barely below the surface of his humanist melange lies an indication that he does not necessarily approve of certain kinds of combinations. For Vultur, Audisio and the members of the Algiers School perpetuated similar myths that ultimately reinforced colonialism through their universalist humanism oblivious to historical context (Vultur 35). By taking “refuge in a 'utopia' outside history and politics” (Vultur 48), Audisio removed the violence of colonialism from the context of Algerian history and the struggle for independence occurring at the same time. In effect, this project reflects more of an internal struggle of colonialist conscience than an effort at integration or even assimilation (Vultur 23).

Rhetoric of the multi-cultural Algerian “family” helped reinforce the universalizing discourse of this branch of the Algiers School. Locating the diversity of the nation within the context of the family made it easier to accept the differences between members while maintaining a spirit of unity. Jules Roy, a *petit colon* intellectual born of an illegitimate relationship expressed this multicultural atmosphere in overwhelmingly positive terms toward the “universal”:

Elle tend vers l'universel. La diversité des origines est une preuve de la richesse spirituelle de l'Algérie, grande famille aux membres multiples dont l'arbre généalogique plonge ses racines à travers des couches de sols et de cultures extrêmement variés, mais dont les branches et les rameaux s'élèvent vers la même lumière, la même sensualité, le même amour de la justice et de la liberté. (Jules Roy in Sayeh 51)

The same sun helps the diverse branches grow. The roots of Roy's genealogical tree, however, seem to sprout after the tree is already grown. This temporal delay also applies

to the hopefulness of this metaphor as Roy accounts for the multiculturalism after the fact of its existence and after Algeria has seen the violence and division that has arisen as a result of the diversity of this family that has been violently thrown together by colonialism.

Jean Amrouche, however, constructs a myth that seems more aptly suited to describe reality in terms of historical context rather than an idealized humanism that did not really exist. The figure of Jugurtha resonates on both mythical and historical levels. Throughout a series of struggles in the second century B.C., he managed to ward off the Roman army from his claim on Numidia (roughly present day Algeria). Despite his eventual defeat, he was taken as an inspirational figure by Amrouche for the persistence of his struggle against colonial oppression (Vulor 34). Similar to Amrouche and his European-educated peers of non-European descent, Jugurtha also struggled between the cultures of the oppressor and the indigenous people. In this case, his Numidian family was complicit with Roman rule since the establishment of Numidia as a kingdom by his grandfather. Jugurtha symbolizes anti-colonialist struggle undertaken by members of the indigenous intelligentsia caught between two cultures after generations of assimilation and oppression. However, he is more than simply a symbol. He is a historical figure who fought a struggle against a different colonial powerhouse in the same geographic region that Algeria occupies.

Significantly, Jugurtha also lends a certain level of legitimacy to the metaphor of Algeria as an illegitimate orphan of France—having been born out of wedlock and adopted by his father's brother after the death of his parents. In spite of this illegitimacy,

he rose beyond the power of the legitimate heirs to the Algerian throne and attempted to free his land from colonial rule. This resonated with the context of Algeria and the legal identities of those involved in the anti-colonial insurrection. Legally, they existed as second class citizens with fewer rights than their European counterparts, but this also gave them the impetus to seek independence. In the case of Jugurtha, the concept of illegitimacy shifted from the sphere of the family to that of politics and became a motor for political action.

Amrouche evoked the language of family more explicitly in describing the relationship between France and Algeria in terms of a marriage. “France and Algeria had never been married, and so no one could speak of the revolution as a 'divorce,' as some French commentators did. Algeria had simply been violated” (Amrouche in Vulor 35). Again, the question of legitimacy was raised both in political terms as well as the language of family law. What constitutes a legitimate marriage? Is it legitimate if the hand of one of the parties is forced? Can rape occur within the context of a legal marriage? For Amrouche, the relationship between France and Algeria was more accurately metaphorized by the idea of rape (with the subsequent birth of an illegitimate child) than by a marriage wherein one party seeks a divorce. The Algerian situation resembled a forced marriage involving forced intercourse in which the wife possesses no legal venue for pursuing a divorce. The legitimacy of this union depends upon what kind of perspective is taken. Privately, it can easily be read as illegitimate. Publicly, it appears perfectly acceptable if the concept of “rape” cannot exist between a married couple.

For describing this unpleasant reality that the non-European Algerians found themselves involved with as colonized subjects, Amrouche became alienated from members of the Algiers School who ascribed to Audisio's harmonizing vision. Most famously, Camus describes this as “bad faith” on the part of Amrouche “coming from an ungrateful intellectual who lived on the cultural fruit of France, and yet appropriated anti-colonial metaphors” (Camus in Vulor 35). Camus's steadfast allegiance with France became visible here. He considered Amrouche as a kind of traitor for accepting the culture and education, but not the politics of France. Like many other intellectuals educated by France, Amrouche's French education extended beyond the strictly pedagogical into the realm of Algerian performative politics.

The End of World War II and the Beginning of Armed Resistance

World War II ushered in a period of further discontent and disillusionment with French colonial policy in Algeria. The majority of the population continued being subject to domination by France and the European population without enjoying the full benefits of French citizenship. The non-European Muslim population was increasingly unhappy with the expectations placed upon them and the unfulfilled promises of legal equity. As we have seen in the previous section, the state's rhetoric promoted assimilation, but the reality reflected coexistence of at least two separate groups with separate rights. Todd Shepard describes this failure of an assimilationist reality in *The Invention of Decolonization*, “Officials continued to rely on the excuse of legal exigencies and the

maintenance of ‘local civil statuses’ to explain the ongoing juxtaposition of the theory of assimilation with a practice in which coexistence predominated” (Shepard 39). These distinctions were based largely on religious difference with Christians and Jews (throughout much of Algeria's history) on one side and Muslims on the other. Despite the official French policy (and legacy) of separating religious identity from national identity, legal categories became overtly religious—partly as a result of wanting to retain dominance over a large segment of the indigenous population (along with the political and economic power that would entail), partly as a result of wanting to appear to respect difference by protecting the local civil status of its non-Europeans. From 1944 onward, Muslim Algerians were categorized as the FMA (*Français Musulman d’Algérie*) meaning that they had an ancestor with “Muslim status” in 1830 (Shepard 49). From this point, religious denomination was evoked to distinguish one set of French citizens from another, but also to distinguish the rights of Muslims living in France from those in Algeria:

After 1944, official texts no longer invoked civil status to explain why ‘Muslims’ had fewer rights than other French Nationals. Instead, from 1947 until 1958, it was the distinction between Algerian and ‘European’ French territory that legitimated continued restrictions on the rights of ‘Muslim French from Algeria.’ (Shepard 41)

After 1944, it became explicit that Algerians had different rights from the French of France. The unity of France was breaking down legally as France struggled to define the population they wished to legally restrict and economically and culturally exploit.

World War II also marked a shift in treatment of the Jewish population.²⁰ The Jews were alienated from the French as a result of revoking of the Crémieux Decree on

²⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between Algeria's Jews and other populations, see Benjamin Stora's *Les Trois exils juifs d'Algérie* (2006).

October 7, 1940 by the Vichy government. Although their citizenship was given back after the war, the antisemitism in the colony during the course of the war caused an irreparable rift between the Jews and those who retained French citizenship. Horne describes this antisemitism as largely nonexistent on the part of the Muslims:

In the Second World War, Petain's anti-Semitic regime repealed the Crémieux Decrees, and Jewish teachers and children alike were summarily flung out of European schools; the whole community was menaced with deportation to Nazi camps. Yet during this time (so several Algerian Jews averred to the author), there was barely a breath of anti-Semitism from any Muslim quarter. By the 1950s the Algerian Jews were tugged in several directions; the least privileged tended still to identify themselves with the Muslims rather than the *pièdes noirs*, and many were members of the Communist Party, while the wealthiest had developed distinctly Parisian orientations....After 1954 a significant proportion of the Jewish intellectual and professional classes was to side with the F.L.N. (Horne 59)

Christian antisemitism during the Vichy era resulted in a more critical perspective of the French. It became clear to all that the French could give and take citizenship rights and identity categories whenever they pleased. Not only were they bullied legally, they were also met with violence in their social and cultural lives. This helped certain Jews cast a sympathetic eye on their Muslim countrymen as fellow subjects of abuse and broken promises by the French inside and outside of Algeria. By the end of the war, large segments of the population felt exploited and betrayed by the French—even the non-European intelligentsia had become disillusioned with the prospect of assimilation after being met with denial of equality for so long. This period also marked a shift in mindset among the non-Europeans seeking equality. Rather than seeking alliances with the French, the exploited majority groups began to seek alliances among themselves to overthrow the inherent inequality of colonial oppression (Shepard 38). Similarities were

sought out rather than the differences between groups that supported French hegemony for so long.

The Beginning of the End of French Algeria: The Sétif Massacre (V-E Day, 1945)

The end of the war brought relief and jubilation throughout Europe over the end of Nazi violence. However, in Algeria, this day brought mass protest and mass violence to the streets of Sétif. The non-European majority took to the streets to protest the injustices that they faced on a daily basis. Their faith in the nobility of French rule had gradually eroded away, they were disillusioned with the prospect of assimilation, and their confidence in France's ability to overpower her enemies (in Europe and in Africa) had been shaken. Unrest had arisen in the past—mostly in Berber regions, but always quickly put down. This time, however, there was a coordinated mass movement that signaled the discontent felt by the non-European majority. Starting on May Day, 1945, the newly-formed AML (*Les Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté*) movement peacefully took to the streets waving nationalist flags to demand Algerian independence and freedom of their leader, Messali Hadj (former leader of the defunct *Etoile Nord-Africaine*), from prison. This violence culminated on May 8, V-E Day in Sétif and Guélma when protesters went against police orders to refrain from displaying the Algerian flag. In a very symbolic way, the Muslim majority was met with violence while they peacefully protested the atrocities of colonialism on the day when all of Europe was celebrating the end of the Nazi era of countless atrocities against humanity. Police

violence triggered violence among the protesters resulting in approximately a hundred European deaths and thousands of Muslim deaths. The official French account estimates 1,500 whereas other sources vary from 7,000 to 40,000—15 times more deaths in the most conservative estimate to 400 times as many deaths in the higher estimates. The French also dissolved the AML and threw over 5,000 others in prison.

Albert Camus responded to this massacre in his first series of articles on Algeria since before his exodus to France. He warned the French to respond to the situation with moderation in order to avoid inflaming the issue and to preserve some degree of amicability in Franco-Algerian relations. He called for France to extend their ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity to their relationship with non-European Algerians (Camus in LeSueur 105-06). He also pointed out that resistance leaders were products of French culture and had been open to assimilation before the hypocrisy and unfulfilled promises of France had been revealed time and again over the course of the twentieth century. At this point, Camus believed (with many others) that French hegemony could be regained if reform came about through enfranchisement of the majority and the end of colonial violence; “If we want to save North Africa, we have to show our resolve before the world to make France known throughout its best laws and with the most just of men” (Camus in LeSueur 106).

Officially, France responded quickly to the violence of Sétif by proposing a wish list of reforms (resembling the kind proposed by Camus) in an attempt to regain hegemony in the region. The reforms would bring about nearly every demand made by

the *Jeunes Algériens* when they had supported the idea of assimilation²¹: non-Europeans would be enfranchised, colonial appointments in the *communes mixtes*²² would be abolished, Arabic would be recognized as a national language, and religion would no longer matter in political or legal terms. However, the French failed to take into account the high stakes of such a move for both the non-European Algerians as well as the *pieds-noirs*. Politically, the Muslim deputies abstained from voting—for them, it was too little, too late. For the *pieds-noirs*, this was an atrocity that they would never allow to see the light of day:

Nevertheless, on 27 August 1947 it was finally voted in by 328 to 33, with 208 abstentions—including, discouragingly, those of the fifteen Muslim deputies. The 1947 statute tabled five important reforms which the Muslims had been demanding for many years: The suppression of the *communes mixtes*, and their replacement by democratically elected local councils. The suppression of the military government of the Saharan territories, and their replacement by civil departments. The recognition of Arabic as an official language alongside French. The separation of Church and State for the Muslims, as for the other religions. The electoral enfranchisement of Muslim women...As it was, the *pied noir* lobby managed to block it just as they had the Blum-Viollette proposals of 1936. (Horne 69)

Again, reform was blocked by the fear of *pied-noir* loss of power. They knew that if non-Europeans were enfranchised, they could no longer monopolize the political decisions of Algeria. This, in turn, would likely entail a loss of economic power as well. The French government capitulated once again to the *pied-noir* outrage—causing increased contempt and discontent on the part of the non-European population who walked the streets in significantly greater numbers than their oppressive, European countrymen. Ironically, the

21 By this time, however, they had mostly all shifted from an agenda of assimilation and inclusion to liberation and separation because their demands had been ignored for so long.

22 Cities and villages with a non-European majority that were, nevertheless, governed by French appointment rather than free vote.

longer the *pieds-noirs* resisted reform, the more difficult it would become for them to regain their control over the region.

La Génération de '52

In the wake of the events following the Sétif Massacre and the blockage of French political reforms by the *pieds-noirs*, some Muslim intellectuals began an indigenous literary movement that shed light on some of the mysteries of life in Algeria under colonial rule. The Generation of '52 overlapped in some ways with the Algiers School, but refers more specifically to non-European artists working in French toward the construction of what Sayeh describes as a “*Littérature régionale d'Algérie*” (24) and the construction of an Algerian national imaginary including authors such as Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib, and Mouloud Mammeri. Sayeh argues that this group of writers failed to receive the attention due to them because they neither dealt with overtly anti-colonial themes nor attempted to sever themselves entirely from European literary forms. In a sense, they were keeping open the possibility of a peaceful resolution after their political counterparts (such as Hadj and Abbas) had already moved to a more extreme anti-colonial position of revolution.

These writers described their political and social realities in ways that did not involve a wholesale exclusion or revolt against the French, but their work asserted their own unique positions within a larger social reality. This reality neither endorsed colonialism nor overtly called for decolonization. Sayeh describes this work as

“rethinking vague terminology and concepts” rather than “revealing a change of mentality” of the “collective imagination”:

Dès lors, le déplacement des oeuvres littéraires dans un contexte régionaliste n'a pas pour but exclusif de comprendre et révéler le changement de mentalité qui s'est opéré dans l'imaginaire collectif d'une nation. Il s'agit aussi, et surtout, de repenser une terminologie et des concepts vagues qui, malheureusement, continuent d'être ignorés et qui ont mené, inévitablement, à des conclusions trop hâtives en raison de la douloureuse histoire de l'Algérie durant l'ère départementale française. (Sayeh 25-26)

Because of this negotiation of terms rather than an overhaul of the collective imaginary, these authors are sometimes discredited as champions of assimilation. For Sayeh, jumping to this conclusion signals a misunderstanding of the inherent regionalism informing the context and content of the projects of these writers. (Sayeh 28)

In many ways, Sayeh argues, these writers occupied an interstitial space between cultures. They were part of the educated, indigenous elite who were more comfortable writing in the language of their French education. Legally, they were not considered “Algerian” because of their religion. The term was also fraught with *pied-noir* colonial violence:

Cependant, au début des années 1950, la critique littéraire et l'opinion publique s'interdisent de présenter Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib et Mouloud Mammeri comme des “écrivains algériens” tant les enjeux politique, culturel et économique étaient graves et confus. Autre remarque importante dans l'histoire littéraire algérienne d'expression française, remarquons par ailleurs que jusqu'alors, ces mêmes écrivains ne s'étaient jamais désignés comme “Algériens” non plus. (Sayeh 48)

They were not accepted as “Algerian” and they did not consider themselves “Algerian” until an Algerian nation comprised of different ethnic and religious groups arose around them. Despite their reluctance to identify with the fraught category “Algerian,” the

literature of these men helped to construct and perform a new national identity in opposition to the French. This distinguished them from their European colleagues in the Algiers School. Albert Memmi argues that part of what distinguished the non-European writers at this time from their European counterparts in Algeria lay in the nation-building that arose from their work: “Ces écrivains maghrébins (Feraoun, Mammeri, Dib...) ont vécu la situation coloniale et colonisé: ils ont annoncé et préparé, dans une certaine mesure la constitution de leur communauté en nation;...les écrivains européens n'ont participé ni de l'un ni de l'autre” (Memmi in Sayeh 56). This nation-building involved bringing communities together into larger entities with common aims. For these communities, it was not only resistance against colonial oppression that brought them together, but the ideological component driven by intellectuals and activists from their communities.

Similar to the pro-colonial perspective of the Algerianists, Abdelli suggests that an essential component of nation-building lay in the construction of a national consciousness through the space of literature: “La nouvelle littérature algérienne porte la marque de cet effort pour saisir dans sa totalité la masse du peuple algérien et lui donner d'elle-même une conscience qu'elle n'avait jamais eue sur le plan de la littérature” (Abdelli in Sayeh 41). The stakes that Abdelli signals, however, derived mostly from the struggle against colonial oppression. Literature helped pull these perspectives together into a collective voice. These authors began the project of constructing national myths where dispersed community identities reigned throughout most of the colonial period in Algeria. This nascent collective identity began with the demand for justice in the face of colonialism,

but also became a more tangible thing with the construction of a collective imaginary.

The Generation of '52 was significant precisely for their artistic contribution to a national identity that struggled to find coherence and legitimacy as a component of the French colonial legacy. Unlike their more overtly political comrades in the FLN, MNA, PCA, or the Uléma, this generation of writers kept open the possibility for peaceful reconciliation without foreclosing the possibility of anti-colonialism. The Algerian nation had never previously found a collective voice that actually reflected the cultural diversity of its inhabitants. With this work, the disparate identities found a vehicle for expression in a way that retained cultural specificity while expressing a more universal pursuit of justice in a nonviolent, participatory way. In a sense, these authors with more moderate voices resembled Camus's pursuit of justice—against colonial violence, but providing alternatives to decolonization and severance from France. Through literature, the Generation of '52 constructed a family tree that was more inclusive of their non-European countrymen, but did not demonize their French brothers.

The War (1954-1962): A Failed Attempt at Integrationism

By the advent of the Algerian war for independence, very few of the promises made by the French for full enfranchisement or legal equality of the population had come to fruition. Further, very few Muslim children had access to education. By Horne's estimates, around 20% of Muslim boys and around 6% of girls were attending school

with over 90% of the population illiterate in 1954.²³ The violent outbreaks by this largely uneducated collective finally brought a wave of reforms in a last-ditch attempt by the French government to assuage the unhappy, underrepresented majority. By 1955, Shepard argues that, in fact, this was France's first earnest attempt “to enhance the political and economic possibilities for Algerians...when the post-1944 French attempts to relegitimize their empire definitively foundered” (45). Colonialism had been fairly unpopular in France for quite some time due to its ideological dissonance with the ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality. However, the circumstances involved with Algeria were slightly different due to its status as a full *département* of France. By definition, Algerian inhabitants were all French, but their brand of French citizenship (and the rights or lack of that accompanied it) varied from one group to the next. For generations, the Muslim majority lived under conditions of associationism—living separate, unequal cultural and legal realities with promises of assimilation whereby all French citizens are created equal regardless of race or religion. Associationism pleased only the European majority. Assimilation pleased only the educated elite who were willing to assimilate to French culture. Ultimately, promises of assimilation toward legal equality never materialized—angering even the staunchest supporters of French culture. Ferhat Abbas and his gradual turn to extremism provides an excellent example of disillusionment with assimilation that led to demands for independence.

The French were unwilling to think of the possibility of losing French Algeria, so

23 In 1954 it was estimated that, of the Muslims, only one boy in five was attending school, and one in sixteen among girls (though in some country areas the ratio could rise as high as one in seventy); illiteracy (in French) was set at ninety-four percent of the males, ninety-eight percent for the females. (Horne 61)

they were left with no option but to shift to a policy of integrationism to have any chance of regaining hegemony in the region. “Decades of applied assimilationist theory--which worked to eliminate group ‘particularisms’ in order to create individuals who could be French citizens--had pushed most Algerian ‘Muslims’ farther away from other French people, not closer” (Shepard 47). Among the Muslim majority, few but the most diehard defenders of France²⁴ were willing to stand behind the policy of abandoning their rights to the French anymore. The advent of the war marked the opportunity for an indigenous, Algerian identity to emerge to form a national identity distinct from the sense of identity based on inferiority instilled by the French. They no longer felt like equality was contingent on abandoning their particularities. For this reason, the French attempted a policy of integrationism which supported measures that advanced three versions of equality for Algerians:

Civic, political, and social...Integration opened limited possibilities to accommodate some of the existing particularities of a certain population (‘Muslim’ Algerians) in the pursuit of eventual full and real equality...exceptional measures in the present were necessary to re-create the imagined unity of all French people before the law in the future. (Shepard 48)

This policy probably could have been more effective if it had been employed before the outbreak of the war when the educated elite had been more aligned with the project of assimilationism and before the uneducated masses were unhappy with their inability to feed and clothe themselves under French rule. Unlike the rhetoric of the past regarding eventual equality of all, this new policy undertook “exceptional measures in the present” to ensure that this rhetoric came to fruition. However, from the perspective of those who

²⁴ Such as the *harkis* who would fight alongside the French throughout the war.

had lived so long under colonial rule without imagining any other possibility, this came too little, too late in comparison to the new alternative national identity that was being constructed through the art and political rhetoric of members of the Muslim majority.

The Limits of French Intellectual Support: Le Comité d'Action des Intellectuels contre la Poursuite de la Guerre en Afrique du Nord (November 5, 1955)

After the official outbreak of the war, many French intellectuals ideologically aligned themselves with the Algerian nationalists against colonial oppression and violence. Coming so quickly after the atrocities of World War II (of which many had been directly involved), many intellectuals continued their effort to fight against state violence—particularly perpetrated by their own state, France. The beginning of the war also came after Morocco and Vietnam had gained independence, so support of Algerian independence seemed relevant and possible. On November 5, 1955, Dionys Mascolo, Louis-Rene des Forès, Robert Antelme, and Edgar Morin founded *Le Comité d'Action des Intellectuels contre la Poursuite de la Guerre en Afrique du Nord*. Both Mascolo and Antelme had been married to the French Indo-Chinese writer, Marguerite Duras, who had lived a rather miserable existence as a *petit colon* in her youth. She had also worked for the French Resistance with Mascolo (who she would eventually marry) while waiting for her husband, Antelme, to return from Dachau. Many of the founding members of the group had experienced equally harrowing situations over the course of the past two decades in France, so they did not approach the question of justice from an overly

abstract perspective. They strove to fight against the colonial regime and emphasized their independence from political parties.

Their perspectives were limited in the sense that most had never lived in Algeria, but they fought colonialism by trying to change colonial policy and the ideology of their peers and the French public. As LeSueur discusses at length, they used their intellectual and political connections to influence French policy in Algeria (36-37). In fact, Algeria's last governor-general, Jacques Soustelle, came from an academic background as an anthropologist of South American colonial cultures. The *Comité d'Action* tried to reason with Soustelle through a series of letters, but they only distanced themselves from him—eventually accusing them of betraying the intellectual impartiality by taking a position with regard to the war. The *Comité* sought a “cooperation in friendship” between France and Algeria (LeSueur 40) and accused Soustelle of being a poor intellectual because of his failure to consider the ethics of his political decisions (41). However, they, too failed to recognize their own intellectual limitations in understanding the ambiguities and nuances of Algerian politics and lived experience when they ultimately cast their lot with the FLN.

The *Comité's* concern with justice helped them unite in terms of influencing colonial policy and ideology. However, most intellectuals in this group did not have enough knowledge about Algeria to know which Algerian political groups to support. In some ways it was this reluctance to take a particular political position with regard to the Algerian War that made the *Comité* unsuccessful. Most members supported groups for idealistic, impractical reasons such as the use (or not) of violence rather than what the

groups could offer their nation in the future or what was in the best interest of the inhabitants. For some, colonialism was the problem, for some it was the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist system. Some sought justice at all costs (human lives included); some took a nonviolent approach to the struggle. Some sided with the MNA; some with the FLN.

Ultimately, it was this division that culminated in the Salle Wagram meeting of Jan. 27, 1956 illustrating how ineffective the group was when it failed to organize itself around a concrete manifestation of justice that could be used in the context of Algeria. Mascolo, Aimé Césaire, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Amrouche were among the participants spanning a wide spectrum of perspectives from the Resistance to Caribbean colonialism to French existentialism to Berber-Algerian. This wide variation in perspective vis a vis colonialism led to very different ideas regarding action and political allegiance in Algeria. The *pied-noir*/Berber, Jean Amrouche spoke about two Frances—one good and the other bastardized. In part, this derived from his perspective as Algerian and French, “I am born Algerian, I believe myself to be French.” These were distinct identity categories for Amrouche despite the claim that Algeria was a first and foremost a French department at the time. Amrouche spoke out against the political rhetoric of integration in favor of real bonds of fraternity and friendship between the European and non-European Algerians (LeSueur 42). His own identity was split along these lines, so he hoped to find a way to resolve the division between the two cultures that shared the same space. Amrouche further drew a connection between the cultures through the language of family to discuss religious difference. Both the Christians and the Muslims could claim Abraham as their

father, so they should be more fraternal with one another. Here, Amrouche seemed to disregard the violence and imbalance of his context. Instead, he idealized his particular Arabo-European composition and a very distant past that seems difficult to call on for support without considering the dissonance between the two cultures that he skimmed over. He only claimed to be both Algerian and French because his family has renounced Islam in favor of Christianity and chosen the European cultural and educational path over the Berber. It is noteworthy that he described himself as “Algerian” and “French,” but not “Berber” or “Arab.” In this context, “Algerian” and “French” would not have been contradictory, but simply naming an affiliation with a certain regionalism such as Breton or Alsatian.²⁵

Too Little, Too Late: Les Centres Sociaux Educatifs en Algerie (1955)

After the outbreak of the war, in 1955, the metropolitan French government also made its first large-scale attempt at fostering brotherhood between the European colonial minority and the non-European, disenfranchised majority through “social and moral modernization” (LeSueur 63) by means of education. This project entailed the establishment of a number of social centers (*Centres Sociaux Educatifs*) throughout Algeria to encourage apolitical bonds between the disparate groups. These centers sought to educate the masses in a way that had been promised in the past, but had never come to fruition—especially in such a hospitable, non-invasive way. Officially, the goals of the

²⁵ For a more thorough analysis of the regionalism of Algerian identity, see Sayeh's *La Génération de 52*.

Centers were defined in terms of teaching “humility,” “useful character,” and “concern with self-education” (LeSueur 67) to the non-European majority who had previously never had access to the European education that had been promised to them in the rhetoric of the *mission civilisatrice*. On the surface these goals were declared as apolitical, but the timing of these centers indicates a last-ditch political attempt at hegemony. If the French made good with their promises to educate the masses, perhaps the grateful masses would ally themselves with France in the war.

In many ways, these Social Centers followed through with their purported goals to forge connections between the cultures and provide an educational resource to the masses. However, the larger goals failed miserably both in terms of widening the support of France among the non-European majority as well as remaining apolitical. LeSueur succinctly points out this lack of foresight in his discussion: “The Centres Sociaux were to be the principal agents in the individual's self-recognition of his or her individual worth, and the leadership naively believed that this Cartesian call to consciousness would not be seen as political during the era of decolonization” (LeSueur 68). Recognition of worth is not consistent with living under the oppression of colonialism. The French hoped that their pedagogy would not be performed by the Algerian masses. Beyond this failure to predict the consequences of this kind of education, the French administration did not recognize the consequences of their administrators taking their positions seriously:

As an internal agent of change in Algerian society, Centres Sociaux members were to take a phenomenological leap into the Algerians' world. Placing oneself within the drama would allow the misery and ailments of society to

become part of one's own identity. This identity found expression in efforts to escape poverty. It also united everyone into a single society, and through this, it created a common identity. As a result, those working in the Centres Sociaux were asked to place themselves in a dangerous no man's land in the battle for Algeria. (69)

The Centers shook the ideological foundation of colonialism by empowering those being educated as well as displaying the painful consequences of colonialism to those doing the educating. This created a sense of intercultural community inside the Centers, but did not necessarily translate into the support of France. Developing intimate relationships with the victims of French atrocities did little to support the continuation of these deeds. In fact, the Centers incited a great deal of skepticism among the most conservative *pieds-noirs* and led to a number of allegations of anti-French, pro-FLN collaborations and increased violence (LeSueur 70-71).

One of the most famous figures involved with the *Centres sociaux* was Mouloud Feraoun, a Kabyle writer and social activist. After accepting a position with the *Centre sociale* in El-Biar, Feraoun chronicled his ambivalent feelings in his journals. He worked for solidarity between the cultures, but explained it as coming too late to produce the desired effects:

It should have been done in 1950 and now no one believes in it: neither the administration, nor the educators, nor the users. Maybe we should come back to it when the killing and self-deception have stopped. In itself, it is great, even a coup. But all is divided by the incertitude that fogs the street, and fills it with the most general agony and the most narrow-minded hatred. No one wants to do good anymore. (Feraoun in LeSueur 89)

On the ground, there was not enough faith in the value of the existence of French-Algeria and hope for reconciliation on peaceful terms was mostly absent—even in the

administrators of the Social Centers. There was too much resistance and violence in their lives for peaceful coexistence to seem like a viable option. Again, the most forceful show of resistance to reconciliation seemed to come from staunch believers in the supremacy of European culture.

With the development of the war, the question of ethnicity became a more explicit issue in Algeria as well as in France. In spite of the rhetoric of brotherhood and solidarity and the actions of the *Centres Sociaux*, France wanted a way to distinguish the French Algerians from the non-French in case of defeat. During this period, the question of French nationality in Algeria revealed a contradiction in the *jus soli* standard for French citizenship and the *jus sanguinis* reality of the situation. In 1958, French officials began making the distinction between FSNA (*français de souche nord-africain*) and FSE (*français de souche européenne*). French citizenship was drawn along ethnic lines in a way that had previously been denied in France (Shepard 53). With the threat of an insurgence of immigrants from Algeria, France looked for a way to distinguish the European from the non-Europeans (Shepard 143). This legal categorization translated to a difference in rights and benefits as well. The French opened up the problem of origin to include either the father or the mother's ethnicity in the case of mixed marriage (Shepard 53), but what had previously been denied regarding ethnicity in France was now revealed to matter as war raged on in Algeria.

As the war dragged on, it became increasingly clear that self-determination was necessary in Algeria and that integration or peaceful resolution would be impossible. Most non-European Algerians, French metropolitan citizens, and French government

officials saw this as the only resolution to the war by 1961. However, some resistance was still waged against separation of the two nations on the part of the Europeans with cultural or economic interests in the region. In 1961, the *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (OAS) emerged as a paramilitary group by General Raoul Salan in response to the passing of a referendum in France for the self-determination of Algeria. Salan and his men terrorized people threatening the existence of French Algeria at home and abroad with targets ranging from Charles de Gaulle to a killing spree of cleaning ladies, attorneys, and intellectuals. Less than four month before the conclusion of the war on March 15 1962, Feraoun was assassinated along with two other non-European and three European colleagues outside of the *Centre Sociale* where they all worked in El-Biar. One of Feraoun's journal entries resonates with the result of the failed project of the *Centres Sociaux*. "...after a century' of 'waste and errors' it was ironic that France finally attempted to 'build a just and fraternal Franco-Muslim community'" (Feraoun in LeSueur 89). Seeing the irony in the larger project, Feraoun's death seems logical. He saw that no one believed in reconciliation or fraternity after the outbreak of the war, but worked toward it anyway.

Pieds-noirs and OAS Involvement (and Relationship With France)

Pied-noir culture developed separately from that of France. This should not be surprising considering the diversity of their community (from Spanish to Italians to Cypriots), the particularity of their economic concerns, and a different relationship to the

idea of preserving a cultural heritage in a land largely comprised of cultural and religious outsiders. Wealth was more unevenly distributed in Algeria with the gap between the *petit colon* and *grand colon* exceeding that between rich and poor in France. Between the poor colonizer and the Muslim population, however, there was not such a large distinction (Horne 56). The idea of cultural superiority helped reinforce the bond across the wide economic distribution of the colonial power. Eventually, it became clear to both the Franco-Algerians as well as the metropolitan French that the two cultures did not hold the same values or have the same relationship to the idea of French-Algeria. French Algerians held on to the ideas of reconciliation as well as violent insurgence (largely through the OAS) to maintain the existence of French Algeria long after it was a viable option in the minds of most metropolitan French and non-European Algerians (Shepard 142).

Throughout most of the history of French-Algeria, the European population was considered French and largely supported by metropolitan citizens. However, when the threat of large-scale immigration arose, politicians and the French media painted a very different picture of the *pied-noir* population. In fact, it was not until 1962 that the term “*pied-noir*” gained popularity over the term “Algerian” (it also became irrelevant). Prior to 1955, some sources say, it was a pejorative term used for native Algerians or French sailors with dirty feet (Shepard 193). In *The Invention of Decolonization*, Shepard describes the development of the French perspective with regard to the *pied-noir* community. During the mass exodus around the end of the war, the prevailing view was that these settlers were inherently different than the French of France and that they were

largely responsible for the worst atrocities of the war. They were painted as sexually deviant and the imminent threat of their relocation to France made people more outspoken against their arrival (193-205). Blame was placed with the *pieds-noirs* “*tapettes*” (a derogatory term for homosexual) (199) who lacked a hetero-normative family structure (according to the myths propagated by the media). It was not the colonial system that was at fault, but the particular iteration of it that developed in Algeria (Shepard 204-05). The discussion shifted when the threat of non-European immigrants became more and more salient. In the face of a Muslim threat, the *pieds-noirs* community looked less threatening. The deviant *pieds-noirs* found normalcy with the reunion of the families after the war. The men who had been left by their women and children during the war to become depraved and aggressive became good Frenchmen upon their return to their families. Now, it was the non-European Algerians who sought refuge in France after the war who were demonized. Despite their faith in France and the degree to which they may have collaborated with France during the war, they were relegated to refugee status and denied what was promised to them by the French in terms of what they might find for them in France. Most were denied access to France and subsequently murdered by the FLN for their collaboration with France (Shepard 228).

The Algerian Divorce From France and Other Possibilities

As the non-European majority became increasingly discontent with their unequal treatment by the French—in particular the European minority who refused to relinquish

their economic and cultural stranglehold on Algeria—perspectives on either side of the colonial/anti-colonial divide became increasingly polarized. As we have seen throughout this chapter, early twentieth-century attempts at legal reform were met largely with hostility, refusal, or blockades of all kinds constructed primarily by the right wing of the *pied-noir* community. In this atmosphere of resistance to reform, politicians (such as Cambon and Violette) and philosophers (such as Fanon and Sartre) predicted what was to come of French Algeria—an anti-colonial revolution that would lead to its bloody demise.

In this way, moderate positions of reform and attempts at coexistence became less and less realistic. The rhetoric of brotherhood between Europeans and non-Europeans became replaced with condemnation and acts of unthinkable violence and terror on all sides. As Amrouche explained, “divorce” does not adequately convey the project of decolonization since it suggests that France at some point did, in fact, lay legitimate claim over Algeria. In fact, France violated Algeria (and its inhabitants) and continued to do so long after the war. They raped and pillaged their way through Algeria from the moment they landed on Algerian soil until Algeria broke free from French colonialism. At that point, the French found that their hands were tied in terms of peacefully leaving Algeria when OAS militants declared war against anti-colonial French and Algerians through acts of unspeakable violence. Even after 1962, France did not follow through on promises made to protect and compensate French soldiers, *pieds-noirs*, or non-European *harkis* and refugees arriving in France. Likewise, the FLN violated Algeria in a number of ways in order to achieve independence. The FLN coerced (often violently) many of the smaller

political factions into joining them as they sought to eliminate the colonial presence. Throughout the war, they often murdered innocent civilians (Europeans and indigenous alike) in order to achieve their ends.

In this chapter, I have shown that in the case of Algerian independence, positions of moderation and nuance became increasingly foreclosed by the violent colonial/anti-colonial binary. Over the next three chapters, the bulk of my investigation will involve perspectives that resist violence in favor of negotiation or peaceful forms of resistance. Although all of the figures I follow have relationships with both France and the indigenous populations of Algeria, the trajectory of my work will move from most closely-aligned with Europe and peaceful coexistence in Camus, Derrida, and Feraoun to most closely-aligned with anti-colonialism and a total break from France in the work of Kateb Yacine in Chapter Three and Chapter Four's analysis of the role of women in the revolution. By looking at the civil sphere through the language of family in literature, journals, letters, and the private lives of writers in liminal positions such as Albert Camus, Mouloud Feraoun, Kateb Yacine, Jacques Derrida, and Assia Djebar, I would like to disrupt the colonial/anti-colonial binary to make room for a non-violent space for civil negotiation and coexistence that existed (as we have seen throughout this chapter), but did not fully materialize into a viable political project during this period.

In the next chapter, "Algerian Sons and the Question of History," I will look at three prominent Algerian intellectuals with deep connections to France: Albert Camus, Jacques Derrida, and Mouloud Feraoun. All three believed that peaceful coexistence between populations was possible in Algeria and that

overthrowing the French was not a necessary step toward justice. Beginning with representations of relationships with their parents in their work, I will argue that their identities as sons intimately shape their political perspectives. Coming to terms with their fraught relationships with their parents helped them re-imagine their relationships with Algeria and all of the feelings of love, anger, short-sightedness, violence, and future potential that came with such an exercise.

CHAPTER TWO: ALGERIAN SONS AND THE QUESTION OF HISTORY

*I have always condemned terror. I must also condemn the blind terrorism that can be seen in the streets of Algiers, for example, which might strike my mother or family. I believe in justice, but will defend my mother before justice.*²⁶

--Albert Camus, *Le Monde*, December 13, 1957 (as reported by Dominique Birmann)

*People are now planting bombs in the tramways of Algiers. My mother might be on one of those tramways. If that is justice, then I prefer my mother.*²⁷

--Albert Camus, *Stockholm*, December 13, 1957 (as reported by Carl Gustav Bjurström)

Albert Camus's infamous Nobel Prize press conference speech in Stockholm after he had “kept quiet for a year and eight months” (*Chronicles* 214) spread like wildfire among the French intellectual scene that had urged Camus to join their ranks to publicly support the decolonization of Algeria. Perhaps unintentionally fueling the flame of disdain levied against Camus was French journalist Dominique Birmann's provocative paraphrasing of Camus in *Le Monde* that implicitly aligns “blind terrorism” with “justice” and suggests that he will defend the safety of his family over his commitment to

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“J'ai toujours condamné la terreur. Je dois condamner aussi un terrorisme qui s'exerce aveuglément dans les rues d'Alger par exemple, et qui peut un jour frapper ma mère ou ma famille. Je crois à la justice, mais je défendrai ma mère avant la justice.”

27 “En ce moment on lance des bombes dans les tramways d'Alger. Ma mère peut se trouver dans un de ces tramways. Si c'est cela la justice, je préfère ma mère.”

defending human rights in Algeria. It seemed that Camus had become disillusioned with the value of the pursuit of justice and cared only for his family's safety. He chose his mother and, some argue²⁸, a colonial Algeria (consciously or otherwise) because the pursuit of justice for the non-European majority had proven violent and difficult. His silence, following this logic, reflects his lack of political engagement or, potentially, a dubious alignment with French colonialism.

In this chapter, I will take a different approach to Camus's infamous silence by describing it as an alternative to the violent, binarized political context of the war rather than a stand for or against colonialism. I will begin by reviewing the history of critical reception of the Stockholm speech and its transition from hostility to “brotherhood” in 1994. Then, I will read his unfinished semi-autobiographical novel, *The First Man*, alongside the work of another prominent French-Algerian intellectual, Jacques Derrida. Throughout much of the war, Derrida remained silent pursuing an education in France's top schools while his family remained in Algeria. In both cases, I will look to their relationships with their mothers and their intercultural positions between France and Algeria as starting points for their larger philosophical and ethical projects. They viewed their mothers (and Algeria) as essentially inaccessible to them and profoundly beloved. Ultimately, by spending most of his time in France, I will argue that Camus chose his

28 Most notably, Simone de Beauvoir, Gilles Martinet and “hundreds” more (see James D. Le Sueur *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* Chapter 4 “The Unbearable Solitude of Being: the Question of Albert Camus.”). Later, in 1970, Conor Cruise O'Brien set off a wave of Anglophone criticism in his autobiography of Camus titled *Camus*, suggesting he unconsciously shared the colonial perspective that he consciously rejected. Camus then became the target of postcolonial, orientalist critique triggered by Edward Said in his essay “Narrative, Geography, and Interpretation” (1990) and Emily Apter in “Out of Character: Camus's French Algerian Subjects” (1997).

“country” over his “home”--France over Algeria and his mother. His guilt over betraying his mother, however, drives him to recover some of his family's history by finding his father's grave in France.

In the second half of the chapter, I will pursue Camus's account of the father in more detail adding the perspective of Mouloud Feraoun—a French-educated Kabyle activist and author who sought a peaceful end to the violence of decolonization in his writing and through his work with the Social Centers in Algeria. In their written work, Camus, Derrida, and Feraoun attempted to reconcile their pasts with their family histories and the history of their nations (France and Algeria). Camus largely ignored his father and history in describing his “first man” who develops out of the absence of history he sees in his mother and in the poor in Algeria. Derrida, too, describes a renunciation of his past and his family's past. Ultimately, only Feraoun comes to terms with a past that includes a variety of competing perspectives—including his family life, French colonialism, indigenous history, and literature. Rather than idealize or renounce the past, he conceives of it as an integral component of the present with a vital role in composing the future for all Algerians.

Camus and Derrida: France's Algerian Sons

As early as Camus's first self-imposed proclamation of silence in 1956, his political engagement had been a highly-contested subject. Reading Camus's silence through the figure of his mother, helps to shed light on his perspective during the French-

Algerian War and connects him with Derrida—another silent, marginalized Algerian with strong ties to France. Despite the infrequency of their critical comparisons, Derrida, David Carroll argues in 2006, takes a political position most closely related to that of Camus hidden within the “Curriculum Vitae” accompanying “Circumfession” in *Jacques Derrida*--one of the only places where he mentions his position in favor of peaceful cohabitation in Algeria (“Remains” 811). Drawing from Derrida's 1961 letter to Pierre Nora, Edward Baring argues that the silences of both Camus and Derrida developed out of their complicated positions as French-Algerian liberal intellectuals in “Liberalism and the Algerian War” (2010). Alongside their respective silences, both Derrida and Camus put pressure on their mothers from France to leave Algeria when coexistence seemed an impossible feat while they watched their homeland disintegrate during the French-Algerian War.

Looking at the ways that Camus and Derrida describe their mothers and their relationships with them in two heavily autobiographical texts, Camus's unfinished novel, *The First Man*, and Derrida's “Circumfession” helps to make sense of their respective silences on the subject of Algerian independence during the war with France. Their difficulties in enabling these women to speak for themselves through their texts result in simultaneous localization and idealization—discussing their mothers as both women with particular life experiences and idealized images of womanhood. This approach sheds light on the ambivalence of their positions on Algerian decolonization, but fails to do justice to the actual voices of these women or the disenfranchised populations of Algeria.

A Return to the Stockholm Speech

Much of the early critical scholarship surrounding Camus's infamous Stockholm speech situated Camus in favor of “justice” for his family over “justice” for the non-European populations of Algeria. Part of what is at stake in these reactions is the entanglement of the private sphere of the family with the public sphere of such a politically-engaged intellectual. Some found it appalling to think that Camus might not align with the French left on the Algerian question in 1956 and 1957 when so many French intellectuals were overtly supporting the FLN and Algerian nationalists. They read his silence as a retreat to his family and a refusal to take a political stand. Many notable French proponents of Algerian independence such as Simone de Beauvoir and French journalist Gilles Martinet used the appearance of his speech in *Le Monde* as an opportunity to publicly condemn Camus's refusal to support the FLN. Beauvoir accused Camus of intellectual fraudulence in upholding an idealized form of “justice” without accepting the possibility of using violent means to achieve it:

...He declared, “I love justice; but I will fight for my mother before Justice,” which amounted to saying that he was on the side of the *pièdes noirs*. The fraud lay in the fact that he posed at the same time as a man above the battle, thus providing a warning for those who wanted to reconcile this war and its methods with bourgeois humanism. (Beauvoir 105-06)

Beauvoir specifically mentions Camus's reference to his mother in the speech as the foundation for her critique—despite her sloppy paraphrasing. For Beauvoir, there is no place for “bourgeois humanism” like Camus's pacifistic idealism in times of war when bombs must be thrown. On the other hand, Algerian writers such as the Kabyle, Kateb

Yacine, and French-Spanish-Algerian poet Jean Sénac voiced their frustrations regarding his position a bit more delicately by writing him letters—appealing to him privately as a fellow Algerian. As an Algerian Sénac also hoped that it was possible for the public and the private to align—justice and his mother could both be protected beyond terroristic means: “But already the young surround me and like me. Others will be born who will know me. My victory is not of this world. My world is combat and fraternity. I will try to defend my mother and justice together” (Sénac in LeSueur 128). Sénac is willing to sacrifice himself for upholding his ideals to benefit him in a place “not of this world.” He evokes “fraternity” with those who fight alongside him because it drives his actions—along with “combat.” By fighting for what he feels is right, he hopes to be able to protect both his ideals and his family. Unlike Beauvoir's placement of Camus on the side of the *pieds noirs*, Sénac reads Camus's speech as pessimistically giving up on achieving justice in Algeria. Sénac still hopes that solidarity in Algeria can overcome colonialism and uphold justice.

After years of fighting for justice nonviolently in Algeria and achieving practically nothing, Camus had become disillusioned with banding together with his Algerian brothers who had turned increasingly toward the use of violence against civilians to achieve their goals. His refusal to participate in anti-war projects of 1955 supporting Algerian independence such as the *Comité d'Action* in France and the *Centres Sociaux* in Algeria²⁹ frustrated his French and Algerian comrades in light of his personal engagement with the pursuit of justice for Algeria. Camus had been expelled from the

29 For more on the *Comité d'Action* or the *Centres Sociaux*, see Chapter One.

French Communist Party (PCF) in 1937 for his sympathy for Arab nationalist Messali Hadj. The party had been closely-aligned with Hadj's *Etoile Nord-Africaine* until he was arrested and the ENA was banned. When Camus criticized the party for being too sympathetic to colonialism in Algeria, he was expelled. Subsequently, in a series of articles for *Alger Républicain* in 1939, he blamed French colonialism for the recent famine and sustained poverty in Kabylia and was the first *pied-noir* expelled from Algeria for taking up the non-European Algerian cause. Further, leading into the war, Camus had become disillusioned with the limited results achieved by his interventions on behalf of death penalty cases for Algerian nationalists through his participation in the *Comité pour l'Amnestie aux Condamnés d'Outre-Mer* and the lack of attention by the public to articles he had written for *L'Express*, *Communauté algérienne* and public speeches.³⁰ By 1955 he had made many attempts at political and social interventions in Algeria³¹ and the results were expulsion from his party, his homeland, his intellectual circles, and threats on his life and family.

Later scholarship mostly ignores Camus's commitment to his mother over justice in Algeria to focus on his position against using terrorism as a means to achieve justice. The spirit of Camus criticism shifted significantly in the wake of publishing the manuscript of his final novel, *Le Premier homme*, found in 1960 among the wreckage of his fatal car accident. His daughter, Catherine, justified her reluctance to release the manuscript to public eyes until 1994 as a result of her father's unpopular refusal to take a

30 For a more detailed account, see Le Sueur.

31 Mangesh Kulkarni cites these interventions as sufficient evidence that Camus “strove to redress the wrongs done to the [Arabs] and to put them on an equal footing [with the *pieds-noirs*]” in “The Ambiguous Fate of a *Pied-Noir*: Albert Camus and Colonialism” (1997).

political position consistent with the French left or the Algerian nationals, “At the time of his death he was very much isolated and subject to attacks on all sides designed to destroy the man and the artist so that his ideas would have no impact” (*First Man* vi). She describes a man whose work was criticized and ultimately ignored for decades as a result of the unpopularity of his political position at a time when he was expected to take a stand to defend anti-colonial “justice” by the politicized French left. By the 1990s she had hoped that the tide had shifted sufficiently that “readers will come to it in a spirit of brotherhood” (*First Man* vii). The novel takes a more personal, autobiographical approach detailing some of Camus's formative experiences as a poverty-stricken *petit colon* growing up in Algiers and being educated (against the odds) in the French system. The reception of the manuscript brought a renewed interest in Camus's complicated ethics, his position toward the negative consequences of decolonization (that resonated with the violent reality of decolonization projects in the 90s), and was seen as a relief from political correctness by reviewers such as Donald Schier: “Looking back, I think that Albert Camus's seriousness and moral intensity were somewhat anachronistic in 1960; today they seem vestiges of a more heroic world now shriveled into political correctness” (lxviii). By the 90s, intellectuals were no longer expected to take such a clear moral position. “Political correctness” diluted morality in the 90s as did the recognition that these positions are never black and white. In other words, Camus's words finally found a popular critical context beyond the traditional colonial/anti-colonial dichotomy--over forty years too late for him to personally take part in the discussion.

In the spirit of righting misconceptions about Camus's position, the French-

educated Swedish translator, Carl Gustav Bjurström who had attended the original speech, remembered a different phrase that made Camus's position less troubling following the occasion of the publication of Folio's *Discours de Suède* in 1997. The Bjurström recollection reflects the general spirit of the critical reconsideration of Camus's position and suggested that Camus did not abandon the pursuit of justice altogether, but rather disagreed with the use of terrorism to achieve it: “Si ma mémoire est bonne, il a dit: 'En ce moment on lance des bombes dans les tramways. Si c'est cela la justice, je préfère ma mère'” (“Rencontre”). With this phrasing, Camus called attention to the very real, very personal casualties that arise from implementing such techniques as planting bombs in tramways. By naming his mother as a potential victim, he chose a figure that would resonate on a personal and more generalizable level with his audience and with himself. Any woman on the tram could be someone's mother and her death would be a tragedy to her son regardless of which side he was on. He refused to support a form of justice that incurs excessive civilian casualties rather than giving up on justice itself. This sounds very different than Birman's account in *Le Monde*. Here, “justice” becomes a catch-phrase used by politicians to justify their terroristic actions. Within this relativized context of justice, Camus chose to side with an alternative less easily co-opted by politics and ideological relativism—his mother.

Retrospectively, Bjurström revealed a quotation more consistent with Camus's views on justice and terrorism in his philosophical work than Birman's report allows. In this way, he turned the debate into an honest mistake by journalists and critics rather than a rejection of the pursuit of justice by Camus in Algeria. The new transcription saved

Camus from excessive sentimentality and positioned the example of his mother as part of a larger philosophical argument on relativism and the perversion of justice:

C'est vrai qu'il est 'sentimental' de dire qu'on préfère sa mère à la justice. En tant qu'écrivain, l'expression de sa position était beaucoup plus nette: que ce soit pour une bonne cause ou pour une mauvaise, le terrorisme reste le terrorisme. Lancer des bombes au milieu de gens dont le seul tort est d'exister est inadmissible. Cela dit, je crois que, sur le coup, cette phrase est passée inaperçue dans le mouvement du débat. Et personne n'a alors prévu l'exploitation qu'on allait en faire. En France, c'était différent: l'affaire d'Algérie avait déjà provoqué un ressentiment contre Camus, à qui on reprochait une attitude très timorée. Ainsi retranscrit, ses propos ont fait l'effet d'une bombe. ("Rencontre")

Bjurström described this revelation as having “the effect of a bomb” on readers of the article in *Le Monde* who had previously condemned Camus. Scholars of Camus largely accepted this new transcription as a way to lessen the blow of the Stockholm speech—diminishing the significance of Camus's use of his mother as an example as well. Most recently, in Arthur Goldhammer's new English translation of Camus's *Algerian Chronicles* (2013), Alice Kaplan describes the 1957 Stockholm press conference as a “tragicomedy of misquotation” (18) in her preface. She cites Bjurström's new transcription as the original version and the article in *Le Monde* as “a formula that makes Camus sound even more like a sentimental egoist” (18). In order to save Camus from “sentimental ego[ism],” Kaplan and other Camus scholars subscribe to Bjurström's transcription which presents Camus's position more clearly and logically. His mother stands in for any innocent bystander on the tram who is killed by the bombs of a terrorist who says he acts in the name of a twisted form of justice. As an opponent of using violence to achieve justice, he was not just a silly sentimentalist who cared more about

his mommy than adhering to his convictions.

Olivier Todd revealed yet another twist in the debacle in his autobiography of Camus in *Albert Camus: Une vie* (1996). Apparently, measures had been taken at *Le Monde* to record and accurately quote Camus's speech:

At the office of *Le Monde*, the newspaper's director, Hubert Beuve-Méry, asked his reporter Birmann to confirm that Camus had actually said, word for word, what he was quoted as saying, before the article was printed. Birmann listened to a tape recording he had made of the meeting and confirmed the quote, but he has since lost the recording, which would have been the only objective proof. Once the quote was confirmed, Beuve-Méry said, "I was totally sure that Camus would say some fucking fool thing." (700)

It seems that the quotation had not been carelessly paraphrased by Birmann. He had meticulously verified the article for his editor using a recording he had made of the speech before his article had hit the newsstands. Still, the newspaper director expected that Camus would say "some fucking fool thing" which he found in Birmann's transcript. Unfortunately, the original was lost, so neither transcript can be verified retrospectively.

However, evidence of the offhandedness of the example of his mother and the inaccuracy of Birmann's reporting can be seen in Camus's corrective letter to *Le Monde* three days after the article was published on December 17. Camus focused his attention on Birmann's misquotation of his statement regarding the French government's handling of Algeria in general rather than the reference to his mother, "The statements attributed to me are perfectly correct except for one, which I ask your permission to clarify. I did not say that our governments had committed only minor faults in dealing with the Algerian problem. I believe the opposite, in fact" (*Chronicles* 215). He actually ignores the statement regarding his mother—suggesting that Birmann's original quotation of it was

more or less correct. If not correct, than of negligible significance to what he was trying to express that day.

After the incident in Stockholm, Camus once again retreated into relative silence on the Algerian War until he published his “last warning that a writer devoted for the last twenty years to the service of Algeria can formulate” in his 1958 *Algerian Chronicles* (212). According to David Carroll in “Camus's Algeria: Birthrights, Colonial Injustice, and the Fiction of a French-Algerian People,” Camus saw his silence as a last resort of claiming a position outside of the violent duality of the conflict, “the threat of his silence and his actual silence seemed to Camus the only political weapons he had left in his own war against colonial injustice, the Algerian war, and the arguments and tactics of both sides in the struggle” (538). Camus felt that anything he said or did could be taken poorly by either side, so the only way he could avoid misinterpretation was to remain silent. He did not anticipate that his silence could also be read in a variety of ways—from supporting colonialism to cowardice to disinterest.

Both silence and his relationship with his mother play significant roles in Camus's ethics. Regardless of his intention or inattention in his public invocation of his mother, she holds a significant position in the Stockholm speech as well as in his unfinished manuscript, *The First Man*. The way his protagonist, Jacques Cormery describes her inaccessibility contributes to a reading of Camus's silence during the war. Edward J. Hughes claims Jacques mother achieves “emblematic status...in an ethically superior position to history” (180). The figure of the mother takes precedence over the lessons or particular events of history in this novel. If effect, Daniel Just considers this attachment

to idealism over historical reality a “compromised political stance” in “Literature and Ethics: History, Memory, and Cultural Identity in Albert Camus's *Le Premier Homme*,” (2010). His work raises ethical questions, but his political position apparently makes these questions less important according to this reading: “what has become problematic about Camus to the point of rendering any ethical re-evaluation of his work ineffective and reactionary is his compromised political stance on the war in Algeria.” In the following section, I will read Camus's ethics and politics as intimately tied to his relationship with his mother and not wholly inconsistent with one another. His political stance was not so much “compromised” as inconsistent with a binary view of political participation popular after World War II. He did not use his private life to shield himself from his public life, but displayed the inextricability of the two spheres in his formation as a private and public man. Likewise, Derrida's mother haunts his autobiographical essay, “Circumfession,” (1991) in the footnotes as he discusses the impact of her life and death upon him while acting as a complement to his philosophical contributions outlined by Geoffrey Bennington in the upper portion of the page. Their relationships with their mothers affect their relationships with and their understandings of the world around them. Foreclosures in their mothers' perspectives impel them to construct new languages and ways of relating with these important women and the rest of the world.

Writing The Pain of The Mother

The figure of the mother pervades his writing well beyond the Stockholm speech.

Camus began writing about the significance of his relationship with his mother from his early notebooks in his twenties to his final manuscript, *The First Man*. I will focus my analysis on his final semi-autobiographical novel, *The First Man* since it was written after the Stockholm speech, the figure of the mother is central to the narrative, and Camus comments on this relationship in a way that appears largely unedited in the accompanying notes—making it particularly difficult to distinguish between autobiography and fiction. Camus ascribes his/Jacques's mother a central role in the narrative despite her silent inaccessibility. Since she is poor, uneducated, and illiterate, he describes her as living in a perpetual present with only an abstract notion of France—similar to the way Camus describes the indigenous poor of Algeria. Derrida, too, describes the inaccessibility of his mother who plays an equally central role in his text and in his life. Unlike Camus, Derrida recognizes his impulse to ventriloquize the figure of his mother for his own benefit. Both Derrida and Camus idealize and ventriloquize their mothers in ways that paralleled their relationships with Algeria and France. In particular, I will argue that Camus's project developed directly out of this tension between abstraction and a deep personal connection he felt with his mother despite his inability to understand her.

Robert Royal describes Camus's mother in stark contrast with her intellectual son as “a kind of ideal figure of rugged human love, a representative of the silent people who accept life and death with calm equanimity” (63). Camus's mother did not share his intellectual endeavors, so he related to her in a more emotional, “rugged” way. Their formative experiences together persisted throughout his life and work that Camus described as not always intellectually intelligible, “The bizarre feeling that the son has for

his mother constitutes *his whole sensibility*. The manifestations of that sensibility in the most diverse fields is adequately explained by hidden memory, material from his youth (a glue that sticks to the soul)” (Camus in Royal, “The Other Camus”). Her effect on him is “material” despite its hiddenness in terms of memory. This relationship shaped his dealings with the world in a fundamental way through “constitut[ing] his whole sensibility”—suggesting, also, that his sensibility runs deeper than his intellect.

The First Man begins with an intercession from Camus's mother (a slippage into the explicitly autobiographical) in the place of an epigraph or dedication that sets the stage for the significance of his mother in the text and in his work: “Intercessor: Widow Camus To you who will never be able to read this book” (*First Man* 3). Camus uses the name “Widow Camus,” the only name his mother, Catherine, had learned to sign on official documents (*First Man* 206). Despite the text's inaccessibility to her as a result of her illiteracy, her official presence interrupts the text and dedicates it to those who share this incapacity with her. She directs the text from a position of distance through her effect on Camus's life, but persists in her significance. Similarly, it is for her sake that he sets out on his search for his father's remains in France. She will never read nor visit France, but Camus's exploration of himself throughout the text comes as the result of her presence in his very sensibility. Calling her by her official name likewise sets the stage for her distance from the text and from Camus's intellectual life. He calls her by a name that is forced upon her through marriage and the world of legal documents. Camus interpellates her with a name that she learned to write as an adult for official documents that she could not read while naming her generically as “widow”—lacking a husband, but

carrying his name.

The notes found accompanying the manuscript also reveal that the novel would have ended with a “confession to his mother to conclude.” Camus's mother frames the narrative as both an intercessor and a confessor. Her presence interrupts the narrative, but also comprises the structural reason for its incarnation as a confession. As in the prefatory intercession, Camus recognizes that she does not understand him, but he asks her forgiveness for the mistakes of his past—even those he has not committed against her:

You do not understand me, and yet you are the only one who can forgive me. Plenty of people offer to do it. Many also shout in all sorts of ways that I am guilty, and I am not guilty when they tell me I am. Others have the right to say it to me, and I know they are right and that I should seek their forgiveness. But one asks forgiveness of those one knows can forgive. Just that, to forgive, and not to ask you to deserve forgiveness, to wait. [But] just to talk to them, to tell them everything and receive their forgiveness. The men and women of whom I could ask it, I know that somewhere in their hearts, despite their good intentions, they neither can nor do they know how to forgive. One person alone could have forgiven me, but I was never guilty toward him and I gave him my heart entire, and yet I could have gone to him, I often do so in silence, but he is dead and I am alone. You alone can do it, but you do not understand me and cannot read me. And I am speaking to you, I am writing to you, to you alone, and when it is finished, I will ask forgiveness without further explanation and you will smile on me... (318)

Camus has written this text to his mother even though she is illiterate in order to free himself from guilt from all of the wrongs he has committed in his life. He puts her into the position of his confessor because he knows she will truly forgive him no matter how heinous the crime. Others “neither can nor do they know how to forgive.” His father could have given him the forgiveness he seeks, but he died when he was too young to remember him. The only person left to grant him this is his mother and she cannot

understand him because of her deafness as well as her illiteracy.

Camus's emotional commitment to his mother is both touching and troubling in this context. He upholds his mother as the greatest authority in his life—placing her on a pedestal where he can always admire her. However, her failure to understand what she is actually forgiving or presiding over is problematic. Camus makes his mother into an empty signifier—giving him *carte blanche* to commit crimes more heinous than she can imagine “without further explanation.” Her influence and judgment infects his life--without her, he would not have a life--but she fails to materialize fully as a distinct subject apart from her sensibility and her signature which Camus co-opts for himself from the official documents she must sign without understanding.

Many years later, Jacques Derrida similarly structured his personal confession, “Circumfession” (1991), around a confession to his mother (three years before Camus's manuscript was published). Derrida was also raised in Algeria to parents who identified as European. Unlike Camus, Derrida was Jewish, grew up knowing his father, and came from a fairly wealthy family. He likewise struggled with his confession and discussed his mother in terms of both intimacy and inaccessibility. However, rather than their formative experiences, Derrida detailed the significance of dealing with her death in his work. He also recognized the limits of his perceptions of her and the self-serving role of his confession in a way that differs from Camus:

I confess my mother, one always confesses the other, I confess (myself) means I confess my mother means I own up to making my mother own up, I make her speak in me, before me, whence all the questions at her bedside as though I were hoping to hear from her mouth the revelation of the sin at last.. (147-48).

In constructing this confession, Derrida gave words to his mother in a way that resonates with Camus's call to his mother as an intercessor and confessor to his novel. Derrida's mother not only pervades his text, but pervades his life. His words give her life while she sits at her bedside and dies. Here, too, Derrida has a different relationship to language than his mother. His mother cannot read his confession because she is deathly ill before he begins to write it, but she lives in him and through the words of his confession. In his confession, he hopes to hear her confession as well. Through his admission of guilt, he also seeks forgiveness from his voiceless mother. Both Camus and Derrida ask forgiveness from women who cannot give them what they need for injustices they did not commit against them. However, through giving them words that they never possessed in the first place, they resurrect them and find the comfort they seek. Their mothers hold a position of primacy and supremacy in their texts and in their lives. The question lies in whether or not they do justice to their absent, inaccessible mothers or co-opt their voices for their personal fulfillment.

More explicitly than Camus, Derrida admits to falsely giving his mother words. He hopes to hear his sins from his mother's lips, but part of the sin lies in this very ventriloquism. Derrida recognizes the falseness of this resurrection and adds this to his list of sins. However, in order to make his confession, he must finally acknowledge her presence in him--even after her death:

...From what wound is it waiting for me, me who, among other remorse with respect to my mother, feel really guilty for publishing her end, in exhibiting her last breaths and, still worse, for purposes that some might judge to be literary, at risk of adding a dubious exercise to the "writer and his mother" series, subseries "the mother's death," and what is there to be done, would I

not feel as guilty, and would I not in truth *be* as guilty if I wrote here about myself without retaining the least trace of her, letting her die in the depth of another time... (36-37)

By returning, in his confession, to the hour of her death, he is guilty of repeating a common literary trope, thus making her passing less singular. The public quality of his confessions makes him feel like he is betraying the private significance of their relationship. Her death is general in terms of a significant life event that most people experience, but Derrida also calls attention to its singularity of significance to the person who experiences it. Derrida's mother can neither know the effect her death has on him nor hear his confession, but her presence is necessary for him to proceed. Derrida acknowledges the falsity of co-opting her this way in a way that Camus does not admit.

Camus places his mother at the end of his narrative to bear witness and acknowledge his confession, but she does not understand it and he does not admit its falsity: "To conclude, he asks his mother's forgiveness—Why you've been a good son— But it is because of all the rest she cannot know or even imagine []³² that she is the only one who can forgive" ("Notes and Sketches" 312). This confession is for Camus, not for the benefit of his mother. She does not understand his guilt and cannot understand his confession because he withholds part of himself in front of her. He understands their relationship as more visceral and outside of her intellectual capacity to understand: "And what he wanted most in the world, which was for his mother to read everything that was his life and his being, that was impossible. His love, his only love, would be forever speechless" ("Notes and Sketches" 300). She will never understand "his life, his being"

32 Unintelligible word in the manuscript

because a large part of it is outside of her intellectual capacity and inaccessible to her—Camus wants her to “read” him despite her illiteracy. She wants her to do something that lies outside of her capacity.

Derrida's mother also speaks a different language than his own, but her speech lives on through him. This difference is particularly salient after she has had her stroke. Her capacity for speech and comprehension has changed drastically with her illness: “Consign them here, but I wonder, confide to the bottom of this book what were my mother's more or less intelligible sentences, still alive at the moment I am writing this, but already incapable of memory, in any case of the memory of my name, a name become for her at the very least unpronounceable...” (22). Not only has her comprehension level changed, her memory has also been affected by her illness. Similar to Camus, he relates the desire to reflect on memory with his mother as a result of her dramatically different relationship to it. However, her presence does not disrupt the text the same way as Camus's mother, the intercessor. Rather, he relegates the narrative he constructs out of his experiences related to his mother's death to the bottom half of the page—as just a footnote to Geoffrey Bennington's summary of his philosophical career. He “confides” these disruptions of language and life to the bottom of the page—an absent presence that underlies the narrative of his philosophical development, but is not mentioned explicitly as part of the primary narrative. This is a secret being “confide[d],” but not in the standard written language of the text. It is outside of the time and space of the text, but present, like a footnote, in the development of Derrida's philosophy.

Similar to Camus's narrative, Derrida's mother comprises the beginning and end

of this text about his life. She is the absent presence that underscores his life—a spectral trace that defies language in its incapacity for it:

As if I loved only your memory and confession of me but who would I be, me, if I did not begin and end by loving you in my private language deprived of you, that very one, the untranslatable one, in which the joke leaves us floored, winners and losers like the day on which a premeditation of love had dictated to me for immortality, no, for posterity, no, for the truth that you are, *et lex tua veritas, et veritas tu*, “don't forget that I will have loved you”... (41)

“Truth” and “law” originate in Derrida's mother prior to language and history “*et lex tua veritas, et veritas tu*, “...And thy law is the truth, and the truth is you.” “don't forget that I will have loved you.” Latin is not her language, but he uses it, in its foreignness and historical resonance, to describe “truth” and “law” in terms of his mother as outside of language and time. He plays with temporality in his use of the future perfect to describe his love, “Don't forget that I will have loved you.” Even though she cannot understand him on her deathbed, he demands that she not forget that he will have loved her before anything else in the future comes to pass in a language that they once used to share jokes that he alone possesses now. This is not an indefinite promise to love her in the future that would come from use of the future tense (e.g. I will love you). The future perfect describes the action as definitely coming to pass as a pre-condition of something more to follow. Derrida's mother is the absent-presence of his life and his life's work that he comes to realize as she lay dying. He describes the pain of his mother's imminent passing as having “‘a pain in my mother,' as though she were speaking *for* me, both in my direction and in my place...” (23). The linguistically unintelligible silence brought on by her stroke speaks in an important way for Derrida. The voice he gives her in his text also

gives himself an alternative voice outside of language—"both in my direction and in my place." This absent-present voice of his mother calls out to him, but also speaks for him. This time, he allows her to speak for him. Her presence does more than simply influence his work from the bottom of the page, but comprises a central component of his voice. He speaks to her on her death bed in a one-sided confession that recalls a shared time with a shared language that is no longer accessible to her.

Camus, too, plays with temporality with regard to his mother. However, he discusses his mother's sense of time as different from his own as a function of her poverty and her illiteracy. Camus's mother lives in a kind of perpetual present as a result of her socio-economic condition. Memory and history do not exist for the poor in the same way as they do for the rich:

She said yes, maybe it was no; she had to reach back in time through a clouded memory, nothing was certain. To begin with, poor people's memory is less nourished than that of the rich; it has fewer landmarks in space because they seldom leave the place where they live, and fewer reference points in time throughout lives that are gray and featureless. Of course this is the memory of the heart that they say is the surest kind, but the heart wears out with sorrow and labor, it forgets sooner under the weight of fatigue. Remembrance of things past is just for the rich. For the poor it only marks the faint traces on the path to death. And besides, in order to bear up well one must not remember too much, but rather stick close to the passing day, hour by hour, as his mother did, somewhat by necessity no doubt, since that childhood illness...since that childhood illness had left her deaf and speaking with difficulty, then prevented her from learning what is taught to even the most wretched, so her mute resignation was forced on her, but it was also the only way she had found to face up to her life, and what else could she have done, who in her place could have found another way? (*First Man* 80)

Camus's mother's atemporal existence has to do with her stasis and her illiteracy. Staying in the same place makes it less necessary for her to organize the events of her life,

according to Camus. In addition to this condition of the poor, she has the added misfortune of being deaf. This makes it more difficult to learn and speak for herself. Camus adopts the “mute resignation” that was forced upon her by her childhood illness in his attitude toward the war and his “year and 8 months of silence.” Living from moment to moment rather than within a temporal trajectory was her way to “face up to her life.” This attitude might also begin to account for Camus's solution for Algeria that many criticized as being out of touch with his times. Living from moment to moment in silent resignation was a way to ignore the the painful conflict happening in his homeland, Algeria. But, according to Daniel Just, it was also his way “not to invigorate the infinite circle of violence” with his “increasingly outdated” ideals with regard to the members of the *Comité d'Action* by the end of the 1950's (75).

Derrida's mother's imminent death writes itself on his body as he writes about it to complement the trajectory of his philosophical work. He imposes a written language upon it in order to make it communicable to others. However, as he points out, this attempt at communicability also takes away from the its singularity even as it leaves an invisible, painful trace on him alone that he compares to health conditions in his past:

...With this facial paralysis or Lyme's disease which, one now without leaving any visible trace, will have changed my face from the inside, for henceforth I have changed faces and my mother is not for nothing in this, not the eternal visage of my young mother but hers today, especially near the lips, that's the event, unpredictable both for G. and for me, in the writing of a circumfession for the death agony of my mother, not readable here but for the first event to write itself right on my body, the exemplary counterscar that we have to learn to read without seeing...(120)

Physical ailments do not always leave a visible trace, but the stress leaves its mark

psychologically or by weakening the body of the person. Derrida urges his readers to “learn to read without seeing” these non-physical, non-linguistic markers that communicate pain or distress. His mother's “death agony” is “the exemplary counterscar” that marks his body. It is not a scar left on his body by a physical injury, but a “counterscar” left by the effect of his mother's pain on his body. He does not appropriate her scars, but calls attention to a scar that aligns and differs from her own pain. He has left his mark on her body in birth, now she leaves a mark on his body in death. This mark of death is very different than that of the circumcision he describes throughout the text. Now he has the emotions and language to describe the trauma as well as the ability to intellectualize the experience. Derrida does not paint a wholly idealized portrait of his dying mother, but inscribes her pain--“especially near the lips”--of her old age, her temporal existence.

Derrida describes the pain of his mother's imminent passing as having “a pain in my mother,’ as though she were speaking *for* me, both in my direction and in my place...” (23). The linguistically unintelligible silence brought on by her stroke speaks in an important way for Derrida. The voice he gives her in his text also gives himself an alternative voice outside of language—“both in my direction and in my place.” This absent-present voice of his mother calls out to him, but also speaks for him. Her presence does more than simply influence his work from the bottom of the page, but comprises a central component of his voice. Nevertheless, he still hides behind this image of his mother--regardless of how realistic it may be. She impossibly speaks *to* him and *for* him at this difficult time as she lies silently confined to her deathbed.

This silent, bodily communication resonates with Camus's relationship with his mother as well as his experience with Algeria. In a letter he wrote in 1955 to Aziz Kessous, an Algerian who also wanted to create an egalitarian, mixed community in Algeria, "Believe me when I tell you that Algeria is where I hurt at this moment, as others feel pain in their lungs. And since August 20, I have been on the edge of despair" (*Chronicles* 113). After the FLN assault on the European community in Phillippeville and the ensuing massacre of FLN fighters by the French, Camus was in pain with worry over the escalating situation in Algeria. As a man with tuberculosis, he knew firsthand the pain one can feel in the lungs. This pain he felt for Algeria was just as bodily and individual--a political, mass condition that he experienced as a bodily sensation. He appropriates this pain directly. There is a scar rather than a Derridean counterscar. He describes the pain of the struggle going on in his country in a very physical language that resembles the language he uses to describe and relate to his mother. However, in both the case of his mother and his homeland, his language falls short. His descriptions memorialize and objectify rather than rectify the damage and pain of either his mother or Algeria.

In this way, Camus's mother remains partly inaccessible to him. In part, it is her inaccessibility--related to the inaccessibility of the non-European Algerian population--that Camus loves about her. He owes his life to her and holds her in the utmost respect, but she is partly inaccessible to him. Thus, he can position her as diametrically opposed to his own perspective in order to orient his narrative. They are related by blood, but differ in almost every other way. As with the non-European Algerian population, they

share a homeland and a history, but differ in many other regards:

I want to write the story of a pair joined by the same blood and every kind of difference. She similar to the best this world has, and he quietly abominable. He thrown into all the follies of our time; she passing through the same history as if it were that of any time. She silent most of the time, with only a few words at her disposal to express herself; he constantly talking and unable to find in thousands of words what she could say with a single one of her silences...Mother and son. ("Notes and Sketches" 300)

In his notes for *The First Man*, Camus writes that the tension between their blood relation and their multitude of differences—her proximity and distance—creates the structure for the narrative. His mother and his relationship to her is at the heart of his novel.

Throughout the story, he returns again and again to her--particularly her relationship to history and the differences in their relationships to language. He is thrown into history and language in a way that she never was and seeks to understand these differences throughout the novel. However, his understanding is limited because his words fail to account fully for her silences. For Camus, silences say more than words. In this way, his public silence after many attempts at finding the right words in articles and speeches may be inspired by the silences he fails to describe in his mother.

From an Ethics of the "Country" to an Ethics of the "Home"

Throughout the novel, Jacques oscillates between his mother's sensibility (silent, sensual, illiterate) and his intellectual development (legible, outspoken, self-conscious) in school. He sees and begins to understand the distance that exists between himself and his family just as he sees the distance between himself and his intellectual community. In this

process, he learns that he must form an attachment to a “country” that he only knows intellectually. Camus's young protagonist that resembles him in his youth learns in school that his “country” is France—a concept that his mother does not understand. She only feels an attachment to her home:

“*Maman*, what is our country?” he asked one day. She looked frightened as she did each time she did not understand. “I don’t know,” she said. “No.”

“It’s France.”

“Oh, yes.” And she seemed relieved. (*First Man* 208)

Jacques has learned in school that his country is France even though he experiences a sense of home with his family in Algeria. His mother does not understand this when he asks her because she has not been educated in the French system like he has. Her relationship to France is only an abstraction while her relationship to her “home” is a concrete reality. Much later, Jacques asks her to go to France with him when the war begins :

"You see," she said, "I'm old. I can't run anymore."

Now the blood was returning to her cheeks. In the distance could be heard the sirens of the ambulances, urgent, rapid. But she did not hear them. She breathed deeply, calmed herself a little more, and smiled at her son with her beautiful brave smile. Like all her people, she had grown up with danger, and danger might wring her heart but she would endure it as she did everything else. It was he who could not bear that pinched look of a dying person he had suddenly seen on her face.

"Come with me to France," he said to her, but she shook her head with resolute sorrow: "Oh no, it's cold over there. I'm too old now. I want to stay home." (76-77)

Jacques urges his mother to escape the impending danger of living in Algeria when he

comes back from France to visit his family, but she does not wish to leave. He does not understand that her “home” is more valuable to her than her “country.” She “had grown up with danger” in a way that Camus did not, so she does not personally fear the repercussions of staying in Algeria. In Stockholm, when Camus says that he fears the bombs that may injure his mother, we can see now that he fears the bombs more than she fears them.

Daniel Just argues that Camus's ethical project, in general, and in *Le Premier homme* in particular, “undermines specificity and concreteness” because it “does not interpret specific ethical propositions by showing their applicability in concrete situations” (86). However, I would argue that Camus's ethics develop out of a tension between a very concrete, personal relationship with his mother and Algeria and the abstraction introduced by his intellectual engagement with the French system. His perspective moves between one centered around his French “country” (generalizable, inaccessible, abstract, concerned with history, perpetrators of violence) and one centered around his Algerian “home” (personal, concrete, accessible, concerned with the present, minimizing violence). In the novel, it is this tension between a “home” and “country”-centered ethics that ultimately shapes and informs his work and makes it and his silence difficult to understand in the polarized political context of the French-Algerian War.

Through the tension of his relationship with his mother, Camus enacts the drama of his ethical project between “country” and “home”—two spaces that are not always complementary in his novel. This mirrors the accessibility and inaccessibility of his relationship with his mother. The decision is more complicated and personal than

choosing to maintain or resist French colonialism. Through the character of Jacques, Camus illustrates the guilt he feels for moving far away from his mother—for choosing his “country” before his “home.” By making this choice and imposing such a distance on their relationship, he no longer feels like a “good son” to his mother:

No, I am not a good son: a good son is one who stays put. I've traveled far and wide, I've betrayed her with trivialities, fame, a hundred women.

“But, you loved no one but her?”

“Ah! I've loved no one but her?” (“Notes and Sketches” 316)

In his notes to the novel, he explains that he feels this betrayal of his home through distance as a betrayal of her. In France, he cannot attend to his mother and love her at the same level of intimacy as if he had stayed by her side. This is not a betrayal of his love for her—he admits that he has loved “no one but her”—but a betrayal of the intimacy and proximity of their relationship. However, his curious usage of a question mark at the end of his response to the question his interlocutor poses indicates that his betrayal of distance may also be a betrayal of a form of love.

However, it is this time that he passes in France and his commitment to carrying out his mother's work that initiates his investigation into his own path. A compromise between “home” and “country” directs his ethical and intellectual projects. His search for his father's remains in France comes about as the result of a request of his mother. It is his devotion to her, not a commitment to a patrilineal family history or French patriarchal dominance that helps him begin to reconstruct his family history by visiting his father's

grave:

Jacques Cormery did not answer. Surely, too many had died, but, as to his father, he could not muster a filial devotion he did not feel. For all these years he had been living in France, he had promised himself to do what his mother, who stayed in Algeria, what she for such a long time had been asking him to do: visit the grave of his father that she herself had never seen. He thought this visit made no sense, first of all for himself, who had never known his father, who knew next to nothing of what he had been, and who loathed conventional gestures and behavior; and then for his mother, who never spoke of the dead man and could picture nothing of what he was going to see. But since his old mentor had retired to Saint-Brieuc and so he would have an opportunity to see him again, Cormery had made up his mind to go visit this dead stranger, and had even insisted on doing it before joining his old friend so that afterwards he would feel completely free. (*First Man* 24)

Jacques's relationship with his father's absence begins to form because of the bond his mother felt with him. He does not feel a filial devotion through a commitment to a family history. In part as a result of his mother's detachment from history, her husband's memory is not something she returns to frequently with Jacques. His mother hardly spoke of his father, so investigating his life or feeling loyal to his memory does not seem inherently important to him. He feels the same as he would toward the “many who had died,” but carries out an excavation of his family history at his mother's request even though he “loathed conventional gestures and behavior.” For him, the “sense” it makes to his mother than what he can understand, but he uses the opportunity to fulfill a wish for his mother and pay a visit to his old mentor—who he cares about more than his father as a result of his aversion to convention. Jacques reevaluates his relationship with history at the request of his mother, who has no concern for history as such. Through his European education, he has developed a concern for history, but has neglected his family. By

honoring his mother's request to visit his father's grave, he must come to terms with his place in colonial history as well as his family's history. Even a woman who has no concern for history sees value in Jacques's engagement with this basic component of his family history. Throughout the novel, he attempts to come to terms with these two histories and two spheres of his life that often collide in his youth.

Both Derrida and Camus call attention to their mothers' influences on their lives and projects rather late in their careers. "Home" calls them away from the "country" where they have decided to escape danger. For both, a return to their mothers marks a return to their Algerian homeland and questions of silence and commitment. It is clear that their absent-presences' mark a formative component of their private lives and their public projects--not just as nostalgic sentimentalists, but as ethically-minded theorists and public figures. However, the complexity of their relationships with their mothers--whose perspectives remain outside of their reach despite their best attempts at understanding them--signals an unbridgeable gap in understanding that they both acknowledge. Derrida admits to raising his mother to a the status of a symbol while simultaneously preserving the singularity of their relationship and their common language. Camus, however, has more of a tendency to idealize this gap and objectify his mother as an indecipherable symbol on a pedestal who watches over him and forgives him for all of his sins he commits in the silence he inherits from her. Camus's silence speaks differently than his mother's. Ultimately, he struggles to protect his home, while not betraying his country--a struggle unfamiliar to his Algerian mother who stayed home while her son made history in France. In his notebooks from July 1956, Camus reveals the secret of his mother's

silence as well as the posthumous fate of his work: “Novel's end. Maman. What was her silence saying. What was this mute and smiling mouth screaming. We will be resurrected” (*Notebooks* 176).

The Fatherless Child, or the First Algerian Man

The idea of being cut off from history and a father's heritage is central to Camus's novel, *Le Premier homme*. Camus's Jacques does not feel an inherent attachment to his dead father, but pursues his connection with him as the result of his mother's deep love. Again, Jacques struggles between the abstract heritage of his father's remains in his “country,” France, versus the love he feels in the present for his mother at “home” in Algeria. Mouloud Feraoun likewise grapples with the question of a father's inheritance in his novel, *Poor Man's Son*, but the protagonist, Furoulou, cannot distance himself from his father. Instead, he defines himself in relation to him as the son of a poor man—appearing as prominently as the title. Both Camus and Feraoun use their experiences as sons to help them describe their positions in Algeria in the increasingly tumultuous context of the middle of the twentieth century. Unlike Camus, Feraoun accounts for his father as one of many components comprising his protagonist's heritage. To this, he adds indigenous history and colonial culture to develop a fuller picture of history from which to draw lessons for the future.

A key component in Jacques's development throughout the novel has to do with his relationship with his absent father. He did not know him growing up, his mother

never speaks of him, and he has no memory of him. However, he begins to think about him more after he arrives in France because he knows that his mother would like for him to visit his grave. At the outset, he thinks that he can suffice on his own without a father and his mentor echoes this for him, "You're right, Jacques," said Malan. "Go find one. You no longer need a father. You brought yourself up alone. Now you could love him as you know how to love. But..." he said, and he hesitated. "Come back to see me. I don't have much time left. And forgive me..." (*First Man* 36). He encourages Jacques to take the initiative with regard to finding a father figure. He has grown up without a father and as an adult, he no longer needs one in the same way that a boy needs a father. He also opens up the possibility of constructing a new relationship to his father without the weight of preconceived expectations about fathers and their lessons. His "but..." also suggests that he may not be able to do this very easily. He "could" love him, "but" maybe not. He is old enough to find support from others such as his mentor and his mother and love his father in a different kind of way as a result of his absence.

He describes himself as "the first man" walking through oblivion without his father's family heritage to guide him. He never experiences the formative moments of growing up with a father that most boys have:

...Wandering through the night of the years in the land of oblivion where each one is the first man, where he had to bring himself up, without a father, having never known those moments when a father would call his son, after waiting for him to reach the age of listening, to tell him the family's secret, or a sorrow of long ago, or the experience of his life, those moments when even the ridiculous and hateful Polonius all of a sudden becomes great when he is speaking to Laertes.. (*First Man* 195)

Regardless of the personal merit of the man, Camus places a certain kind of significance

in the relationship of a father to his son. A son learns lessons of manhood and the history of his family in a different way than he learns these things from other people. No matter how ridiculous Shakespeare makes Polonius throughout the play, his famous words to his son, Laertes, in Act I, Scene III of *Hamlet* contain sound, fatherly judgment. Through imparting his son with wisdom, he actually sounds more wise than he does throughout the rest of the play. Of particular importance to the speech and to Jacques's example of Polonius and Laertes is the line, "This above all: to thine ownself be true." Polonius empowers his son to stand up for himself and be true to what he believes. In the case of Camus/Jacques, they have had to discover this wisdom on their own without the benefit of having a father to guide them to it. Their fathers died for France, an abstract homeland that made their educations possible, but whose wisdom does not always coincide with the kind they are capable of getting from their families. They have always had to seek out support on their own because their mother was incapable of this kind of fatherly, educated wisdom. Camus and Jacques have never known this because their fathers died fighting for France. Now they are one of the first men, living in oblivion, who have essentially had to raise themselves outside of their families.

Camus applies this condition of "the first man" to all children of Algeria—both Arab and French alike—who lost their fathers to the violence of war:

But for the moment there were no dugouts, only the African troops who melted away under fire like multicolored wax dolls, and each day hundreds of new orphans, Arab and French, awakened in every corner of Algeria, sons and daughters without fathers who would now have to learn to live without guidance and without heritage. (*First Man* 70)

He describes the "African troops" as "multicolored wax dolls" with no distinction

between them of race or ethnicity. They all die on the battlefields for France leaving behind newly “awakened” orphans in Algeria. These children “awaken[ed]” to a new life free of fatherly guidance where they must seek out their own lessons. For Camus, it is not just the “French” like himself who must learn to live this way, but also the children of Arabs. His condition is generalizable to Algerians of all races who find themselves “awakened” into this new position. The position affords them a certain degree of liberty from the constraints and expectations that come from history, but also puts all of the developmental responsibility on their own shoulders as they “wander...through the land of oblivion” as fatherless orphans. Daniel Just argues a certain “intersubjective openness” pervades the novel that reflects Camus's political and ethical project, “this intersubjective openness, however politically impractical, took on the form of a narrative formulation of an ethically receptive model of cultural identity that Camus hoped would end violence” (70). In moments such as these, violence levels the racial playing field making all Algerians susceptible to the same horrible death that cuts them off from future generations. Camus draws his readers away from the violence of the French-Algerian War to a shared violence preceding it that all Algerians share despite their ethnic origins. From this starting point, he begins his ethical and political project of openness and mutual non-violence.

The painfulness of this condition of “first man” comes out in one of the notes Camus included in the margin of his novel long before it appears in the text itself. Near the end of the novel, Jacques sees his ability to “fashion” himself by finding father figures to guide him as he created “his own heritage” that was “sufficient at the time for

his circumstances, insufficient later on when confronting the cancer of the world” (*First Man* 278). He managed to create a life for himself, but sees that this kind of self-guided construction project which is suitable for a fatherless boy is not suitable for a grown man. He recognizes the lack that he possesses with regard to his father's heritage after he has already cobbled together his own. A similar sentiment also appears in the marginalia toward the beginning of the text when Jacques's mentor tells him that he does not need a father as the result of his early efforts to cope with his father's death. He feels “a terrible emptiness” as a result of the conversation he has with Jacques about not needing a father. His mother acts as an absent presence in his life while his father is something like an absent absence that he seeks to fill. In the margin, Camus includes a response from Jacques in which he admits that he needs his father:

“There is a terrible emptiness in me, an indifference that hurts..”

a. Jacques/ I tried to find out for myself, from the start, when I was a child, what was right and what was wrong—because no one around me could tell me. And now that everything is leaving me I realize I need someone to show me the way and to blame me and praise me, by right not of power but of authority, I need my father.

I thought I knew it, and that I had myself in hand, I don't [know?] any longer.
(*First Man* 36 with marginalia)

Jacques realizes that he needs a father for guidance even though he never had one growing up and he is a man now. Now that he is growing older, he seeks out the father that he never had to “show [him] the way and to blame [him] and praise [him]” by right of inherent “authority” over him. He does not want to submit to someone, but for someone to preside naturally over him as a father would. His attempt at carrying out his

mother's wish, to seek out his father's grave, makes him reflect on his fatherless life in a different way. Until now, he had seen his situation as a kind of empowerment—he could choose who to follow and respect by his own choice. Now he sees this blessing as also a curse that he must live with the rest of his life since no effort of his could ever bring back his dead father. Also significant is the location of this confession. He relegates this painful revelation to the margins of his manuscript rather than including it in the text as Derrida does in “Circumfession.” He conflates his narrator with himself again as “Jacques/I” and realizes that he does not totally have himself under control, “I thought I knew it, and that I had myself in hand, I don't [know?] any longer.” As he writes his story, he also undergoes a crisis of identity that blurs the line between himself and his protagonist. There is a part of himself that he will never know as a result of his father's absence—an absence in his home life that makes his public and private lives come into conflict in the novel and in Camus's life. Like Derrida, Camus's personal hardships reveal themselves in the footnotes of his text.

At the end of the manuscript Camus describes a tension between the “home” where he was raised “without forefathers” and his “blind hope” that drives him to find something more significant to live for than “the daily routine.” His “unalloyed passion for life” confronts the death of his father, his own death, and the limitations he inherits from his mother:

And he too, perhaps more than she, since he had been born in a land without forefathers and without memory, where the annihilation of those who preceded him was still more final and where old age finds none of the solace in melancholy that it does in civilized lands [], he, like a solitary and ever-shining blade of a sword, was destined to be shattered with a single blow and

forever, an unalloyed passion for life confronting utter death; today he felt life, youth, people slipping away from him, without being able to hold on to any of them, left with the blind hope that this obscure force that for so many years had raised him above the daily routine, nourished him unstintingly, and been equal to the most difficult circumstances—that, as it had with endless generosity given him reason to live, it would also give him reason to grow old and die without rebellion. (*First Man* 284)

He feels no melancholy for the past, only the desire to live that resembles the day to day existence he describes in his mother. Living without the burden of the past propels him headlong into the future with little concern for regret or death—to “die without rebellion.” He experiences life “above the daily routine” due to his education and his reflection, his relationship to time comes from his mother who, he argues, experiences it differently than those who are literate and educated. His context and his personal drive conflict and “shatter[ed]” him like the blade of a sword. As is clear in his relationship with the intellectuals in France and Algeria, his perspective is somewhat unique relative to the discourses of his time. He rises up out of a life of destitution due to his intelligence and is unwilling to give up either aspect of his life. His poor mother helped shape him, but so did his French education.

Fatherless children and the significance of the father's relationship in the development of the son also appear in Feraoun's *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*. Menrad, the book's protagonist (whose life very closely resembles its author's), is the child of a fatherless boy “who should have been” named after his grandmother who raised his father after his grandfather's death:

My uncle and father are named Ramdane and Lounis, but in the neighborhood people came to call them simply "the sons of Chabane." I'm not sure why. They were orphaned at such an early age that my father never

knew my grandfather. They should have been called the sons of Tassadit, after my grandmother. Their uncles or cousins no doubt preferred to perpetuate the Chabane name in order to show people that orphans descend from someone and that together, by act and by right, they replaced the one who was no longer there. (11)

Menrad's father never knew his father, but his name marks the significance of their relationship for the rest of the village. Similarly, Jacques keeps his father's name, but the act does not seem to carry as much cultural significance. Menrad's father wants the right to inherit the land and the reputation of their father. Their family heritage is important in the Kabyle village where their family has lived for generations. Ramdane and Lounis “replaced the one who was no longer there” in a way that differs significantly from Jacques's experience with his family name. He forges a new identity rather than adopting his father's identity in his community. In part this has to do with the rootlessness of his family and their relative isolation in the poor, mixed, urban community where they live. They move to this community after Jacques's father has already passed away, so his name bears no significance or weight to him or his community.

Here, Algeria is not the land of orphaned children with no relation to the past in the same way that Camus describes. In Feraoun, orphans possess a unique perspective as a result of having to deal with such a deep sense of loss. The narrator of Feraoun's text places orphans (or fatherless children) in a particularly painful position of being deprived of their parents' love, but also in a position of appreciating love in a way that children with parents may not experience. As in Camus, having no father gives them the ability to see their lives from a different perspective than that of children with fathers, but in Feraoun this is empowering:

I am speaking of the ordinary child who lives with his parents, for in the case of orphans, one wonders what compensation life can reserve for them fair enough to make them forget one day what they are so cruelly deprived of. The ordinary child, therefore, does not make much of his parents' love. For him it is a given thing. He is not even conscious of it, and grows tired of it when they spoil him. He dreams of additional attention: he reaches out, tries to make friends, the thankless brat wants to open his little heart to someone; he is ready to betray his mother, to prefer another man to his father, provided he finds someone he can count on...Numerous are the children whose hearts remain heavy from never having the chance to open up to anyone, whose abundant love remains trapped within. Will they open, in turn, for their children? You need time to love. (*Poor Man's Son* 60)

He describes the “ordinary child” as taking his parents' love for granted, as a “given thing” that orphans are acutely aware of. Children with parents are more likely to betray them by opening their love to others whereas the love of orphans “remains trapped within” as a result of not having parents to open up their hearts. Feraoun describes a fairly bleak picture of the transmission of love from parent to child. Either the parents open the child's heart to love and the child runs the risk of betraying them by loving too many others or the orphan's heart remains closed to love as a result of not having parents to open his heart. Only two implicit possibilities seem less destructive: either the child with parents becomes aware of the gift of his parents' love and does not betray them with others or the orphan opens his heart to his children in compensation for the love that he never received from his parents. Feraoun describes the same orphans of war that Camus describes as “sons and daughters without fathers who would now have to learn to live without guidance and without heritage.” This process seems to take a great deal of personal motivation and time to accomplish. Similarly, Feraoun describes love as a process that takes time to achieve, “You need time to love.” Without the example of love

from their parents, they must learn to love and open their hearts over time and with experience—perhaps with the arrival of their own children.

Similarly, if this metaphor applies to a more general kind of Algerian orphans, it suggests that the new nation needs time to develop and open their hearts to one another. Furthermore, in order for this development to occur, these orphans must intentionally, consciously set out to accomplish their goals to pave the way for future generations. Otherwise, they run the risk of perpetuating the condition of their love being “trapped” within them or betraying their families for the love of strangers. Feraoun describes this kind of personal betrayal of his country, Algeria, in his journals in 1956 that gave him a deeper love for France than a French child: “He taught me early on that France was my adoptive country and that, consequently, I was a little orphan to be looked after. This put in my heart a lot of humility and tender gratitude; and I liked France more than a French child” (*Journal* 91). Feraoun was taught that he came from a country of orphans at an early age so that a deep, familial love for France would be instilled in him. His reluctance to commit to the FLN fighters comes partly as a result of this ambivalence in feeling toward France as both gentle benefactors in childhood and colonial oppressors in adulthood. However, it is clear that this kind of language makes it difficult for him to sever himself from France. It is by means of French educators that he has become a teacher, himself. He owes his intellectual and professional development to his adoptive parents: France. Through both action and discourse, the French inhabit and construct an ambiguous, familial bond with the Algerians. Feraoun describes a foundational experience in the construction of his relationship with France in his journal that would be

categorized as a betrayal when read through the lens of his novel. His relationship with France is betrayal of Algeria made possible by understanding his nation as orphaned and rescued by the charity of France. As an “orphan,” he can feel the parental love that the French take for granted.

In both Feraoun and Camus, it is the responsibility of the orphan to seek out the history that was lost to them with their tragic absence of a father. In this sense, orphans are both blessed with a unique perspective that enables them to experience the world differently and can potentially be more aware of this experience. However, they also must deal with their trauma and the absence of a father figure in a very personal way. They are more attuned to their positionality in private terms of their family, but also in more general terms of their communities and cultures. In Chapter Three, I will explore another significant relationship that Kateb Yacine reworks in his fiction: the illegitimate child. He, too, turns an orphan into a figure of political potential in the character of Nedjma.

Reclaiming Family, Reclaiming History

Camus, Derrida, and Feraoun each describe Algeria as a place without history. In part, it is this relationship with history that complicates the political situation leading into and through the French-Algerian War. Without a salient engagement with history, political activism does not resonate as a relevant project for these three. Camus opposes

Jacques to his schoolmate, Didier as a result of his ignorance of history, the Derridas relinquish their cultural history to their new French identity, and Feraoun describes Algeria as a place the Europeans will quickly forget when they return to France after the war.

Camus's protagonist, Jacques, does not recognize a common history with his wealthy classmate, Didier in *The First Man*. His poverty makes it impossible for him to understand French history the same way that the wealthy identify with it:

Whereas Didier did know what it was; the family through its generations was a potent presence to him, and the country where he was born through its history--he called Joan of Arc by her first name--and so were good and evil defined for him as was his present and future destiny. Jacques, and Pierre also, though to a lesser degree, felt themselves to be of another species, with no past, no family home, no attic full of letters and photos, citizens in theory of a nebulous nation where snow covered the roofs while they themselves grew up under an eternal and savage sun, equipped with a most elementary morality that, for example, forbade them to steal, enjoined them to protect their mother and women, but was silent on a great number of questions concerning women, and relations with their superiors...(etc.)—children, in short, unknown to and ignorant of God, unable to imagine a future life when this life seemed so inexhaustible each day under the protection of the indifferent deities of sun, of sea, or of poverty. (209)

Jacques, as a child, neither relates to history nor the future. Rather, he lives in the present perpetuated by the poverty of his family. Didier recognizes Joan of Arc as a significant figure in his political and religious history unlike Jacques whose mother does not have the time or the desire to transmit such stories to him after her long days cleaning houses for the wealthy. Interestingly, Camus also relates this perpetual presence to a lack of moral grounding. He has no moral, material, religious, or discursive markers to trace his history or with which he can construct his future. Poverty cuts him off from the rest of

the European “species” which avoids falling prey to the “indifferent deities of sun, of sea, or of poverty” by means of their wealth. Their material wealth affords them the ability to mark the history of their ethics, religion, and culture.

Poverty makes war an inexplicably violent event that happens in a far off land for Jacques's mother. In order for her to care about or understand the political reasons or repercussions of such a war, she would need to first have some understanding of history. Instead, she sees World War II as a coercive act perpetrated by the Germans upon the French “The Germans were forcing France into war once again, and we were going to suffer--there were no causes for it, she did not know the history of France, nor what history was. She knew a little of her own history, barely knew the history of those she loved, and those she loved had to suffer as she did” (68). In Camus, political consciousness is not possible without historical consciousness. In order to understand war in terms of politics rather than arbitrary coercion and brute force, she must first understand history. In terms of her understanding, suffering is suffering and should be endured if necessary, but avoided when possible. The complicated political circumstances do not matter to her so much as the fact that her husband is dead. This kind of aversion to nuance and the simple entreaty to avoid violence is evident in Camus's perspective with regard to the war as well. If speaking up perpetuates violence, he would rather keep silent and try to prevent it as much as possible.

Camus credits the educated, above the poverty line—the same people that recognize France as their “country”—with the capacity for political nuance. Though he oscillates back and forth between seeing this ignorance as a blessing and a curse. He

blames colonial destruction for putting the majority of Algeria's population—the non-European masses as well as the orphaned Europeans—into this kind of predicament where rational thought gives way to “the soft unbearable burden on the heart”:

But on the land of Africa the temples have been destroyed, and all that is left is the soft unbearable burden on the heart. Yes, how they died! How they were still dying! In silence and away from everything, as his father had died in an incomprehensible tragedy far from his native land, after a life without a single free choice—from the orphanage to the hospital, the inevitable marriage along the way, a life that grew around him, in spite of him; until the war killed and buried him; from then and forever unknown to his people and his son, he too was returned to that immense oblivion that was the ultimate homeland of the men of his people, the final destination of a life that began without roots—and so many reports in the libraries of the time about the use of foundlings for this country's settlement, yes, all these found and lost children who built transient towns in order to die forever in themselves and in others... There was a mystery about that man, a mystery he had wanted to penetrate. But after all there was only the mystery of poverty that creates beings without names and without a past, that sends them into the vast throng of the nameless dead who made the world while they themselves were destroyed forever. (*First Man* 193-94)

Camus's father who died “without a single free choice” is thrown into the same mix of “nameless dead” as the indigenous inhabitants of the country who he practically ignores in this speech. “The temples have been destroyed,” but only the tragic fate of the European settlers is described in any degree of detail. The non-Europeans are skipped over in place of a group that he understands much better—the European poor in Algeria. His life “grew around him, in spite of him” in a way that defies strict chronology and agency. Life events happen to him without his volition due to his poverty and his rootlessness. He describes the European settlers of his father's day as “foundlings” who build “transient towns” and “die forever in themselves and others.” Jacques's father's death is not marked by a grave that is easily accessible to his poor family. It lies in

France and his family is poor. He dies “forever” in the sense that no one visits his grave or commemorates his life through stories.

Jacques describes this as a typical fate of the poor in Algeria—particularly the European settlers. He generalizes this “mystery of poverty” to include all of the poor,³³ but develops this description out of his absent relationship with his father and the relationship of his family to their history as well as a more general conception of history. Jacques does not exactly position himself within the same trajectory as that of his father. He gains history when he gains entry into the social class brought about by his education. This is what gives him the ability to see his father's history as well as his own with this kind of more detached perspective. However, as Just argues, seeing his position in history, makes him want to return to the oblivion of his father's past: “The more Jacques becomes a part of history, the more he desires to return to the oblivion of his own past, thereby seeking release precisely from the history for which he left his poverty.” It is also on these grounds of sharing a “compulsion to remember” with the French and “the absence of any recollected object” with the Algerians that “allows him to articulate a common ground for Algerian identity outside the traditional evocation of a collective history of a uniform ethnic group” (72). This position inside and outside of both cultural contexts and temporalities gives rise to Camus's ethical and political projects. He wants to do justice to both perspectives without doing violence and having to repeat the deaths incurred in the last war. This project is very heavily influenced by his fraught

33 Feraoun provides a more detailed description of the Kabyle poor that I will describe later in this chapter that conflicts with this depiction to some degree in terms of the rootlessness of the non-European poor.

relationship with his mother who he loves dearly, but does not relate to very easily intellectually. He feels an intense feeling of justice for her and the Algerian poor, but from a perspective reflective of the educated, French elite that he encountered in his education.

Camus locates Jacques's concern with history at his concern for his mother rather than a universalizable perspective of the educated poor. His mother asks him to visit his father's grave, so he must confront his lack of concern for family history. Jacques did not hear many stories about his father growing up and has never really inquired into his life or death until he moves to France as an adult. Here he admits that this lack of interest is personally “pathological” rather than a pathology of the poor:

Since you're going to see your mother, try to find out something about your father. And come back—at top speed—and tell me what happened next. I so seldom find anything to laugh about.

Yes, it's ridiculous. But now that my curiosity is aroused I might as well try to pick up some more information. It's a bit pathological that I've never concerned myself with it.

Not at all, it's wisdom in this case. I was married for thirty years to Marthe, whom you knew. A perfect woman and I still miss her. I always thought she liked her house. (*First Man* 30—paragraphs all crossed out)

Jacques's mentor suggests that he find out about his father as a kind of ridiculous afterthought. He might as well find something out about his father since he is visiting his mother, but it does not seem like a concern of central importance. Jacques admits, here, that it's a bit “pathological” that he has never researched his father, but his mentor suggests that it may be healthier than knowing the truth of his family history. Again,

there is a tension between the bliss of ignorance and the pain of discovering the truth. This pursuit can ultimately lead to a healthier psyche by working through the pain associated with his father's absence, but it can also lead to painful discoveries that involving working through a whole new set of issues.

Cormery had assumed his wife was happy with their home for thirty years, but his speech suggests that he eventually found out that his perception of the situation was inaccurate. He attributes a certain “wisdom” to not concerning oneself with these kinds of investigations because they can change the way one perceives these relationships—particularly after death makes further interaction impossible. Recovering family history is an ambivalent process of psychic healing and the potential for further pain. Further, as Just argues, what this kind of pursuit will reveal is the absence of origin critical to Camus's ethical-political project, “On both the personal and the collective level of Jacques's effort to recover his and his people's memory, Camus poses a very non-temporal and non-historical moment of origin to which Jacques aspires” “that refuses to pose a concrete imaginary moment of the origin” (81). His search develops out of his relationship with his mother, but reveals nothing but the lost origin of his father's absence. He copes with this absence as best as he can in his adulthood when he has become aware of the consequences of it, but the origin, itself, is never recovered because it was unknown to him. Similarly, and perhaps less convincingly, he relates this to Algeria, but the analogy rings false because a search for lost origins in the historical record reveals the concrete history of a violent colonial invasion that Camus does not really want to see. It is telling that Camus again obscures this passage from his text.

However, this time, rather than relegating the note to the extra-textual space of the manuscript, he crosses it out—perhaps unwilling to recognize his own “pathological” stakes in the project.

Jacques's solution to this ambivalent pursuit is embodied within the model of “the first man,” discussed earlier in the chapter, who recognizes that his heritage must be created and his behaviors constructed because he has had none handed down to him. He seeks out his “father for a year” when the necessity arises (*First Man* 278). However, this solution seems insufficient when read against other moments of the text that suggest that this autonomous decision to forge his own future falls short of his expectations. He gives in to the impulse to seek out information regarding his father, visit his father's grave, and investigate the “pathological” detachment he has inhabited for so long. As the final page of the manuscript describes, it is not “melancholy” that afflicts him because he has no distinct set of memories or experiences to mourn from his past. His father's absence gives him both a strength and impermanence different from orphans who mourn the loss of the parents they have known in their lives through direct experience. Conflating Jacques's experiences with the whole of Algeria seems like an interesting slippage in Camus's writing that would result in a political perspective regarding the war that affects him on a very personal level. Algeria is a “land without forefathers” and Jacques rises up like “a solitary and ever-shining blade of a sword...destined to be shattered with a single blow” (*First Man* 284). His potential destruction, in a context without history, is final and glorious. He does not have the burden of living up to his family history or expectations for the future. His reason to live is contained within his

reception of his own actions rather than an unknowable past or a future reading of his actions.

Even though Camus argues in the text that judgment must happen in the present, a child's family returns again and again in the text as defining the child despite the child's effort to define himself, in the case of Jacques:

A child is nothing by himself; it is his parents who represent him. It is through them that he defines himself, that he is defined in the eyes of the world...he could not know that once become a man, one is less deserving for not recognizing these evil feelings. For one is judged, for better or for worse, by what one is and much less on one's family, since it even happens that the family is judged in its turn by the child become a man. (*First Man* 204)

Camus proclaims in the middle of this passage that “one is judged, for better or for worse, by what one is and much less on one's family,” but he begins by describing the “evil feelings” that “a child is nothing by himself” without his parents to help define him. He points out that later in life, the family is judged by the man the child becomes. However, again, there seems to be a slippage. This time, between description of development and judgment. Children define themselves and develop in relation to the people around them. The fact that later judgments fall upon them and their families for the people they become seems like a very different point. Nevertheless, the child and its family are inseparable in both parts of the passage. The child's relationship to its family seems integral in a process of mutual, temporal identity construction. Even without the acknowledgment of a specific conception of history, family history works upon the child in the social context in which it is raised. Jacques develops a unique relationship to history as a result of his status as a member of the European poor in Algeria, his mother's influence on his life and

her inability to talk about her deceased husband, and Jacques's curiosity as a product of a French education.

The Derridean Trace of Judaism

For the Derridas, Arab Jews living as French citizens in Algeria, family history was complicated in a different way. Rather than being completely closed-off from an understanding of history, the Derridas modified their Judaism to conform to their European lifestyle. In order to benefit from the privileges of being “French” in Algeria, they assimilated nominally to those around them. In particular, they adopted Christian names for their Jewish traditions:

...I, then always take the most careful account, in anamnesis, of this fact that in my family and among the Algerian Jews, one scarcely ever said 'circumcision' but 'baptism,' not Bar Mitzvah but 'communion,' with the consequences of softening, dulling, through fearful acculturation, that I've always suffered from more or less consciously, of unavowable events...(72-73)

Derrida's family (along with many other Algerian Jews) publicly effaced the religious history of their family in order to fit in better with their European peers. In the privacy of their own homes, they conducted the rituals of their religion while the public believed that they were performing Christian rites. This is distinctly different from Camus's account in that the Derrida's clung privately to what they must publicly disavow for fear of harmful repercussions. However, in time, this public effacement led to private effacement with Derrida:

I am one of those *marranes* who no longer say they are Jews even in the secret of their own hearts, not so as to be authenticated *marranes* on both sides of the public frontier, but because they doubt everything, never go to confession or give up enlightenment, whatever the cost, ready to have themselves burned, almost, at the only moment they write under the monstrous law of an impossible face-to-face. (170-71)

The perpetual public denial of their heritage has made him “doubt everything.” After living under these conditions in his past, he cannot recognize a reason to privately or publicly acknowledge his Jewishness. This is not to avoid admitting the hypocrisy or desperation involved in behaving this way, but because the strength of his religious convictions has faded with the occlusion of their faith by his family in Algeria.

Derrida describes a relationship of *différance* between himself and his Jewish heritage through a process of “anamnesis.” This term, itself, is an interesting choice because of its association with Platonic philosophy as remembrance from a previous existence, a patient's account of medical history, as well as an integral part of the Eucharist in which Christ's life is recalled. Derrida's Judaism is from his life in Algeria—a life that seems a world away from his life as a French philosopher—that he fails to account for until later in life. He uses the term in this text mainly to describe his circumcision—a component of his medical and spiritual history. Finally, he invokes this Christian term at a moment when he describes how his family appropriated Christian words in order to hide their Judaism from public scrutiny. The “trace” of Derrida's Judaism becomes visible as he writes his autobiography in this process of anamnesis on the occasion of his mother's imminent death. Judaism defines the private sphere of his family and his relationship with France. The Derrida's would not be “French” if not for

their Judaism. Here, though, Derrida describes the process of effacement that began with a public disavowal of their religious ceremonies and resulted in the personal effacement of this element of his identity and inheritance. This transformation marks a difference and a deferral (as connoted by the French “*différer*”) between the public and private worlds of Derrida's relationship to Judaism. His family hides their faith within the conventions of their Frenchness, but ultimately, this effacement invades the private life of Derrida as well. This text reveals the trace of Derrida's Jewishness and a private resonance of one of Derrida's major theoretical concepts: *différance*. This also seems to describe the relationship of many Algerian Jews with their Frenchness given the overwhelming majority emigrated to France after the French-Algerian War (rather than remaining in Algeria or traveling to Israel or the United States).

Different from both Derrida and Camus in terms of their outsider status in Algeria, Feraoun describes his position as an educated, Catholic Kabyle more in terms of inclusion than exclusion in his heavily autobiographical novel, *Le Fils du pauvre*. He differs from those around him in his village by virtue of his education, but is more intimately attached to Berber life than European life (unlike Derrida and Camus). It is from this position of inclusion and exclusion that Feraoun, too, describes the European Algerians' relationship with history. Their relationship with history in Algeria is contingent on their context rather than as an intimate component of their identities. Feraoun understands Algeria as a part of the history of the Europeans that they will soon forget when they return to their “beloved” French homes:

At present, they think about only one thing, about only one day. The day

when, with peace reestablished, they will buy their return ticket to their beloved Normandy or Alsace, their Saint-Etienne, Lyon, or Paris, barely recovered from their wounds. When this day arrives, they will forget the past entirely. They will get right back to work, rebuilding their humble broken happiness with gusto. (*Poor Man's Son* 145)

For Feraoun, France is the true homeland of the European Algerians where they will all pick up where they left off before they emigrated to Algeria—no matter how many generations ago that may have been. When they find peace, they will also find a permanent closure to this part of their lives. Camus presents a counterexample to the simple return home predicted by Feraoun of the European minority. For some, like Camus and Jacques, “home” is not a matter of a historic, ancestral home. Derrida, too, complicates this model since his family is legally “French” in Algeria despite neither parent having any particular ancestral connection to France. Derrida feels more at home in his adopted homeland than in the land where his family has been living for generations.

However, Feraoun posits an indigenous relationship to history overlooked by Camus drawing from oral history, pre-European Algerian history, and a renewed commitment to the project of an Algerian future. Feraoun recovers a shared Algerian indigenous history that gets covered over by French historians and colonialism, “No, the time for Jeanne d’Arc is over for Algeria because there has already been the La Kahena” (*Journal* 44). Feraoun invokes a seventh-century Berber queen who resisted Arab expansion that predates Joan of Arc’s similar military and spiritual quest by 800 years and the Arab, Abdelkader’s resistance to French invasion by 1200 years. She was a military and spiritual leader who managed to fight off the Numidians decisively until her

continued violence turned local tribes from friends into enemies. La Kahena is an indigenous Berber hero in her own right long before the French version, Joan of Arc. This resists the idea of French primacy with regard to strength in the region as well as providing a historical example of non-European resistance against oppression skimmed over largely by contemporaneous French historiography. This also resists Camus's temptation to regard the region as free of history and heritage that he discusses in his work. Algeria is not a blank slate in terms of history that mirrors the barren landscape.

Feraoun does not have to dig deep to find non-European figures of greatness in Algeria's past. He populates the past with names and stories not simply landforms and spaces. Even more specifically, this past is derived from his own people, the Kabyle. Feraoun paints a portrait of a people on the brink of war who very deliberately have an eye turned toward constructing a better future as well as paying homage to the past. In Feraoun's journal, he describes the Kabyle as an indigenous group very different than those described by Camus—even in his journalistic writing:

Among the Kabyles, there is a sustained enthusiasm, an essential stubbornness, an absolute belief in a better future. The thought of dying for this kind of future no longer frightens anybody. Everyone accepts this idea with the certainty that the sacrifice made by those who die will ensure the happiness of future generations. People also think that it is time to avenge our ancestors, who, a century ago, were ruthlessly crushed by a well-armed conqueror who was desperate for colonies. So the young, beardless French soldiers appear as nothing less than the successors of the first Zouave soldiers, while the young Kabyles that are facing them want nothing more than to avenge the first moudjahiddins. A century of living together has been deliberately forgotten. A metallic, ice-cold bridge has been thrown over a century of Franco-Algerian history. This bridge is similar to the Sirat that leads to the resting place of the chosen; it is as fragile as a rope, as sharp as a sword, and it is gradually being stained with the dark blood of the sinners. A blade on fire stands poised over this century; it is stained with the blood of

men: that of the fighters and the victims. In the end, it will form a bloody line of retribution across a useless page. (*Journal* 118)

Feraoun draws a parallel to the Kabyle past, but with a difference. He describes a community that is ready to avenge their ancestors—“the first moudjahiddins”—who were defeated by the first wave of French colonialism, but this generation approaches the problem with a different perspective. They are thinking toward the future with the knowledge of past lessons they have learned in their struggle against colonialism. Feraoun links the “young, beardless French soldiers” with the Kabyle tribes who comprised the first wave of recruits to the French army battalion called the Zouaves (from 1831 until around 1871). In this uncovering of historical detail, he attributes a primacy to the non-Europeans who fulfilled these roles before the European settlers appropriated them for themselves. In fact, after 1871, the Zouaves lose their elite status and service becomes compulsory for settlers of European descent. So, European involvement actually seems to contribute to the loss of status and skill of this particular military group.

Not only does Feraoun unearth certain aspects of history that have been covered over by French colonial historiography, he also reminds us of a relatively peaceful “century of living together that has been deliberately forgotten.” In this case, he seems to be talking about a process of forgetting happening on both sides of the battle. He lives in daily fear that the FLN perceives his work as an educator as unpatriotic and that the French (specifically the OAS) will accuse him of allying with the FLN. Through his journals, we see that he took the mission of the mutual understanding of the *Centres*

sociaux very seriously—more seriously than perhaps was practical under the extremely divisive circumstances. By the time Feraoun wrote this journal entry in June of 1956, peaceful reconciliation had already become untenable. Interestingly, he describes an “ice cold bridge thrown over a century of Franco-Algerian history” that he links to the Sirat bridge in Islam that everyone must cross to enter Paradise. Sinners die in their attempt at crossing this bridge while those who perform acts of goodness enter Paradise. Feraoun describes the blood of the victims as well as the fighters as indistinguishable from each other. What is right and what is not right is not only ambiguous in the context of this war, but arbitrary to define. The “bloody line” that distinguishes them marks a “useless page” on which these criterion are described. In other words, the greatest injustice is that there is a great deal of death on both sides. Whether one side is more or less just seems like a secondary concern. In this regard, Feraoun resembles Camus. They both want to see the flow of blood and violence end in the name of justice. Feraoun, especially, supports decolonization, but cannot bear to see the violence that breaks out as a result of this pursuit.

This project of resurrecting indigenous history resembles the project of the Subaltern Studies Collective in India to decolonize through historiography. Universalizing, hegemonic historiography leaves out the voices of the people who comprise the nation; “What is clearly left out of this un-historical historiography is the *politics of the people*” (Guha x). As Ranajit Guha describes in *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, in order to resist colonialism (and not simply replicate its violence), historiography must vary from the colonial form of history

construction on an ideological level, “no discourse can oppose a genuinely uncompromising critique to a ruling culture so long as its ideological parameters are the same as those of that very culture” (11). Feraoun, too, describes a non-elite, non-European version of history in the region through alternative modes of historiography such as storytelling that reveals a kind of “politics of the people:” “There are several stories like this one that are making the rounds. In the future they will be worthy of becoming folk stories. This is how people create History” (*Journal* 56). Local histories are produced differently than those produced by colonial empires. Stories are passed around and if they persist in time, they become history. Another way that Feraoun resists the French standard for historiography is describing personal history as an act of importance in establishing family history in his novel:

He quite simply wanted, like those great men, to tell his own story. I told you he was humble! Far be it from him to compare himself to geniuses; he intended only to borrow from them the idea, the simple idea, of portraying himself. He figured that if he succeeded in making something coherent, complete, and readable, he would be satisfied. He believed his life was worth being known, at least to his children and grandchildren. If need be, he did not have to get it printed. He would leave a manuscript. (*Poor Man's Son* 3-4)

The novel's protagonist, Fouroulou, wants to leave a personal history for his children like “those great men” of history. This is not elevate himself to the significance of important men and women who write autobiographies of themselves or who others deem important enough to chronicle their lives in biographies in the French tradition. Rather, he raises the status of the lives of all simple men in terms of the heritage of their families. He is a simple poor man's son who becomes educated and returns to his people who would like

to chronicle his life. In this way, the space of the family provides an alternative to the French act of biography writing. Fouroulou's manuscript will provide a sense of coherence for his family to better understand their history. This is clearly an alternative to the colonial histories of military conquests and great leaders. Rather, it is a look to an indigenous, personal history that is not meant to influence the world, but destined for family consumption and appreciation, but with equal value and right to exist.

In one of Feraoun's journal entries from 1959, he suggests that his discussion of family resonates more generally than it may seem. His “prologue” he derives from the history of the Kabyle people, and his “epilogue” opens onto “an uncertain future”:

As for myself, I now feel that I can leave this story behind. It does not have a prologue, and it will not have an epilogue. The prologue had to be extracted from a century of colonialism—for us a century of servitude—and I would have to anticipate the epilogue in an uncertain future that has very little to do with me, a future my children will accept, whatever it is and however it will be. By “me” I mean my generation, and by “my children” I mean future generations. (*Journal* 269)

He leaves his story to forces and contexts larger than his own or those of his family.

Although he discusses his family, in particular here, he wants it to designate something larger than himself or his family. In Feraoun's work, the family is a community unit between the individual and the Kabyle people that is both more generalizable because of its structural resonance, but also more contextually specific because of its negotiation of cultural traditions, personal decisions, and particular family history. Fouroulou is initially defined by Feraoun as early as the title as “the poor man's son.” His identity is tied tightly to his relationship with his father and his socio-economic class. He has grown up with his father's name to define him into a life of poverty, but ultimately chooses his own

path in life by going to school in Algiers and returning to his village as a schoolteacher. At the end of the narrative, he is still relatively poor, his family takes advantage of his kindness, and his marriage is far from perfect. He is still the poor man's son, but his family life is structured differently than at the beginning of the novel. His ideas about love, marriage, family, and education have changed and unlike his father, he leaves a “manuscript” for his family from which to learn and grow.

Part of what is at stake for Feraoun in this novel is something that resonates with his journals (as well as Camus's project in *Le Premier homme*)—writing a family-oriented manuscript that resonates on a personal and collective level. In this way, he brings domestic concerns of his family on public display. Putting together all of the stories of the sons of poor men would result in a different kind of archive out of which to construct a history of the Kabyle and a history of Algeria:

We should be able to put together all sorts of stories recounting thousands of dramas. All of these thousands of deaths, outcries of rage, torrents of tears, and pools of blood have marked and disfigured this earth on which we were unfortunate enough to be born and from which they want to take us as if we were bastards. It would be best if, later on, people knew about all this and told each other, “After all, our fathers were quite commendable, and we can be proud of them.” (*Journal* 276)

Feraoun urges a reconsideration of the process of historiography that uses family as a starting point. This is not to say that family is a metaphor for the nation or that the relationship between Fouroulou and his father is analogous to the relationship between a citizen and the state. Rather, this is a call to redefine the lens of what constitutes history. The construction of historical accounts should include fathers that sons are proud of regardless of their military prowess. This restructuring of history also resonates with his

invocation of La Kahena and the Zouaves. It is turning what persists from oral or overlooked forms of history into a “manuscript” that can be preserved first at the level of family transmission. Inherent in this movement is also an emphasis on education—education of the history of Algeria as well as basic reading, writing, and analytical skills—that transcends socio-economic class. Fouroulou and Feraoun come from poor families and learn to read and construct family histories of their own. In order for this project to continue, there would need to be a greater emphasis on (and availability of) education in every village. For this reason, both Feraoun and Fouroulou go back to their villages after receiving their educations. In this sense, Feraoun's project extends beyond the context of war in which he writes his journals. He writes his own semi-autobiographical contribution to Franco-Algerian history, *The Poor Man's Son*, in 1950 before the war breaks out. He does not simply write for nationalism or peace between the fighting factions. Rather, he supports the development of alternative forms of historiography developing out of the family structure. Starting from a very traditional relationship of the son's identification with his father, he constructs an alternative process of development and education that extends beyond (but also includes) his father's influence.

Toward a Family Ethics

Reading Feraoun, Camus, and Derrida together, we see three very disparate

Algerian identities who relate to their respective cultures as both insiders and outsiders. Through their private relationships with their families, they developed public ways of understanding the quickly changing, violent world of decolonization. Camus kept his pathological relationship to his father's absence private in the notes and margins of his manuscript, but it bleeds through in Jacques's ambivalence of being "the first man" in the novel between the silence of his illiterate mother and his French education. Likewise, Derrida kept mostly quiet with regard to the situation of Algeria throughout the war. In "Circumfession" we see that his relationship with his mother and his identity as an Arab Jew were significant to the development of his work and his life in France. Again, they occupy the margins of the text of his philosophical oeuvre.

Feraoun, on the other hand, publicly embraced his roots and used his French education to educate his community and encourage a grassroots effort at solidarity and cultural understanding. His position at the *Centre sociale* made him a public figure of cultural negotiation between European and non-European communities that ultimately resulted in his death by OAS violence—it seems that his effort could only be fully appreciated in private. In all three writers, there is a deliberate attention to their family relationships as they develop their projects—particularly relationships with their mothers. This is least apparent in Feraoun, but there is some indication that a matrilineal legacy may be more appropriate than the patrilineal name his father inherits. The war and their personal histories have compelled them to reevaluate history and politics beyond the binaries they are presented with in Algeria and France.

All three have seen the death, violence, and destruction of Algeria's war for

independence from France and want to see a peaceful resolution to the conflict. All three return to their histories for help with relating to the violence around them. For Camus and Derrida, this is a mix of returning to their family histories as well as their relationships with Algeria. They find obscure origins and hardship, but fail to recognize the history that already marks the land. Feraoun contributes a reconfiguration of history that supplements the pursuits of Camus and Derrida. Camus questions colonial history, but sees the obscurity of his family history in place of the history of the Algerian people made obscure by colonial historiography. Camus and Derrida feel out of place in this land as witnesses to the final days of French colonialism. Similarly, Feraoun feels out of place, but for different reasons. He recognizes the shortcomings of colonial historiography, but resurrects the history of his people through autobiography, folklore, and historical events. His politics develops out of his ambivalent perspective as a French-educated Kabyle, but he uses these skills to enrich his people as well as to reveal the history that already existed in Algeria before colonial historiography. He resembles Camus's "first man" in the breadth of his perspective, his concern with family, and his critical analysis of history. However, he differs in the efforts he makes to imagine a future from an excavated individual and collective history.

In Chapter Three, "Nedjma and the Illegitimate Children of the Revolution," I will turn to the orphan Nedjma in the work of Kateb Yacine. He returns to this woman time and again over the course of his career giving the reader a sense of his progression as a writer and as a proponent of a political split with France. I consider the inherent danger of metaphorizing a nation through a

literary figure and suggest that by the end of his career, Nedjma becomes both more explicitly political and more individualized as a woman. She is no longer defined by her relationships with her husband, her illegitimate birth, or the sexual desires of all of the other male characters. She becomes a woman with a political conscience and a voice of her own who does not follow in the footsteps of any preceding stereotypes or myths—even slipping out of the grasp of the author who has created her.

CHAPTER THREE: NEDJMA AND THE ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

*The presence of the French and the Europeans in Algeria does not pose an unsolvable problem. In any case, Algeria, purged of colonialists, will know neither super-citizens nor second-class citizens. The Algerian Republic will make no distinctions founded on race or religion among those who remain its children. Fundamental guarantees will be given to all echelons of citizens participating in the life of the country. All legitimate interests will be respected.*³⁴

—Ferhat Abbas, 1958

With the first declaration of the Provisional Government of the new Algerian Republic, Ferhat Abbas addressed the question of the composition of the new Algerian nation almost four years before achieving independence. His 1958 speech as “*Président du Conseil*” states that all people regardless of race or religion will be able to become “children” of the new Algeria once she has been purged of the remaining colonialists. Although the details of this process and the identity of these colonialists remained ambiguous, the council clearly sought to appear open to the idea of a multi-cultural, racially diverse, post-independence Algeria. The new Algeria would adopt any child with “legitimate interests” in the nation. This declaration reflects the reality of the mixed

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La présence de Français et d'Européens en Algérie ne pose pas de problème insoluble. En tout état de cause, l'Algérie, expurgée des colonialistes, ne connaîtra ni de super-citoyens ni de citoyens à part diminuée. La République Algérienne ne fera aucune distinction fondée sur la race ou la confession entre ceux qui veulent demeurer ses enfants. Des garanties fondamentales seront données pour qu'à tous les échelons tous les citoyens participent à la vie du pays. Tous les intérêts légitime seront respectés. Ferhat Abbas, “Première déclaration du Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne,” 10 September 1958 reprinted in *El Moudjahid* (10 October 1958)

composition of the nation (linguistically, culturally, and religiously), the nationalist movements, and the support received by the rebels by the international community. As a result of multiple colonialist endeavors, the outside imposition of national boundaries, and immigration, Algeria was a country of mixed languages and cultures long before the French invasion. This declaration specifically addresses the European minority, but illustrates a commitment to preserving the historical diversity of the people. By the end of the war, however, this declaration proved less than convincing in the face of OAS and FLN violence and mutual distrust on the part of the citizenry. Of well over one million Algerians of European descent at the outbreak of the war, “Only 30,000 stayed bravely, or hopelessly, behind” (Horne 533). Likewise, the post-independence regime turned increasingly toward religious fundamentalism and exclusion of women and minorities. The multi-cultural, inclusionary ideals of the revolution dried in the face of the deaths of over a million of Algeria's children.

In this chapter, I will explore the multiplicity of the Algerian linguistic and cultural experience in the middle of the Twentieth Century—focusing on figures who did not fit neatly into categories such as “Arab” or “French.” Non-European writers employed metaphors such as matricide and patricide to describe their experiences of choosing a language to express themselves. At the same time, the French government was hoping to expand their hegemony through encouraging mixed marriage and supporting the rights of Algerian women. In the rest of the chapter, I will focus on the quintessential figure of mixed cultural identity in Algerian fiction, Kateb Yacine's Nedjma, who has been described as a metaphor for the Algerian nation. I will argue that

looking at Nedjma's repetition with a difference throughout Kateb's³⁵ oeuvre (from 1948 to 1966) both encourages her status as a metaphor and resists metaphorization in her singularity. Kateb transforms Nedjma from an object of desire whose primary function is disruption to a figure whose mixed origins embody the plight of an Algerian nation struggling for independence and post-colonial identity.

The Mother Tongue and "L'Algérie de Papa"

Four extensive experiences with colonialism left the Algerian population culturally, linguistically, and ethnically mixed by the advent of the war for independence from France in 1954. The Turks, Romans, Arabs, and French had each conquered Algeria and left their respective marks on the population. Most of the native Muslims in Algeria could trace their heritage to tribal and ethnic groups such as the Kabyle, Chaouia, M'Zabite, Mauretanian, Turks, and Arabs. The Kabyle comprised the largest ethnic group, however, "probably less than a third still retained their separate identities of language and culture, the rest being rated by ethnologists as Arabised Berbers" (Horne 49). Similarly, the European population (who were granted French citizenship officially) was comprised of a variety of ethnicities: Spanish, Maltese, and Italians comprised large numbers of the settler population. "By 1917 it was estimated that only one European in five was of true French descent (and these included Corsicans and Alsations), and in the

35 In school, Kateb's teachers mistakenly reversed his name from Yacine Kateb to Kateb Yacine. Kateb used the reversal as a tongue-in-cheek pen name, but the standard way that critics now refer to him is by his family name, Kateb.

1950s you could still hear more Spanish than French spoken in the poorer quarters of Oran” (Horne 51). Only a fifth of the “French” of French Algeria were of French descent and a majority of the “Arabs” were “Arabised Berbers.” By the outbreak of the war, Algeria was far from a culturally or linguistically homogenous place.

On March 25, 1959, de Gaulle recognized that Algeria was changing quickly and that France was losing its hegemony. No longer the monolithic, monolingual bastion of authority, France was “working towards a transformation which [would] enable Algeria to find her new personality.” This “transformation” consisted in a move from forcefully excluding the non-European majority to recognizing that without the complicity of the masses, France would lose all claim to the land. This new “personality” would have to extend beyond grasping desperately at the legacy of “*Algérie française*” to an Algeria ruled by self-determination. When the *pieds noirs* staunchly refused to change with the current of French (and FLN) politics, de Gaulle famously declared that “What they [the *pieds noirs*] want, is to return to 'Papa's Algeria.' But Papa's Algeria is dead, and if they don't understand that they will die with it” (De Gaulle in Horne 341). “Papa's Algeria” was one where colonialism and oppression flourished with very little disruption by the non-European population or the rest of the world. In this historic Algeria, the *pieds noirs* could maintain cultural and economic control over the masses with little check on the breadth of their oppression.

Unlike France's colonial legacy of cultural exclusion, beginning as early as the inception of the provisional government in 1959, the FLN officially accepted diversity despite its strong bond with the Arab world. In Abbas's 1958 proclamation, he underlines

the strength of Algeria's bond with “le Monde Arabe,” “La solidarité arabe n'est pas un vain mot. C'est grâce au soutien agissant de ces peuples frères et de leurs gouvernements que le peuple algérien est près d'atteindre son but. S'il pouvait exister une dette de reconnaissance entre frères, celle du peuple algérien envers les peuples arabes serait immense” (“Première déclaration”). Along with this political alliance comes implicit (and after independence, explicit) expectations to maintain a linguistic, cultural, and religious alliance with the Arab World. However, before the end of the war, Abbas is careful to include all ethnic and religious groups in the creation of the new Algerian nation. In the official newspaper of the FLN, *El Moudjahid*, several articles³⁶ over the course of the war claim that living on Algerian soil makes one a child of Algeria, not ethnicity or religion. In 1960, Abbas calls out again to all citizens to proclaim a political agenda of inclusion for the new nation:

L'Algérie aux Algériens, à tous les Algériens, quelle que soit leur origine. Cette formule n'est pas une fiction. Elle traduit une réalité vivante, basée sur une vie commune. C'est la terre qui façonne l'homme. Et la terre algérienne nous a façonnés. Elle nous a si bien marqués que nous pouvons vivre ensemble. Nous sommes désormais tous des Africains, condamnés à subir les mêmes épreuves et à nourrir les mêmes espérances. (“L'Appel du President Abbas”)

The land makes a person Algerian, not an identity card. Abbas urges his people to recognize that they can live peacefully together despite their differences before the bloody conclusion of the war and the European exodus to France. In the same speech, Abbas also addresses de Gaulle's declaration that “L'Algérie de papa est mort” :

Les premiers colons d'Algérie, vos aïeux, vos pères, on pensé et agi en fonction de leur époque, dans le contexte de vainqueur à vaincu, de maître a

36 See, for example, 10 October 1958 and 20 February 1960, “L'Appel du President Abbas.”

sujet. Or, cette époque est révolue, et bien révolue. “L’Algérie de papa” est morte. Ce n’est pas le général De Gaulle qui l’a détruite. C’est le peuple algérien par sa lutte. Ce qui pouvait donc s’expliquer pour vos pères, ne s’explique plus pour vous. Regardez autour de vous. Dans le monde d’aujourd’hui, il n’y a plus de place pour le concept colonial, il n’y a plus de place pour la suprématie raciale. (“L’Appel du Président Abbas”)

The times have changed. The majority is no longer willing to be oppressed by the will of the European minority. Abbas avoids blaming the current generation for the racism of their parents, but urges the *pieds-noirs* to see that they must stop their racist resistance to adapting to the new “personality” of Algeria. There is no place in Algeria for “*le concept colonial*,” but Abbas leaves room for peaceful coexistence in the policy of the nascent nation.

In this atmosphere of relative acceptance³⁷, the vast majority of European and non-European Algerian writers chose French as their language of expression. French could reach many of the educated members of the population both in Algeria and abroad. Furthermore, writing in French could mobilize the language of the oppressor in new ways that could potentially fight oppression. Hédi Abdel-Jaouad describes this process as rewriting identity in a “historically conflictual situation”: “Because it is the locus of an historically conflictual situation in which the *I* and *the world* are opposed, Maghrebian writing in French involves rewriting the texts about them that the Other has produced over time” (12). Abdel-Jaouad later argues that Kateb Yacine’s project of constantly returning to the character Nedjma throughout his career is a result of this impulse to rewrite what the other has imposed. However, the opposition between “*I*” and “*the*

³⁷ Later, the decision to write in French would become increasingly controversial as OAS violence in Algeria mounted and the war came to a close.

world” seems a bit excessive considering the linguistic and cultural context of Algeria. Kateb did speak Arabic in the home, but he was engrossed in the French language and culture from an early age through his French education. Charles Bonn describes a situation that evades binaries with regard to the position of the Algerian writing in French, “loin du binaire que suppose l'idéologie identitaire la littérature se joue dans la complexe et ambiguë alliance des contraires” (12). This “alliance of contraries” comprises a central component of Maghrebians writing in French. Education in the French language and culture comprises a component of their identities not a random superimposition over a more authentic, homogenous indigenous culture. Politically, this became more difficult to parse out in the midst of the French assimilationist agenda throughout the war and the FLN turn to increasingly conservative pan-Arabism. As we have seen in previous chapters, Algerian identity was far from homogenous and education did not necessarily entail succumbing entirely to French ideology.

Throughout the war, some Algerian writers identified Arabic with the language of their mothers. As we saw in Chapter Two with Derrida and Camus, the mother calls to mind childhood, tradition, and a sense of “home.” In an interview in *El Moudjahid*, Abdelhalim Raïs describes his choice to use dialectical Arabic in his new play as related to his mother:

Il est sans doute souhaitable qu'un jour, ce théâtre soit écrit et dit en arabe sinon régulier et classique, au moins en arabe “relevé,” mais actuellement, tant que ma mère pour faire son marché emploiera le “dialectal” pour se faire comprendre du marchand de légumes, moi, artiste algérien, je parlerai le langage de ma mère, et du marchand de légumes lorsque je voudrais faire du théâtre réaliste. (“Entretien avec les artistes algériens”)

Raïs hopes that one day, classical Arabic will be the language of choice for Algerian intellectuals, but in order to create a “realist theater,” he must use the language used by his mother at the market. Dialectical Arabic is the language he hears around him by the majority of the non-European population despite the fact that he conducts his interview in French and implies that the language of the elite remains French. Here, he associates Arabic both with his domestic life through his mother and with his public life in the streets of his country dealing with merchants. Dialectical Arabic is a performative language. In contrast, French remains the language of the educated elite—a pedagogical language. Raïs, however, in a position consistent with that of the FLN, seeks to ultimately upset this dynamic and raise classical Arabic to the status of French for the whole nation.

Raïs is not alone in evoking relationships with his parents in a discussion of language hegemony. In “Le Tragique de l'émergence littéraire maghrébine entre deux langues, ou le roman familial,” Charles Bonn describes the drama of this dynamic illustrated by literature of the 1950s and 1970s in the figure of the sacrifice of the mother, “inséparable de la contradiction tragique du personnage pris entre deux langages” (13). The “tragic contradiction” between French and Arabic leads to the mother's sacrifice. The literature Bonn describes by Mouloud Feraoun, Albert Memmi, Mouloud Mammeri, and Driss Chraïbi (to name a few) embodies domesticity and intimacy, “A la fois gardienne de la tradition et intimité la plus inviolable, la mère se trouve ici soudain exhibée au mépris des convenances et au creux même de la blessure” (14). Unbeknownst to her, the mother “finds herself” in harm's way with the necessity of the breakdown of

tradition in the name of the revolution. Here, the mother must be sacrificed in order to usher in new values and traditions consistent with the new political order.

Franz Fanon shifts the focus to the father and poses a less violent alternative in an extract of *Révolution Algérienne, An V* published in a 1959 issue of *El Moudjahid* as “La Famille Algérienne dans la révolution.” He describes sons who convert their fathers to a new revolutionary ideology beginning with the enormous decision to “combattre l'occupant les armes à la main” (“La Famille algérienne dans la révolution”). The son commands his father to finally reject colonialism through force—a decision the father ultimately respects out of a mutual desire to end his oppression. The son converts his father to a new way of thinking, but the father does not simply abandon his traditional point of view or his authority:

Toutefois, cette conversion du père n'élimine pas radicalement les conduites traditionnelles. Le père fait taire difficilement son désir de rétablir sa souveraineté écroulée et la hantise des conséquences effroyables de cette guerre ouverte. C'est ainsi que prennent naissance de nouvelles formes d'opposition paternelle, des manifestations voilées de l'autorité paternelle. (“La Famille algérienne dans la révolution”)

The father does not willingly abdicate authority over his family as a result of his son's political action. Rather, his authority changes as he finds more covert forms of asserting it. Bonn, too, describes a challenge to paternal authority in his essay. However, Bonn goes further than Fanon in describing the choice to write in French as a slaying of the father in the 1970s. In this way, both parents fall victim to the revolution. In terms of Fanon's description, the father's “veiled manifestations” of his authority stifle the son's voice and he must be slayed in order to avoid returning to tradition: “Et comme le

sacrifice du corps de la mère, le sacrifice de la parole paternelle est indispensable pour permettre le surgissement de la parole des fils” (18). The son's voice cannot be heard over that of his father's no matter how much control he gives over to his son. So, for the sake of the revolution, the father must be killed. Already, patricide and matricide seem problematic both in terms of the violent disruption of the family and the generational relativity inherent to the family structure. When the mother and father are dead, new mothers and fathers will inevitably replace them. For future generations, the ideology of the children (the revolutionaries) will seem as outdated as that of their parents.

Kateb Yacine discusses his choice to write in French very differently. Arabic is the language of his father, mother, uncles, and grand-parents, but he ventures outside of his “source maternelle” intentionally pushing boundaries:

Quelq'un qui, même de loin, aurait pu m'observer au sein du petit monde familial, dans mes premières années d'existence, aurait sans doute prévu que je serais un écrivain, ou tout ou moins passionné de lettres, mais s'il était hasardé à prévoir dans quelle langue j'écrirais, il aurait dit sans hésiter: 'en langue arabe, comme son père, comme sa mère, comme ses oncles, comme ses grands-parents.' Il aurait dû avoir raison, car, autant que je m'en souviens, les premières harmonies des muses coulaient pour moi naturellement, de source maternelle. (Kateb in Aresu 11-12)

Kateb Yacine's father was a lawyer who interacted with his clientele and the legal system in Arabic. He was sent into the French educational system under the assumption that he would return and serve his community and his family in the language of his family. He chooses to go against the natural language of his family and his personal feelings. The “harmonies of the muses” speak to him in Arabic, but he writes in French. This is a dramatic shift from the language of comfort, family, and creation, to one he adopts

through his entrance into the French educational system: “Le premier *drame* de notre famille, ce fut d'abord le langage. Petit à petit, par la langue, j'ai été amené à me détacher un peu de ma mère” (Kateb in Aresu 12). Kateb describes this decision to work in French as a “family drama” by which he could gradually distance himself from his mother. This decision seems less politically motivated than motivated by his relationship with his family. He chooses an unconventional way to transform his relationship with his family just as he chooses an unconventional “star” for the bulk of his artistic oeuvre—the illegitimate child of mixed origins, Nedjma. As we have seen, choosing to write in French or Arabic entailed a complex political and cultural choice that preceded the particular subject matter. Later, I will argue that Kateb's choice to structure the bulk of his work around the character, Nedjma makes the drama of cultural hybridity even more acute by resonating with the complicated political situation of the war and the changing face of Algerian womanhood.

Ethnic Legal Status and Mixed Marriage

Kateb Yacine's character, Nedjma, embodies a more pronounced conflict of cultural hybridity than the choice to write in French or Arabic as a child born to an Arab man and a European Jew. In this section, I will outline the legal status of multi-ethnic children before exploring Kateb's iconic literary representation of Algerian mixed marriage later in the chapter. Legally, the French government defined French citizenship in the Law of 26 June 1889 by the rule of “double *jus soli*” “which gave French

nationality to any individual born in France (including Algeria) of a parent born (French or foreign) in France” (Shepard 29). The child had no choice in the matter. Technically, this made virtually everyone born in Algeria a French citizen—especially after citizenship was granted *en masse* to all Europeans and Jews. However, as I discussed in Chapter 1, the reality was more complicated for the non-European population who were given convoluted legal statuses based on religion that submitted their personal or civil status to local Koranic or Berber laws and limited their voting and citizenship rights. Until 1958, in order for a child of mixed backgrounds to be entitled to the full benefits of a citizen of France, a French father would need to legally recognize paternity of the child. Eventually, the French resorted secretly to their own categorizations based on *jus sanguinis* racial definitions to distinguish European from non-European citizens and soldiers. Racial categories that went against French principles such as “French of North African Status” (*français de souche nord-africaine*, or FSNA) and “French of European Origin” (*français de souche européenne*, or FSE) distinguished the non-European from the European population. In 1958, the French Army Deputy Chief of Staff Pasteur officially condoned the use of these categories in the military recognizing all children of mixed FSNA and FSE background as officially FSE: “in all cases the designation *français de souche européenne* will be given to servicemen of mixed ancestry” (Pasteur in Shepard 53). Legal recognition of paternity was no longer a prerequisite for French status, but race became an official category for increased rights as a citizen. By 1958, race became an overt mode of classifying citizenship in Algeria. However, unlike renouncing one's religion (which almost no one chose to do) to become more French,

renouncing one's ethnic background was not possible.

As assimilation became the official policy of the crumbling empire, the French encouraged mixed marriage with the thinly-veiled goal of increasing their presence in Algeria. The French assumed that most of these marriages would take place between French men and indigenous women—resulting in the assimilation of both the woman and her children while expanding French cultural hegemony. However, an article in an issue of *El Moudjahid* reveals that this support shown by the French was generally understood by their readership as an assimilationist tactic and not particularly successful:

Le problème à aborder, c'est le mariage mixte qui a été plus d'une fois utilisé par les champions de l'assimilation et par ceux qui pour justifier la colonisation ont mis l'accent sur la chance qu'il représentait pour leur politique.

Les rares cas de mariages mixtes enregistrés jusque là suffisaient à leurs yeux pour constituer les éléments positifs d'une amorce de ce qu'ils appelaient "fusion des deux communautés" "régénération d'une partie de la race indigène." ("L'Aliénation colonialiste")

The French endorsement of mixed marriage turned a private choice into a political act. For the French, this signaled a "fusion" of their community with the non-Europeans and a "regeneration of a part of the indigenous race"—the "part" that sided with the French and would not be repressed by French colonialism. This account also illustrates that mixed marriage was not a common occurrence in colonial Algeria despite the French attempt at making it appealing. Like the *Centres Sociaux* from Chapter One, the French supported the institution of mixed marriage and "the fusion of two communities" nominally, but only as a last-ditch attempt at maintaining control over the region. They supported mixed marriage only when it suited them and on their terms (between a French man and an

indigenous woman). Kateb Yacine posits an alternative to the French institution of mixed marriage in the construction of his character, Nedjma. She is a child of mixed race, but her parents do not conform to the kind of racial “fusion” supported by the French. They do not marry and abandon her to a Muslim woman's care. Ultimately, she follows a radically different path than what the French would hope for by challenging all expectations and engaging in the struggle against French colonialism.

Nedjma and the Algerian Nation

Arguably the most widely-discussed character in all of non-European Algerian literature, Kateb Yacine's Nedjma, modeled on his beloved cousin, is the illegitimate daughter of a French Jewish woman and an uncertain Arab man. As the result of the death of her mother and the abandonment of her father, Nedjma is raised by a relatively wealthy Arab couple who cannot produce children of their own and educated in the French system. After the woman's husband dies, she befriends another widow in a comparable social position to her own and marries Nedjma to her son as a sign of her affection. The dazzlingly beautiful Nedjma complies out of respect for her adoptive mother, but never truly loves her bearded, conservative husband. Despite her marriage, she has many suitors—one even abducts her. In fact, the story is largely structured around their desire to possess her and the disruption it causes in their lives as they begin the struggle against colonial oppression around the time of the Sétif Massacre of 1945.

Often read in isolation of the rest Kateb's Nedjma cycle, the status of Nedjma in

the eponymous novel has been the question of debate since the novel's publication.³⁸

Many interpretations tend toward reading Nedjma as an allegory for Algeria citing her relationships with her four suitors (Mourad, Rachid, Lakhdar, and Mustapha) as the root of this comparison—the four men symbolize each of the four major historical invaders of Algeria, competing brands of nationalism, or the cultural heterogeneity of Algeria.³⁹

These kinds of readings emphasizes the male characters and take Nedjma as simply the organizing principle of the narrative and a coveted object of the men around her. In his quest for a “comprehensive” reading of the text, Louis Tremaine warns against adopting a symbolic interpretation too quickly, “no critic to my knowledge has attempted to demonstrate how such symbolism can lead beyond character analysis to a comprehensive interpretation of *Nedjma*, based on the specifics of the text” (21). He urges for a more detailed analysis of the text rather than a superficial reading of its general contours.

However, like many of the symbolic readings, Tremaine's interpretation reduces Nedjma to a textual function and also fixates on the men in the novel. He blames Nedjma for making the men around her withdraw from the world and their political commitments. Nedjma's presence represents:

...The persistent desire to turn's one back on the world and withdraw into the self or the closed group, to pursue a tribally created illusion of fulfillment and significance, resulting in growing stagnation and pointless inner dissension, and precluding authentic participation in the revolution, in the ongoing business of life, in the search for freedom and meaningful action—for *itinerary*. (34)

Tremaine cuts down Nedjma from the status of allegory for the nation to the embodiment

38 Louis Tremaine provides a succinct account of many early interpretations of the status of Nedjma in his 1979 essay “The Absence of Itinerary in Kateb Yacine's “Nedjma” (17-18).

39 See Mortimer, Déjeux, or Aresu for example.

of a “pattern” that hinders the revolution. The men who love her turn away from the world and enclose themselves within a tribal mentality characterized by “stagnation” and “pointless inner dissension.” As long as they allow themselves to be transfixed by Nedjma, they cannot commit to the revolution or even to life. Tremaine concludes by explicitly constructing a dichotomy between Nedjma and the revolution. He argues that the two are “opposing forces, and that they play opposite roles in establishing or destroying the temporal foundations of human life” (35). By this account, Nedjma “destroy[s]” temporality as she seduces her suitors into an absence of “itinerary” while the revolution “establish[es]” temporality through encouraging a particular revolutionary “itinerary.”

Ultimately, it seems that in Tremaine's attempt at moving away from a symbolic interpretation of Nedjma, he resorts to exactly this kind of reading. Nedjma is a symbol for an anti-revolutionary turn inward and an “absence of itinerary.” Tremaine, too, falls victim to flattening her character and eliminating all sign of her development over time and space in his attempt at forming a “comprehensive” reading of the novel. In his article, he cites Kateb Yacine's warning against adhering too firmly to a symbolic reading of Nedjma:

Il ne faut pas pousser un symbole trop loin. Un symbole est toujours fragile; si on veut le littéraliser, il se détruit. Nedjma, oui, finit par symboliser l'Algérie. Cette fleur aussi peut symboliser l'Algérie si l'on se met à rêver sur le phénomène de la fleur. Il ne faut pas trop creuser un symbole; il ne faut pas vouloir en faire une vérité pure et simple, parce qu'à ce moment-là, il n'est plus symbole... (Kateb in Tremaine 37, Note 16)

It seems that in opposing Nedjma to the revolution, Tremaine “literalizes” the symbol of

Nedjma to the point of making her lose her beauty. Kateb describes either Nedjma or a flower as potential symbols of Algeria, but dissuades from the type of “comprehensive” reading that Tremaine pushes. In seeking an itinerary and finding an absence, he blames Nedjma rather than his own literary agenda. It seems that by the author's account, Nedjma's symbolism resists literalization. Tremaine criticizes other symbolic readings of Nedjma for their failure to account for the text in its entirety and faults the critics rather than considering her “absence of itinerary” as an integral part of a “comprehensive” reading of the text. Superficially, she represents Algeria, but so do a number of other things such as a flower. The text, itself, resists a comprehensive reading of Nedjma solely in terms of a symbol of Algeria or of an anti-revolutionary mechanism.

Winifred Woodhull calls for a mythologization of Nedjma that resists a reductive symbolization.⁴⁰ She argues that the role of women in the revolution extends beyond mere symbolization that reduces them to figures who stand in for the home, for the nation, or for anti-revolutionary inclinations. Kateb's novel goes beyond mere symbolization by encouraging a “reactionary” reading that defies expectations for women or for Algeria: “to deny the reactionary dimension of this myth is to ignore the history of women in Algeria since *Nedjma*'s publication in 1956 and to lend credence to a now dangerous ideology which holds that this symbolization of woman still has revolutionary potential in Algeria” (52). Here, Woodhull criticizes Jacqueline Arnaud's unwillingness to see Nedjma's acts of resistance to her possession, abduction, and loveless marriage as “reactionary” instead focusing her analysis on the ways that Nedjma conforms to

40 See Winifred Woodhull, “Rereading “Nedjma”: Feminist Scholarship and North African Women” (1992).

expectations. By extension, Arnaud (and Tremaine) undermines the acts of resistance made by real women during the time of the revolution.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that Kateb paints a realistic picture of womanhood in Nedjma who at times conforms to tradition and at times disrupts tradition—between pedagogical and performative temporalities. My reading of Nedjma will explore her development over the course of Kateb Yacine's career from her first poetic apparition in 1948's poem “Nedjma ou le poème ou le couteau” to her final appearance in *Le Polygone étoilé* in 1966. She appears repeatedly throughout his work—at times the object of obsession, at others, a devoted partner who mourns the loss of her beloved. At times she speaks, at others, men speak for her. Throughout the “Nedjma cycle,” she stands in for a number of different things, yet ultimately retains her singularity as well as her “reactionary” potential. In particular, her illegitimacy, her unknown paternity, and her relationships with the men around her reveal a revolutionary novelty that resists symbolization throughout Kateb Yacine's diverse oeuvre.

Nedjma's Poetic Birth

In 1948, the 18 year-old Kateb Yacine wrote a poem about a cousin he loved that set the stage for all of his subsequent work called “Nedjma ou le poème ou le couteau.” In this poem, like the figure of the mother in Camus and Derrida, he touched on themes of knowability and inaccessibility that he returned to in later literary appearances of

Nedjma. A bit more explicitly than even Derrida, the narrator recognizes that he has mistaken taken her as an immortal symbol rather than as an individual human being: “Many a star has followed us Nedjma while we have been dreaming/I had imagined you as timeless as space and the unknown/And now you are dying and I am going astray and you cannot ask me to cry...” (“Nedjma” 1:6-7).⁴¹ Her imminent death helps the narrator see the error of his ways. She makes her appearance as a mortal being just as she is about to lose her life. He also invokes the image of the star that follows her throughout the rest of his work. Here, she is not the star around which he revolves, but the stars revolve around the couple as they dream and awake from their sleep. Although the narrator awakes from his dream, he does not want to respond by “cry[ing]” or otherwise revealing his humanity. He does not want to visibly betray that he has undergone a shift in his thinking that effects his emotional well-being. He tries again to hide his emotion, but his voice betrays him and reveals his sadness: “Nedjma I taught you a powerful *diwan* but my voice now crumbles/I stand amid a desolate music in vain do I cast your heart away it comes back to me decomposed” (“Nedjma” 2:1-3).⁴² He cannot keep himself together to recite the *diwan* he has taught Nedjma because of the strength of his emotion and mysteriously rejects her love. It seems that he cannot bear interacting with Nedjma, the woman. He prefers Nedjma, the symbol. Nedjma's behavior reveals her humanity in the face of the narrator's inhumane treatment. She tries to love him and when her love is rejected, tries again. This time, however, her heart begins to decompose. It undergoes a

41 “Nedjma depuis que nous rêvons bien des astres nous ont suivis.../Je t'avais prévue immortelle ainsi que l'air et l'inconnu/Et voilà que tu meurs et que je me perds et que tu ne peux me demander de pluerer...”

42 “Nedjma je t'ai appris un diwan tout-puissant mais ma voix s'écroule/je suis dans une musique déserte j'ai beau jeter ton coeur il me revient décomposé.”

very human transformation rather than returning in a more idealized, unscathed form.

This is the first time that Nedjma seems to slip out of the author's grasp. Kateb recognizes the limitations of his position as author, interpreter, and lover of Nedjma. Her femininity and humanity elide him.

When Nedjma finally dies, the narrator still struggles to come to terms with her mortality. He oscillates between describing her as dying and immortally living at the end of the poem. Her identity lies somewhere between wholly generalizable and individual:

There was nothing I could say when I lost the Andalusian girl I was agonizing
under her breath I needed the time to utter her name

Palm trees were shedding tears over my head the leaves could have stolen my
heart from the maiden

But Nedjma was asleep remained immortal and I could feel her disconcerting
breasts...

This was in Bône at the carefree time of jujubes Nedjma had opened
boundless palm-groves to me

Nedjma was asleep shiplike love was bleeding beneath her motionless heart

Open your famed eyes Nedjma time passes I will die in seven and seven years
do not be merciless!

Search the deepest fountains for there she flows when her eyes close nights
down like hatches

Sever my dreams like snakes or else carry me into Nedjma's sleep I cannot
endure such solitude! (5:1-8)⁴³

43 Lorsque je perdis l'andalouse je ne pus rien dire j'agonisais sous son souffle il me fallut le temps de la nommer

Les palmiers pleuraient sur ma tête j'aurais pu oublier l'enfant pour le feuillage

Mais Nedjma dormait restait immortelle et je pouvais toucher ses seins déconcertants

C'était à Bône au temps léger des jujubes Nedjma m'avait ouvert d'immenses palmeraies

Nedjma dormait comme un navire l'amour saignait sous son coeur immobile

Nedjma ouvre tes yeux fameux le temps passe je mourrai dans sept ans et sept ans ne sois pas

With her death, his voice and intellect both betray him. There was “nothing [he] could say” and was still imaging her breath as oppressing him. He describes her first in general terms referring to her ethnicity “the Andalusian girl” and needs time to “name her” (“la nommer”) anything more individual. Even in death, she remains “immortal” and her love continues to “bleed beneath her motionless heart.” The narrator implores her to awake from death because the pain of her loss is too difficult for him to accept. Here again, he betrays his own selfish motivation for turning her individuality into something generalizable and her death into a pain she inflicts upon him. He “cannot endure such solitude” he feels when she dies, so he must breathe life into her poetically. In doing so, he takes away her humanity, but also gives life back to her. This tension between respecting Nedjma's individuality and immortalizing her by endowing her with a larger symbolic value repeats itself throughout Kateb's later treatment of Nedjma as well as his treatment of Algerian nationalism. In *Nedjma*, the characters treat Nedjma as an object that comes into and out of their possession. This goes hand in hand with the tension between their willingness to isolate themselves versus a drive to join with their community to combat French colonialism. At times, they act out their personal desires, at time they work toward loftier ideals.

inhumaine!

Fouillez les plus profonds bassins c'est là qu'elle coule quand ses yeux ferment les nuits comme des trappes

Coupez mes rêves tels des serpents ou bien portez-moi dans le sommeil de Nedjma je ne puis supporter cette solitude! “Nedjma,”

Specters of Nedjma

Kateb Yacine's novel, *Nedjma*, found international acclaim as an emblematic novel of Algeria in the midst of its war for independence from France in 1956. The novel tells the story of four young Algerian men: Lakhdar, Mustapha, Rachid, and Mourad and their love for Nedjma, an unhappily-married woman. Alongside their desire for Nedjma, the novel takes place during the nationalist demonstrations of May 8th, 1945—including the Sétif Massacre. As I illustrated in Chapter One, the end of World War II marked the beginning of the large-scale anti-colonial movement in Algeria. The male characters are involved in the demonstrations as well as violence committed against local colonists. Nedjma, neither hero nor anti-hero, provides the tale with an organizing structure as the common point of intersection of all of the characters. Throughout the disjointed, stream of consciousness narrative, we see that most characters have some relationship with Nedjma—whether through romantic or family ties (and sometimes both). Her life events also act as road signs to lend some sense of chronological continuity to the narrative—from her marriage to her affairs to her tribal abduction. Her paternity is also a central concern throughout the text. Born to a French Jew as the result of an illicit relationship in a cave with either Nedjma's husband's Arab father or a lecherous Arab traveler, she was left in the care of a local family in a community that both respect and revile her mixed, uncertain origins.

Before the character Nedjma is ever introduced in the text, Kateb calls attention to her elusiveness and her cultural hybridity by associating her name with the space of a

haunted colonial villa : “Rising above a haunted patio (before the war, a whole family committed suicide here), the Villa Nedjma is surrounded by residences which cut across the streetcar tracks...” (86). Through its primacy, this dead family haunts the Villa Nedjma and the later resonance of the name, Nedjma. In this way, Kateb constructs a specter who haunts the other characters in his text as well as his literary career. Nedjma resembles a Derridean specter from *Specters of Marx*. This is a “question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*.” (*Specters* 11). The name Nedjma arises first in the context of a haunted space: meaning begins with the European family (and the character of Nedjma) coming back into the story. The space she physically inhabits in the present is preceded by her life and death in the poem as well as the mysterious story of a family suicide.

Multiple layers of trauma cover over the physical space of this home in the passage before Nedjma even enters the novel. “Villa” evokes the trauma of a colonial legacy in a multitude of meanings linguistically juxtaposed with the Arab name Nedjma (which can be translated as “star”). First, the trauma of collective suicide likely committed by a family with European origins as a result of the imminent threat of indigenous unrest marks the space which they have appropriated as their own which now lies empty. This event is also anachronistically haunted by the war of independence that has not yet taken place in the context of the novel, but which would have been a pervasive reality in 1956 when this novel was published—two years after the outbreak of the war with France. The materiality of the villa is also significant. The Villa Nedjma “cuts across the streetcar tracks” ostensibly disrupting the flow of traffic across the city.

Similarly, the geographic location of Nedjma's body disrupts and orients the narrative and the lives of the men she encounters—from her illegitimate conception in a cave to her failed attempt at running away with her lover to her unhappy marriage to her tribal abduction. It is not simply the idea of Nedjma that obsesses these men, it is the location and possession of her body that also troubles them and drives them to action. It is also her body that Nedjma refuses the men in her life. As Tremaine points out, it is extremely ambiguous whether any of the men in the text physically consummate their relationship with her (20). Nedjma physically evades them all—haunting the text before she even arrives.

The character Nedjma first enters the text as a ghostly apparition of a woman standing on the lawn outside of the Villa Nedjma—further reiterating the Derridean spectrality of this character in the text. She continually haunts the male protagonists without really becoming a substantial character with a mind and consciousness of her own. Aresu argues that both the ghostly woman as well as the changing landscape of the space she occupies suggests a sense of fatality: “The ghost simile dominating the whole section thus not only stresses Nedjma's elusive condition but also evokes the fatalistic character of the location in the narrator's superstitious mind...as well as the geographical and historical fatality of the land” (56). He calls attention to the shifting identities as well as the inevitability of their movement as components of Mustapha's “superstitious mind” rather than concrete realities. The consciousness of the characters project their own independent realities on the landscapes, history, and the identity of Nedjma—a fact made visible by the shifting perspectives throughout the narrative.

The superficiality of their perception of her is emphasized by the fact that Nedjma is often discussed in terms of her wardrobe. To further stress this connection, Aresu calls attention to the dual significance of the French word “apparition” in French:

The ghost simile at once endows the female character with imprecision and vagueness accentuated by her wearing the traditional Moslem veil. The dual referentiality of “apparition”—in French both appearance and apparition—focalizes Mustapha's purported surprise and, therefore, his unreliable perception. It also paves the way for the abstraction of the female protagonist into whom Mustapha projects his phantasms. (57)

For Aresu, Mustapha becomes a kind of unreliable narrator during this vision. He sees Nedjma where she is not physically present just as he reads his own desires into his perceptions of Nedjma. When she appears, he notices her appearance and does not question the legitimacy of his vision. The only clear detail that stands out to him is her veil—a garment that we will later see as a powerful, but misleading cultural symbol. This instance also marks the first in a long line of “abstraction[s] of the female protagonist” on the part of Mustapha and the other male protagonists. They see her physically, from the outside, and at a distance from her thoughts, desires, and wishes. Tremaine takes Nedjma at face value in this regard—relegating her function to the simple object of sexual desire who prevents action:

Nedjma exerts a tremendous sexual attraction on the men closest to her, disrupting their lives and distorting their ability to think and act purposefully. She does this not because she is consciously and willfully malevolent, but simply because she is Nedjma—beautiful, mysterious, and, as the “star” of the tribe, self-centered in the extreme from the time of childhood. (33)

According to this account, she is a spoiled, egotistical woman who does not realize that her beauty ruins the lives of the men around her. Revealing herself to them (or even

letting herself be spied upon) prevents them from thinking clearly and acting in accordance with the revolution. This seems like a very superficial account of her character. As early as her full entrance into the text, she defies this kind of superficial reading.

Nedjma fully enters the text as a living, breathing woman a few pages after the Villa Nedjma scene in a way that emphasizes the physicality of her body and the clothing that covers. Layers of meaning cloak Nedjma like the layers of historical meaning overlaying the physical presence of the Villa Nedjma: “Garment and flesh new-washed, Nedjma is naked in her dress; she shakes her stifling auburn hair, opens and closes the window; as if she were endlessly trying to drive the air away, or at least make it circulate by her movements...” (89). Her auburn hair betrays her mixed origins and her nudity is emphasized underneath her layers of clothes. She is naked under her clothing—or possibly despite her clothing. This nudity suggests that those around her think that they understand her based on her appearance and their knowledge of her history. However, Nedjma herself resists this impulse through “shak[ing]” her “stifling” hair and opening and closing the window. By this movement, she disrupts the air and readings of her character.

The futility of completely breaking free of the preconceived notions and itineraries of those around her is emphasized by her “endless” pursuit “to drive the air away.” She can make the air in her home circulate through opening and closing the window, but she cannot drive the air out of her house entirely. Similarly, in the context of the Algerian War and Nedjma's life, there were elements of the past that circulate

throughout the text, but none that disappear conclusively—despite the attempts of colonizers or colonized to do so, “The Algerian's life in colonial Algeria is closed in, literally and narratively, by hard labor, poverty, repression and imprisonment. Images of closure haunt the text” (Erickson 33). Erickson argues that this closure extends beyond Nedjma's potential feelings of entrapment to include a more general condition of life under colonial occupation in Algeria. Nedjma is not the only one trapped within the expectations of outside gazes and outside restrictions. Rather, she represents a broader attempt at redirecting the flow of history and oppression.

Nedjma's Algerian Veils

Nedjma's appearance—particularly her veils—are a topic of discussion throughout the entire novel. For the characters around her, her veil is linked with her identity. However, she defies this notion time and time again. Similarly, the significance of the veil is culturally linked to the French fetishization of it. The French rallied most vocally around the veil as an indication of the oppression of Muslim women by Muslim men. The most visible barrier between traditional Muslim and European Christian societies, the veil was (and still is) an object of fixation for outsiders looking in at groups with cultural, religious, and symbolic ties to this practice. By the outbreak of the war, the vast majority of women (even those who were very Westernized) wore veils in the streets of urban centers (Heggoy 454). The French used the image of the isolated, alienated Algerian woman as the pawn of her husband as a common trope by which to justify

interference into the family structure and as a benefit of sustaining the colonial relationship with Algeria:

“If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight.” It is the situation of women that was accordingly taken as the theme of action. The dominant administration solemnly undertook to defend this woman, pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered...It described the immense possibilities of women, unfortunately transformed by the Algerian man into an inert, demonetized, indeed dehumanized object. (Fanon 38)

In his famous essay, “Algeria Unveiled,” Fanon quotes a French politician who describes the work of infiltrating women as a violent violation of their personal and domestic space. They sought to “conquer” the women by imposing themselves on the domestic spaces “where they hide.” By purporting to defend Algerian women from their men, they covered over the violence of their own project of domination. Clearly the political motivation rested more on maintaining hegemony rather than an earnest concern for the rights of Muslim women.

The French effort to “emancipate” veiled women culminated in a heavily-publicized, large-scale act of unveiling orchestrated by psychological warfare officers on May 13, 1958. During a military coup in Algiers to oust the civilian governor of Algeria: “columns of Algerian women marched into the central Algiers Forum and 'spontaneously' unveiled and joined hands with ecstatic European crowds in acts of inter-racial 'fraternization'” (MacMaster 98). *El Moudjahid* described this demonstration as a “mascarade” in which soldiers forced dozens of desperate women who relied economically upon the French “recrutée parmi les bonnes-à-tout-faire du Gouvernement

Général et les pensionnaires des maisons publiques” (“La Femme algérienne”) to unveil against their will. In 1959, they called it a “sinistre comédie des voiles,” “une scène de cirque” where women were treated “comme des animaux de foire” as they were forced to participate in a “striptease au goût méditerranéen” (“Après l’assassinat”). Interestingly, the nationalist newspaper related the act of unveiling to a performance using comparisons to masking, acting, or playing in a circus. Contrary to what the French in Algeria would have the world believe, removing one covering did not result in a more authentic picture of the Muslim women who participated in the rally, but obscured their identity through the inauthenticity of the act. It was only in a vulgar, cheap sense that women revealed more of their bodies or identities—a “striptease for Mediterranean tastes not a political or social act of defiance against repression. Not knowing the details of the context, Western media spun this story as a triumph of Western feminism against Eastern oppression of women. In the minds of the increasingly militarized Algerian government, this collective act of coming together to unveil “was meant to be a symbol of the last object to the total Frenchification of Algeria” (Lazreg, “Gender and Politics” 766).

But, for whose benefit was this staging meant? With this show, the reluctant French government (and the international community) was supposed to regain investment in the cause of maintaining French hegemony in Algeria. Clearly, this was not a triumph for the women who had no choice but to drop their veils nor the scores of women who refused to participate. The situation was much more complicated. As we will see in more detail in Chapter Four, there were women who chose to unveil in their daily lives, but they were not performing a spectacle or “striptease” for European or Muslim men.

Their unveiling was an effort at illustrating their strength rather than an encouragement for objectification. The emphasis was not the sexualization of their bodies, but their equal participation in a collective liberation effort from colonialism as well as traditional paternalism. Nedjma, too, nonchalantly changes veils several times over the course of the narration—sometimes choosing to go unveiled—like a “gypsy” or nomad characterized by her perpetual movement: “She walks in proudly; without a veil, she looks like a gypsy” (*Nedjma* 320).

Fanon, like the French, offers a somewhat limited view of veiling that ultimately contributes to the perpetuation of the objectification of women. He criticizes the French desire to unveil Algerian women as an expression to commit sexual violence: “Thus the rape of the Algerian woman in the dream of a European is always preceded by a rending of the veil. We here witness a double deflowering” (45). He likens unveiling a woman with an act of sexual violence that precedes the rape that Western men would like to commit on Algerian women. This kind of rape dream contains two rapes. He problematically places a great deal of significance in the gesture of unveiling—even in his discussion of women who chose to willingly unveil themselves: “Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them, piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare” (42). He focuses on the object, the body, that lies behind the veil rather than the actions performed by this body or the voice possessed by this body—conflating the Algerian woman with the Algerian nation. The veil hides the most intimate secrets of the Algerian woman and Algeria. Fanon describes unveiling in highly symbolic, emotional language as a violation of secrets, resistance, and

sexual prudence. Tellingly, he adds “prostitutes” to the list of women who participated in the rally. (62). By doing so, he repeats the gesture of wrenching agency from these women and symbolizing them in a highly dangerous way—as was the compulsion with Nedjma. Fanon's account makes it difficult for a woman like Nedjma to choose to unveil for personal or political reasons without making the country vulnerable to various forms of cultural, political, and sexual exploitation. Lazreg, too, argues that some women were willing and comfortable with taking off their veils and criticizes Fanon for ignoring this point of view (*Eloquence* 127).

The opposite situation arises for Nedjma when she is kidnapped and forced to veil. She is captured halfway through the text and taken to her purported ancestral village where she is forced to wear a veil and spied upon as she bathes. The men around her force her to play a role as a thinly-veiled fulfillment of their own desires. Aresu compares this with traditional expectations imposed upon women during the revolution:

The representation of Nedjma's ultimate captivity should be primarily understood in the context of the anticolonial, revolutionary struggle from which it proceeds. But if Nedjma's servitude serves as a metaphor for colonial bondage, it also portrays the kind of powerlessness with which Kateb will later become more pointedly concerned. The political role Nedjma and such female characters as the Kahina assume in Kateb's theatre, for instance, clearly situate the writer's own ideology, as do his well-known and frequent statements on behalf of Algerian women. (Aresu 23, Note 36)

In this way, Kateb's text acts as a kind of warning to future revolutionaries. Coercion and projection are not simply the tools of colonial violence, but can also be implemented in the name of colonial resistance to similarly horrifying ends. Nedjma's desires are completely ignored in the face of the revolutionary projects of the men. They return to

the Nadhor in order to revisit their ancestral history and seek to incorporate this history into their present struggle, but ultimately fail to acknowledge their own methods of exploitation and selective perception.

Fanon, however, argues that the general trend among most Algerians at the time was to depoliticize the veil. For most Algerians, it did not hold the same highly-charged political significance as it did for Europeans: “To the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonized opposes the cult of the veil” (47). This “cult of the veil” was largely a European invention which Lazreg credits to “French colonial men's deep-seated erotic obsession *and* French women's frustration with native women” (*Eloquence* 136). Both European men and women fixated on the veil as one of the most obvious differences between their culture and that of the indigenous Muslims. Algerian women were rarely seen by European eyes, so the fact that they wore veils when they were seen on the streets made the presence of the veil very obvious.

However, as we will see in the case of Nedjma and in the next chapter, the veil comes on and off relatively easily throughout the war among women fighters in order to carry out their duties in the fight for Algerian liberation. Fanon notes that the veil changed significance among the Muslim Algerians after this forceful removal ceremony: “After the 13th of May, the veil was resumed, but stripped once and for all of its exclusively traditional dimension” (63). This analysis seems a bit strong, but it is clear that the significance of the veil extended beyond the purely religious resonance of its tradition. In a 1960 article in *El Moudjahid*, one woman described the reaction of women to guard the veil after this forced unveiling as a sign of defiance against French

interference into their personal lives: “leur situation n'a pas changé, elles ont seulement été ridiculisées; elles sont beaucoup plus à plaindre qu'à envier. Le seul résultat, c'est que des jeunes Algériennes, qui sans cela ne l'auraient pas été sont maintenant voilées, et pensent le rester jusqu'à la Libération” (“Femmes algériennes”).⁴⁴ Contrary to their intentions, this woman testifies that as a direct result of this spectacle, women felt more compelled to veil themselves as an act of resistance against the French. As for the women who participated in the event: “Their situation did not change, they were just ridiculed.” The social and cultural standings of these women was made worse, not improved as the French professed. For the majority of the rest of Algeria's women, this was not simply a matter of religion, but one of standing up to French humiliation and reasserting possession over their veils and their bodies.

Ultimately, Lazreg argues that this public display did more harm than good for Algerian women because it brought the discussion of women back to square one—their bodies. Through the May 13th display, French colonists ensured that the discussion of Algerian women would focus on the ways in which they were possessed and hidden by their men rather than the strength of their actions in the liberation movement:

It brought into the limelight the politicization of women's bodies and their symbolic appropriation by colonial authorities. It brought home to Algerian women their vulnerability, at a time when many of them thought they were making history and imposing themselves on men's consciousness as more than mere sex symbols. (*Eloquence* 135)

This spectacle reversed some of the effects of women's participation in the revolution by objectifying them in a time when some women were struggling to find voices of their

⁴⁴ *EM*, 1969, 272. “Femmes algériennes dans la guerre.” November 1960.

own. It was difficult to see these bodies as posing a serious political threat to French hegemony when they were repeatedly represented as sexual objects under constant threat of exploitation by either the French or their own men. This would have also made it more difficult for Algerian women to see themselves as more than mere objects and would have worked against their efforts at challenging their social and cultural milieu for themselves. Even the well-intentioned Fanon fell into this trap—fetishizing the veil and the female body while drawing attention away from the agency of women in participating in the liberation of themselves and their country.

Nedjma resists fetishization of the veil by choosing her veils based on her desired outcome. Later in the text, the emphasis of her veil lies more on the intentional creation of identity rather than her underlying nudity emphasized at the beginning. This time, her body is described as being nearly invisible in order to emphasize the visibility of her face:

She was wearing a wide hood of pale blue silk, the kind emancipated Moroccan women wear now; funny hoods; they cover the breast, the waist, the hips, fall straight to the ankles; a little more and they'd cover the gold anklets (the customer was wearing a very fine and heavy one)...The new hoods are only an excuse to show the face by covering the body with a uniform rampart, so as not to give any excuse for prudish criticism...She spoke to me in French. Trying to cut off all communication by treating me not only as a porter, but as a criminal she could have nothing in common with, avoiding conversation in the mother tongue. (96)

Nedjma hides her Algerian identity under her Moroccan hood in order to avoid the “prudish criticism” of observers. Her attempts to disrupt the gaze of observers yields mixed results. Although more modest, the hood of the “emancipated Moroccan women” that she wears is characterized as “funny” by the man describing her. This peculiarity seems related not only to the style of the hood, but also by the fact that it is worn by

progressive foreign women. The clothing, however, is of little consequence to the man describing her who focuses on the language she uses with him. He sees her use of French as an attempt at imposing a distance between them as she would with “a criminal she could have nothing in common with” instead of an Arab brother.

In a series called “Journal d'une Maquisarde” published in *El Moudjahid*, that I will return to in Chapter Four, women in the maquis would often undertake a similar change of costume in order to change their identities from revolutionary to peasant in order to dupe the French:

Quant à nous, seules, nous pouvions, en cas de danger grave, lorsque l'alarme n'avait pas été donné assez tôt, tout transformer le cas échéant en simples paysannes. Ce n'était qu'une question de costumes. Il suffisait aux citadines de cacher leur teint trop blanc et elles paraissaient alors avoir vécu dans les montagnes depuis leur naissance. (“Journal d'une maquisarde”)⁴⁵

Here, too, the French read identity by hair color and clothing style. In order to change from guilty revolutionary to innocent peasant, a woman simply needed a local garment and a veil. To the French, local women would never dye their hair or stray from the local fashion of the village and revolutionaries would never don the normative garb of the local villagers. In *Nedjma*, the scrutiny comes from a fellow non-European who is more attuned to the local population and its customs, but the resentment and ignorance is similar. When Nedjma covers over her local identity, she receives scorn from the man who thinks that he recognizes the meaning of her actions and the fashion of her appearance. Her choice to dress like an emancipated foreigner is regarded as “funny” and her choice to speak in French is interpreted as a crime against the porter. He

⁴⁵ EM 1959.417 “Journal d'une maquisarde” “Les villages de la mort.” 17 August 1959

understands her decision to speak with him in the language that he perceives as the common “mother tongue” as an affront to their shared cultural experience as well as their shared political struggle. In both cases, Nedjma is read by her observers in a way that shows little regard for her thoughts, desires, or subjectivity. This kind of surface reading of Nedjma's choice of clothing and language mirrors the trauma of colonial violence that appropriated Algeria as a French colony with little regard for the thoughts or desires of its inhabitants. The text, itself, warns that “La féminité de Nedjma est ailleurs” (*Nedjma* 78). Her femininity lies not in the superficial glistening of her auburn locks or the nudity that lies underneath her various veils and articles of clothing. It is elsewhere and largely inaccessible to the men who project their desires upon her.

Nedjma embodies conflicting identities in a similar way that Algeria is comprised of a multitude of identities. She straddles European and non-European cultures in ways that are not always predictable. Her veils and choice of language make her difficult to read just like the people and history of Algeria make the forms of the revolution difficult to predict. As we have seen in other instances before this point, Nedjma's performative aspects elude a pedagogical understanding of her hybrid identity. Woodhull likewise compares Nedjma to Algeria in their mutual qualities of “betweenness”:

Nedjma thus emblemizes Algeria's 'betweenness' because of her multi-faceted, contradictory, and shifting identity which encompasses past and future, tribal and national society. She is of culturally mixed and uncertain parentage and has symbolic ties to France not only through class privilege and education but also through revolutionary immigrant workers who are themselves cultural hybrids. She embodies Algeria's repeated conquest, resistance, and cultural renewal (“virgin after each rape”) and fuels the male protagonists' revolutionary activity. (50)

Nedjma's origins are mixed and difficult to definitively pinpoint as are the cultural practices and beliefs of the Algeria people. Similar to Algeria's national identity, Nedjma's identity is overdetermined by the history of the spaces she inhabits, the expectations of the men around her, and the clothing that she wears, but she subverts these itineraries at key moments throughout the text. When she interacts with the shopkeeper, Nedjma chooses to cover her hair in a Moroccan hood that is not typical to her context and speak in French—annoying the man and disrupting his expectations.

Later in the text, she is taken to her ancestral village by Si Mokhtar and Rachid to fulfill their desire to possess Nedjma and establish a new relationship with their heritage. Over the course of the trip, they treat her like an instrument of their own devices. Most strikingly, they watch her bathe from a distance—even allowing other villagers to do so—and force her to wear a veil. This re-veiling resonates with the forced, staged unveiling by the French of Muslim women rather than with a decision to wear a veil in the maquis as a form of hiding one's identity or the act of re-veiling as a way of resisting French control, “Nedjma's forced reveiling at the time of her imprisonment on the Nadhor...signals a loss of freedom imposed on her against her will” (Woodhull 53). Nedjma is forced to adopt a veil as a result of the fantasy of her male abductors to reappropriate tradition. Contrary to Tremaine's argument, it does not appear that their obsession with Nedjma has somehow driven these men to abduct and veil her. Rather, she becomes a part of a much larger itinerary based on the fantasy of an idealistic return to native soil. Their behavior on the Nadhor reveals the potential for perverse consequences when this fantasy is lived out against the will of all of the participants:

“The passages dealing with the scene on the Nadhor show clearly that Nedjma neither embraces the traditional role assigned her by the black man nor accepts her confinement in the remote mountain camp” (Woodhull 53).

Nedjma, however, does not passively give in to their fantasies. Her resistance reveals that these fantasies are not commonly held by all members of Algerian society and that there is the possibility of resistance when these fantasies become pervasive. Near the end of the text, Nedjma defiantly shows off her free will to veil or unveil as she sees fit when she enters a cafe without covering her head. “She walks in proudly; without a veil, she looks like a gypsy” (*Nedjma* 320). Even with her abduction, she proves that her identity extends beyond the symbolism the men attempt to impose upon her, “Nedjma seems invulnerable to capture as a living symbol, for this fleet-footed girl-carriage eludes enclosure within any identity” (Woodhull 51). Despite their best attempts at manipulating her identity to suit their wishes, she emerges unveiled and “proud.” Aresu describes Nedjma's “transformative function” as related to the process of mythification and totalization constantly at work and subverted throughout the text: “That the poetic text assigns the figure of woman a transformative function is made clear by the concomittant process of (de)mythification and oppositive totalization that systematically underlies nearly every evocation of Nedjma” (220). At times, the men in Nedjma's life seem to understand her completely. At others, she defies their expectations and asserts her individuality. This cycle of readability and unreadability makes her both a symbol for women of the revolution and also an individual woman trying to survive in the midst of a nascent revolution. Similarly, it is the readability and unreadability of the novel that

Aresu perceives as its destabilizing component in terms of its place alongside Camus in French literature: “The unmistakably Algerian ethos of the novel and its almost inevitable hermeticism thus provided the formal—and political—mechanism of elusion and postponement that decentered and destabilized the very art form within which it seemed to inscribe itself” (107). The novel only resonates in the specific Algerian context in which it was written just Nedjma only resonates in her particular context. Certain elements of each are generalizable, but their specificity defies generality. The novel reveals that reading either Nedjma or the Algerian revolution as mere symbols is both dangerous and inaccurate.

Disrupting Hierarchies

By disrupting the fantasies of the men around her, Nedjma performs an alternative form of revolutionary work on behalf of Algerian women in the social sphere. Even without subjectivity or consciousness, she resists interpretation and possession. Her spectral multiplicity eludes the men around her. Woodhull aligns Nedjma's failure to comply with the fantasies of her male counterparts with a form of revolutionary work comparable to the kind undertaken by the men who desire her:

By virtue of her inassimilable quality in relation both to France and to the traditional tribal society, she is aligned with Mustapha, Mourad and Rachid, the young men from the city who have defied French colonial authority by supporting Lakhdar when he is arrested for attacking their villainous foreman at the construction site. To a certain extent, then, the structure of the narrative

affirms Nedjma's liberation by subverting the fiction's chronology and negating the social meaning it imposes. (54)

Nedjma neither aligns herself wholly with France nor wholly with the men of the nascent revolution. She serves the revolution in a way that defies expectations along with defying a strictly political reading of the novel. Woodhull uses the example of the disjointed chronology of the narrative to further support her claim. Nedjma's self-liberation indicates a revolutionary position consistent with the project of Algerian self-determination and the self-determination of women in Algerian culture.

Taking this argument even further, Nedjma's actions illustrate the shortcomings of the revolutionary methodologies of the men around her. They attempt to possess, abduct, violate, and seduce her in ways that perpetuate her exploitation. Their participation in the revolution is stifled by their unwillingness to develop a more progressive attitude towards women's liberation:

The 'whirling blood' of the unsettled tribal order, then, not only holds the promise of a new, emancipatory social formation but also threatens to resurrect the familiar patriarchal line with its alternating—and ultimately deadly—male fantasies of impotence and omnipotence in relation to the mother/lover. (56)

Holding Nedjma captive literally and figuratively threatens to stall out the socially progressive aspect of the revolution indicated by Fanon and encourages a return to the more destructive elements of tribal traditionalism. By ignoring Nedjma's needs and desires for post-revolutionary life, Kateb calls attention to areas of improvement in the nationalist agenda of his day. I will return to the subject of the role of women in the independence movement more thoroughly in Chapter Four.

Despite the potential for a revolutionary reading of Nedjma, a number of concerns arise when looking at the novel in isolation of the rest of Kateb's Nedjma cycle. Nedjma lacks a voice, a consciousness, and any kind of explicit political agenda. Mythologizing her to the status of a *moudjahida* seems a bit premature in relation to a more comprehensive reading of the novel which goes further to displace the colonial power hierarchy. In terms of the Algerian struggle for independence, the novel re-appropriates colonial history in order to develop concrete plans for an independent future. For example, ownership of Algerian trains moves back and forth between the French and Algerian. Reworking history enables Rachid to re-imagine a future where the French do not impose their culture and language on Algeria:

What's he doing in an Algerian train anyway, that sailor with his Marseillais accent? Of course the train is furnished by France...If we had our own trains...First of all, the farmers would be comfortable. They wouldn't be fidgeting at each station, afraid of missing their stop. They could read. And in Arabic too! I'd have to reeducate myself in our own language. I'd be grandfather's classmate... (*Nedjma* 84)

New possibilities for the future are conceptualized through an interrogation of the material history of the objects around them. This passage disrupts temporality through characterizing the train as “Algerian,” but then qualifying this statement that the train was furnished by the French. The origins and ownership of the train are both distinguished from one another and thrown into question. Who belongs rightfully on the train? The Arab man? The French man? This leads to hypothesizing over possible futures that could come in a shift of material possession.

Material possessions (including trains and Nedjma) exchange hands and the

narrative shifts from perspective to perspective across time and space. John D. Erickson describes this as a “return and repetition” signaling “a shift from the discourse of colonialism to that of Algerian independence”:

Kateb thus turns historical evolution against itself by undercutting the notion of absolute truth through the disintegration of chronology, and by restoring historical perspective through return and repetition that involve not mere succession but displaced difference. Here this is produced by a shift from the discourse of colonialism to that of Algerian independence. (Erickson 38)

Erickson's argument highlights “displaced difference” and a “shift” in discourse.

However, I would suggest that rather than displacement, this scene suggests re-appropriation. This material repossession of the train through idealistic, revolutionary rhetoric creates as many problems as it portends to solve. In the speaker's world, the function of Algerian trains could change with a shift in ownership. If the Algerian trains were furnished by Algerians, they might be of greater use to the Algerian people.

However, the practical challenges of this idealized re-appropriation come into view with the idea that not all Algerians speak their “mother tongue” fluently. The speaker would have to “reeducate” himself in his own language along with his grandfather. So, if Arabic is neither his language nor his grandfather's language, whose is it? The farmer's?

Although the farmer may know how to speak it, does he know how to read it?

In general, the novel raises more questions than it answers regarding the future of the Algerian war for independence. Part of this difficulty is a function of the violence of re-appropriation. As we saw with Nedjma's encounter with the porter, claiming Arabic as the rightful language of Algeria trivializes the linguistic multiplicity of Algeria (and Nedjma) and reduces it to a violent political gesture of retaliation against French

domination—reenacting a certain degree of the violence imposed upon the Algerian culture. Ultimately, the novel reveals, “...A disparity lying at the root of past occurrences. None of the narrators is able to weave the threads of experiences into a coherent whole” (Erickson 39). The novel suggests a rupture with chronology, tradition, and the colonial hierarchy. Characters look to the past in order to assist with this process, but the text reveals inherent shortcomings with this approach without proposing a viable alternative: “Not a step backward to honor our tribe, the only link that remains to us by which we can unite and restore our people, even if we hope for more than that” (*Nedjma* 170-71). The characters recognize the necessity of “hop[ing] for more than” what the lessons of the past can offer, but fail to recognize the full extent of the harmful consequences on relying too heavily on the past for social progress.

Evelyn Accad characterizes the stakes of colonialism and the nationalist movement in Algeria in terms of paternity. By her account, the most subversive element of *Nedjma* is her role in calling attention to—and I would argue, disrupting—the destructive paternalism latent in the revolution as a response to colonialism. She calls *Nedjma*: “A symbolic nexus which is almost exclusively female-procreative—it is not the matrix but the paternity of the Algerian people which is called into question by the intrusion of colonialism. Likewise, the stability of the national matrix assures that paternity will ultimately be re-established” (Accad in Woodhull 50). By this account, it is not surprising that the men around *Nedjma* who participate in the revolution ignore her desires. The revolution comes about as a way of re-establishing the paternity of the Algerian nation. The “symbolic nexus” in the text which radiates outward from *Nedjma*

exists independently of nationalism or colonialism. Rather, it indicates an alternate mode of organizing time, space, and identity. However, the question of Nedjma's paternity resonates with the question of Algerian paternity in her uncertain origins as well as her abduction and return to her (possible) ancestral village.

Si Mokhtar, the traveling Arab con artist/vagrant is one of Nedjma's possible fathers who embodies a mobile, "schizophrenic" form of paternity that resembles that of Algeria. He defies the traditional category of fatherhood and calls into question the origins of all of the characters through his involvement in several illicit relationships:

Si Mokhtar is the model of the schizophrenic hero, he who undoes, who unmakes the structures of family and society ("faisant et défaisant les mariages," 106). The labors of this epic philanderer, which earn him the titles of "false father" and "second husband," cast doubt on the origins of all personages and relationships in the novel." (Erickson 41)

Si Mokhtar's various affairs and illegitimate children make him a new kind of tribal leader in the text. In the midst of the chaos and carelessness of the older generation embodied by Si Mokhtar, it is no wonder that the Minister of Information of the Algerian Provisional Government, M'hammed Yazid, describes the youth as the actors against colonialism as well as traditional authority:

La jeunesse a bénéficié des circonstances exceptionnelles créées par la Révolution. La Révolution a provoqué un éclatement de toutes les structures colonialistes et entraîné l'élimination progressive des structures et des survivances féodales. On a vu par exemple le jeune quitter sa famille, échapper à l'autorité traditionaliste du père, échapper au poids de la famille dans la mesure où ce poids était parfois rétrograde politiquement. ("La jeunesse algérienne")

Young men break from the authority of their traditional family structure and culture in the name of the revolution. The revolution, itself, is responsible for providing the

circumstances enabling the youth to free themselves from tradition when necessary.

Decadent, careless characters such as Si Mokhtar and the necessity of the revolution to break with traditional power hierarchies cast a rather negative light on the category of paternity and fatherhood during this period.

Part of the feeling of hopelessness in the text derives from this failure of paternity to ever productively materialize for Nedjma or for Algeria: “In *Nedjma*, the hero's itinerary follows the initiating trials of an adolescence lived under the signs of loss and opposition, of the painful discovery of fundamentally antagonistic realities: inaccessibility of the loved one, paternal absence and betrayal, and dispersal of the headless clan” (Aresu 145). Many traditional sources of love and comfort remain perpetually inaccessible: the beloved (Nedjma), fathers, and the community. The ensuing sense of loss or frustration leads to perpetuating the cycle of violence and hopelessness in *Nedjma* that differs in Kateb's later works. Graebner describes the social ruins on which the text is constructed as empowering an “over-investment in the mother-city” that comes about precisely as a result of this destruction:

...Ruins maintain a connection with the mythic elements of *Nedjma*, and an ideological over-investment in the mother-city may be a necessary danger in a novel where the fathers are decadent or absent. Ruins and ancestors derive their power for Kateb not from their symbolism as vestiges of past grandeur, but from the very fact of their destruction. All the major characters descend from such a ruined ancestor: the mythologized Keblout. (158)

The text is founded on ruins. In *Nedjma*, Algeria lies in ruins after her various experiences with colonialism and violent forms of nationalism, Nedjma's family structure lies in ruins as a result of her unknown paternity, her abduction, her unfulfilling marriage,

and her extra-marital affair(s), and the desires of all the characters lie in ruins because of their unattainability.

Tremaine describes a bleak portrait of *Nedjma* in the midst of these ruins that never become rebuilt. In part, this hopelessness comes as a result of a failure on the characters to act or “shap[e] the course of their own lives.” They are too caught up in the contradictions and ruins of their own lives to shift the direction of the world around them:

In *Nedjma*, the picture seems somewhat bleaker—things simply get broken, whether there are revolutionaries to break them or not. The novel offers no substantial hope of a world which is at the same time human and entirely free of violence. Clearly, however, the world is not yet turning as it ought to turn or as it is capable of turning. People are not yet “dans le sens de la vie,” opening the prisons of their own violence and inner dissension, actively shaping the course of their own lives, and assuming their proper place in the natural and historical order. Until these conditions are met and the revolution fairly begun, an absence of itinerary will continue to abolish the notion of time. (36)

This “absence of itinerary” takes on a distinctly negative sense for Tremaine as does the failure he perceives of the Algerian people to actively cohere and set a viable itinerary to oppose colonialism. However, this bleak “absence” could also be seen as a necessary step toward disrupting (colonial and anti-colonial) paternalism and allowing space for a new conceptualization of Algerian citizenship that could potentially become more inclusive of women and other foreclosed or illegitimate forms of power, “...A type of history based not on male-line inheritance, but on detours and dodges among the ruins” (Graebner159). Acknowledging these “detours and dodges” reveals the fault lines of colonial paternity at the same time that it questions traditional forms of paternity, “Kateb's work, as it participates in contemporary debates over the construction of

postcolonial history, implies learning to use such overlays to build a provisional historical account on shifting ground, as a means of finding one's way among the ruins of the present” (Graebner 159). Kateb builds upon the ruins he illustrates in *Nedjma* throughout his later work. He returns to the same characters, the same themes, and the same ruins over the course of his career to work through his country's colonial history as well as its present struggle for an identity independent of colonial France.

Nedjma's Appearance on Stage

Following the success of *Nedjma's* publication in 1956, Kateb began to explore theater under the influence of his conversations with Bertolt Brecht. Like Brecht, he was a Marxist and believed in the political potential of the theater, but did not agree with Brecht's resistance to traditional forms such as tragedy. Despite his editor's insensitive assessment of his work, “This is too complicated. In Algeria you've got such pretty sheep, why don't you talk about your sheep?,” Kateb became increasingly committed to the political dimension of his work—even letting the battleground serve as the setting for some of his plays. In his drama, his characters became less obsessed with *Nedjma* and more concerned with the revolution. As both an Algerian and a member of the Communist Party since 1947, Kateb became a target of the intelligence community while living in France from 1950-1959. In 1954, he published a play, *Le cadavre encerclé*, a tragedy that was banned in France about an Algerian nationalist confronting the French military. Here, he resurrected some of the characters from *Nedjma* (including *Nedjma*,

herself) as they struggle to escape death by the French. He published *Le cercle des représailles* in 1959—consisting in four short plays beginning with *Le cadavre encerclé*. The other plays, *La poudre d'intelligence*, *Les ancêtres redoublent de férocité*, and *Le vautour*, followed a similarly politically-informed plot with specific references to the war and a similar cast of characters. Nedjma, however, plays a less central role in these plays than in either the poem or the novel which share her name. In fact, she is not even mentioned in *La poudre d'intelligence* or *Le vautour*. In *Les ancêtres redoublent de férocité* Kateb identifies her as the mourning “Femme Sauvage”—only mentioning her explicitly by name in the stage directions near the end of the play when she takes off her veil: “*The woman of the wild drops her veil, unable to put it back on, revealing her beauty...We recognize Nedjma*” (*Les ancêtres* 146). Whereas the various types of veils Nedjma wore contributed to the construction of her identity in the past, it is only through unveiling that her identity is revealed in this play.

Most of the action in *Le cadavre encerclé* revolves around Lakhdar's imminent death at the hands of French troops and the way that Nedjma and her son deal with it. The play opens after Lakhdar has been seriously wounded. Most of the characters, including Nedjma and their son, Ali, attempt to deal with his death and the feelings of revenge they have for the French over the course of the play. Ultimately, Nedjma tries to convince her son not to reciprocate violence with violence, but it is suggested that Ali thinks otherwise. In this play, Nedjma takes a much more active role in the action than she had in prior iterations. This becomes clear early in the play since Nedjma appears in a manner that parallels that of *Nedjma*—being interpellated before she appears physically

and being described in terms of her nudity. Nedjma's name is first associated with a location before she appears on stage. However, her location changes from a villa with a horrific past to a street, which Kateb compares with an artery: “Ici est la rue de Nedjma mon étoile, la seule artère où je veux rendre l'âme. C'est une rue toujours crépusculaire, dont les maisons perdent leur blancheur comme du sang, avec une violence d'atomes au bord de l'explosion” (*Le cadavre* 18). Nedjma's physical location changes from a static, haunted home that rich Europeans once inhabited to a more fluid space which allows for blood flow and movement. Violence, again plays a role in this space, but rather than being an object haunted by a legacy of violence, the street perpetrates an atomic, primordial violence, “une violence d'atomes au bord de l'explosion.”

The meaning associated with Nedjma's veiling and unveiling differs significantly in this play. There is no speculation about the clothing she wears or her nudity. Instead, she quickly takes off her veil at the beginning of the play in order to reveal her identity. When Nedjma appears, she wears a veil, but she quickly kneels and takes off her veil, clothes, and laments Lakhdar's loss: “*Nedjma, voilée, quittant sa chambre, va vers l'impasse. Elle déchire son voile, sa joue, sa robe et se lamente*” (*Le cadavre* 20). The audience and characters watch her public display of nudity that differs significantly from her nudity in *Nedjma*. Previously, she is described as nude despite her clothing and as concealing her true identity. She is stripped by the violent gazes of men who desire her and the jealous women around her who project their thoughts and desires upon her. The scene in *Le Cadavre* also closely resembles the bathing scene that takes place when Nedjma is abducted on the Nadhor. Previously, spectators invaded her private moment

bathing and imposed their gaze upon her unbeknownst to her. This time, however, the eyes of the audience and characters on stage follow her as she reveals her nudity to those around her lamenting Lakhdar. Her decision to reveal her body suggests increased possession of and autonomy over her actions. Furthermore, she is given more of a voice in *Le Cadavre* than she had previously been given in *Nedjma* or the poem, “Nedjma” speaking the words of a *moudjahida* seeking to take revenge upon Lakhdar's murderers as well as colonial oppression, “comme une promesse de lutte, indispensable à la vengeance que nous méditons sans un mot, sans une arme, mais nous avons au moins la certitude d’être battus avec l’orgueil d’être invincibles” (*Le cadavre* 22).

Nedjma defies typical revolutionary behavior by refraining from engaging in violent conflicts with the French like her four suitors who fight colonial oppression with their fists. She sees herself as an “invincible” “promesse de lutte” and defies the expectations of those around her. She also defies expectations based on prior iterations of her character. No longer simply an object that prevents the men from following their ideals, Nedjma becomes a character who possesses her own set of ideals:

Perhaps owing to the novel's immediate historical context, however, Nedjma remains the only character unassociated in childhood and adolescence characterization with the type of political determinism that makes up Rachid, Mourad, Lakhdar and Mustapha's portrayals. Despite the reality of historical and national myth that informs her portrait, Nedjma's political transformation does not occur until her involvement with Lakhdar and Marguerite in *Le Cadavre encerclé*. No longer a focal construct but a character in transition, she contends with the existence of a rival lover...she emerges as a character now unquestionably determined by political circumstance. (Aresu 96)

The political conflict becomes the organizing principle of the narrative in place of Nedjma. This transformation also enables her to find her own voice as a character. She

is not the static “star” that characters follow, but takes her place in the cast of characters along with the others as they pursue their struggle against oppression.

Nedjma's Revolutionary Family

Despite the centrality of a concerted struggle against French oppression compared to the peripheral, disjointed references contained within *Nedjma*, the significance of the changing family structure persists in Kateb's theater. Through his integration of the family sphere with the political and individual tragedies with the collective tragedies of the war, Kateb politicizes tragedy beyond the Brechtian model of epic theater:

Kateb transcends the strictly personal dramas of his individual characters through historicization. The tragedy he depicts is not just that of Lakhdar and his contemporaries; it is that of a people fighting for sovereignty. Historicization is central to Kateb's politicization of tragedy. (Finburgh 119)

The characters in these plays bring their own personal histories to light in the very particular context of the French-Algerian War. Throughout all of Kateb's work, there is a tension between the particularity and generalizability as we have already seen in “Nedjma” the poem, the novel, and the character. This becomes more prominent in Kateb's theatrical works because the action takes place largely on space related to the battlefield. In this sense, there is no escaping the context of war when considering various readings of the play. Against this backdrop, a very particular set of family tragedies takes place including Lakhdar's death and his son's desire for revenge.

The absence of Lakhdar's father follows a rather typical path in Algerian literature

from this period. The absent, errant father must be replaced by his more competent, progressive son. Bonn points out that Lakhdar's father distanced himself from his family in life by engaging in licentious behavior and is now dead—meaning that Lakhdar must take over his responsibilities: “...en l'absence de mon véritable père trépassé dans une automobile, avec une prostituée, ce père dont la mort atroce fut l'un des gouffres englotissant les restes de la tribu, ce mort qui ne m'évoque rien, rien que la férocité du sort et dont le bref passage me laisse loin en arrière...” (*Le cadavre* 27-28). His father's absence occurred long before the automobile accident that left him with a “a sort of ferocity.” In this way, his death “evokes nothing in him” years after it occurs. His family (and the colonial system) began to breakdown years before the revolution began. Lakhdar recognizes that a major shift in ideology is underway and notes that not all men are adjusting well to it: “Je vois notre pays, et je vois qu'il est pauvre./Je vois qu'il est plein d'hommes décapité” (51). The country is “poor” and “full of decapitated men.” The headless men lack reason and judgment. Taking Lakhdar's father as an example, he exchanges his family for pleasure with a prostitute and ends up dead as a result of his poor decision-making.

However, not all men shirk their responsibilities and abandon their families.

Lakhdar's adoptive father, Tahar, seems more accepting of the change in ideology and remains with the family despite the ideas around him that he does not entirely understand. Even though not related by blood, he feels a parental bond with Lakhdar: “Et moi j'aurai perdu le meilleur de ma force à courir comme un misérable, à la recherche du maudit: ce fils adoptif que vous me reprochez d'aimer, moi qui suis le seul père qu'il ait jamais

connu jusqu'au moment où vous lui avez tourné la tête, avec toutes vos idées nouvelles prises je ne sais où...” (*Le cadavre* 22). New ideas circulate in the Algeria changing interpersonal relationships inside and outside of the context of the family rendering real fathers absent and present fathers illegitimate. Tahar accepts Lakhdar as a son in spite of his “new ideas” that differ from his own and from tradition. In *Nedjma*, too, adoptive parents (such as Nedjma's) provide more support than birth parents whether the child comes from an illegitimate or legitimate relationship.

Consistent with my analysis in Chapter Two, mothers are also absent from the text. Nedjma's mother is most likely the prostitute killed alongside Lakhdar's father. Mustapha's mother wears the uniform of insanity: “*Ici entre en jeu la mère de Mustapha, à la recherche de son fils parti pour l'exil. Elle tâtonne devant l'arbre sans voir Lakhdar. Elle porte la tunique bleue des hôpitaux psychiatriques*” (*Le Cadavre* 62). Kateb describes her as “wearing the blue tunic of psychiatric hospitals.” The attention moves away from Nedjma's clothing and nudity to the clothing of other, less central, women. It is also significant that this woman comes from a different generation than Nedjma. She is not a young, revolutionary woman who changes with her times, but a symbol of the past and a traditional order that is crumbling. Mustapha's mother is named “The Mother” in the play—a generic, yet specific mother who decries the fate brought upon herself and all sons and daughters of her times: “On a dû égorger le fils/Et les filles, leur raser la tête/En souvenir de leur mère démente” (63). Sons are slayed and daughters shave their heads in memory of the insanity of their mother. Mothers are commemorated in new, somewhat disturbing ways now. Lakhdar explains that in these turbulent times mothers

must sometimes be exchanged for other mothers: “Femmes et hommes, corps et biens:/Rien ne résiste à l'exode/Et la mère d'un autre devenue la mienne/En ce triple et sinistre abandon!” (63). Mustapha abandons his mother and Lakhdar. Lakhdar's mother abandons him. So, in this “triple and sinister abandon,” Mustapha's mother becomes his own—an exchange that would never be undertaken by Derrida or Camus.

Kateb disrupts norms and traditional family structures in this play without leaving them quite as open-ended as they were in *Nedjma*. In *Nedjma*, her paternity was under constant scrutiny along with her clothing and identity. Now, her nudity appears less shocking and Kateb complicates the whole idea of the legitimacy of paternity. Absent mothers and fathers can be easily replaced by men and women willing to take on the associated responsibilities. Here too, the revolution becomes a driving factor in these momentous changes rather than a contributing consideration. The play takes place largely on the battlefield and revenge against the French for all of the death they have inflicted is both explicit and personal. In the closing lines of the play, Nedjma and her son, Ali discuss whether or not he should seek revenge for Lakhdar's death:

ALI: C'est le couteau de mon père. C'est mon couteau.

NEDJMA: Et tes poches bourrées d'oranges amères! Jette ça. Ne t'ai-je pas dit cent fois que ces oranges sont empoisonnées? Allons, descends. (*Le cadavre* 67)

Nedjma urges her son to leave the “bitter oranges” behind and not take revenge upon the French. He appropriates his father's knife for himself and keeps the oranges. Not only does he save them, but the stage directions call for a “*pluie d'oranges dans la salle*” (67). Oranges rain upon the audience encouraging them to take up Ali's struggle for

themselves, to adopt Lakhdar as their own father and avenge his death. The bitter oranges of revenge may be poisonous, but they are a last resort for Ali and the audience. The final word in the play is the distant murmur of the chorus imploring militants to maintain their positions: “*Militants du Parti du peuple. Ne quittez pas vos refuges*” (67). They should not give themselves over to the French, but bide their time and wait to strike. This is a much more straight-forward message than that of *Nedjma*. In part, this likely has to do with the timing of the message. Kateb completed the play in 1954⁴⁶, the year of the official start of the war with France. He published *Nedjma* in 1956, two years later, in the midst of conflicting nationalisms and increased chaos. The fact that characters do not see eye to eye on all matters reflects the context of the early years of the revolution when competing nationalist groups such as the FLN and MNA competed for support.

In a later play published in the same collection as *Le cadavre encerclé*, *Les ancêtres redoublent de férocité* (1959), Kateb takes on similar questions of revenge, inheritance, and war with almost the same cast of characters. In this play, however, Nedjma takes the place of “La Mère” from *Le cadavre encerclé* and is called “La Femme Sauvage.” Clare Finburgh gives a nice outline of the play's events:

In the next tragedy, *Les ancêtres*, Lakhdar is dead and Nedjma, now the veiled and mourning Femme Sauvage (“Wild Woman”) has been driven mentally ill by thoughts of her lover's torture and death. She and Lakhdar, who returns from the dead as the Vulture, incite their living descendents to avenge their ancestors' deaths. Violence and suffering are thus perpetuated. Kateb's tragedies can be seen as classical in their representations of unrelenting, inescapable human suffering. (118)

Nedjma appears here as a nameless woman, driven crazy by her husband's death. Again,

⁴⁶ Although, it was not widely published until 1959.

the particular becomes generalizable through Nedjma's anonymity. She is both Nedjma and the wife of every Algerian fighter slaughtered by the hand of the French. Here, too, there is a generational concern. Mustapha's mother (and her entire generation of mothers) becomes mentally ill in *Le cadavre encerclé* as a result of the shifting ideology of the revolution. Now, Nedjma (and her generation of mothers and wives) becomes mentally ill as a result of the treatment of their husbands.

Unlike Mustapha's mother, Kateb depicts Nedjma's "savagery" as more complex than sheer madness. She does not lose her pride and does not don the garb of the mental institution. She lives and thinks independently despite her hardship. Near the end of the play, when her veil drops and she is finally recognizable as Nedjma, she is described as "pleine d'insolence" and "enhanc[ing] their star-shaped polygon":

It is better to die
In the woman's arms
But she, more tameless than ever walks at a distance
In full sunlight, full of pride and enhances in the night
The vastness of their star-shaped polygon.
Yes she walks, but at a distance, still unaware of the unfolding drama. (146-47) ⁴⁷

The Coryphea leader of the Chorus describes Nedjma's delirium as "consoling" and preferable to dying with lucidity. Her insanity provides comfort for her, but does not take away her pride or her strength. In fact, she enhances "toute l'ampleur de leur polygone

47 Autant mourir disent leurs regards
Dans un autre délire combien consolateur.
On reconnaît Nedjma.
Autant s'éteindre dans les bras
De la femme!
Mais elle, plus que jamais sauvage marche à l'écart
En plein soleil, pleine d'insolence et dans la nuit marquant
Toute l'ampleur de leur polygone étoilé.
Oui, elle marche, mais à l'écart, et le drame se joue encore à son insu.

étoilé.” She is described as “unaware” of the “unfolding drama” of the battle around her.

In fact, her madness is described as outside of her own volition. She was driven to madness by the men around her “il t'a pillée l'amour des hommes” who do not “rescue [her] when falling.” Men have made her this way and now refuse to help her.

CHORUS: Woman of the wild caught in your evasion, brought back to affliction
The love of men has plundered you
Men who hoisted you in their struggle
And whose arms will not rescue you when falling. (152)⁴⁸

The chorus describes women being “hoisted in their struggle” by men, but not being protected once in this struggle. Nedjma goes crazy because she cannot deal with the psychological aspects of a war that she was brought into by the men around her.

Similarly, in *Nedjma* the men around her project their desires upon her with little consideration for her well-being—dramatized by her abduction to her ancestral village.

The Coryphea describes this war with France as no different than any other war—citing the Trojan War as one of many precursors. War brings out the memory of “les cannibales incestueux” and turns family members against one another:

CORYPHEA: All wars are fratricidal
All true wars bring back the memory
Of incestuous cannibals.
CHORUS: Yes all wars are similar to that of the Greeks for Helen:
From love to death war is the shortest path.⁴⁹

48 CHOEUR: Mais toi, femme sauvage
Surprise en ton évasion ramenée à ta peine
Il t'a pillée l'amour des hommes,
Les mêmes qui te hissaient dans leur combat
Et dont les bras ne viendront pas te relever de ta chute

49 CORYPHEE: Toute guerre est fratricide
Toute vraie guerre nous remémore
Les cannibales incestueux.

CHOEUR: Oui toute guerre est pareille à celle des Grecs pour Hélène:

The Coryphea qualifies all wars as “fratricidal” and “incestuous” suggesting illegitimate forms of both love and violence. In terms of the family, both are problematic. War has the potential to turn brother against brother and to turn family members into potential lovers. Use of this language of family relations is interesting because family is not the typical venue or context of war. However, this language quickly illustrates the high stakes of war and its potential to destroy families—the smallest unit of the community. Not even families are impenetrable to the fallout of war.

The family unit is also important in this play as a link to the past. In *Nedjma*, a concern for family history connects the characters to the village on the Nadhor and to Nedjma's abduction, but the ancestors never assert their presence or their desires. In *Les ancêtres redoublent de férocité*, the ancestors, themselves, take center stage in this play forming a chorus of their own to try to guide the actions of the living characters who take part in the war. The play ends with Nedjma dying and the ancestors' silence:

CHORUS: We shall not die yet, not this time!
The woman of the wild no longer lives but the war embodies her
And the war needs us.

CORYPHEA: The ancestors have been appeased
Since we have deciphered their message
Melted their chains, lived their dreams and watched over their sleep.
The ghosts can now rest in peace.

CHORUS: The ancestors have been appeased! (*Les ancêtres* 154)

The chorus (and the battle against the French) live on despite Nedjma's death. The war “embodies” the Wild Woman and the ancestors are content because their message has

De l'amour à la mort, la guerre est le plus court chemin.

been heard. By connecting with the ancestral chorus, Algerians can construct an identity for themselves that evades the missteps of both colonialism and nationalist violence:

“Kateb perceives the cultural disfigurement perpetrated by both French colonialism and Arabo-Islamist imperialism in terms of a tragedy and advocates a reinvention of identity through a unification with Algeria's ancestral past” (Finburgh 123). This indicates a form of coherence in terms of the war effort that relies on something deeper than a sense of nationalism. Their ancestors connect them through a common bloodline that extends beyond French rule. The question of Nedjma, however, persists. In the novel, four men fight over her living, sexualized body. This time, rivaling factions fight to the death over the fate of her body. At the end of the play, French troops approach and only Mustapha and Nedjma remain. Mustapha has killed Hassan over Nedjma and Mustapha debates over whether or not to kill her before the French can kill her. Even in death, the rivalry persists:

Rifts and reprisals tear apart not only countries, social classes, and religions, but also rival factions within the liberation movement....French troops, the ancestral Vulture, and Mustapha subsequently dispute each other's claims over the Femme Sauvage. No party wins, since she dies. (Finburgh 122)

The French, the ancestors, and the nationalists all hold claim over Nedjma. Here, the injustice seems more blatant than in the novel. Nedjma asserts herself in this play and acts in accordance with her own political and ethical positions, but she is considered insane and remains subject to the men around her. Kateb still uses Nedjma as both a unifying principle as well as an object in these plays despite her increased autonomy. In doing so, he illustrates that women who participate in the revolution continue to be

subject to the desires and projections of the men around them whether on the side of colonialism or anti-colonialism. Citing Leila Ahmed, Woodhull calls attention to Nedjma's role in the struggle for the treatment of women in this context: "...Women and the status of women were to become openly and blatantly merely counters (it is difficult to credit that for either side they were anything more than counters) in the cultural, moral and military battle between the French and the men of Algeria" (Ahmed in Woodhull 48). Kateb paints a very different picture of the role of women through Nedjma than the one painted by Fanon or *El Moudjahid*. Women face oppression and objectification by both the French and their Algerian brothers.

However, Nedjma's death does not signal finality over life or in her character's development. She has already been resurrected from her first death in the 1948 poem and has changed significantly in her political consciousness. Just as Lakhdar is reborn from one play to the next as a vulture who speaks on behalf of the ancestors, Nedjma is destined for rebirth. Finburgh argues that death is a means to rebirth in Kateb's theater: "Death does not enforce finality in Kateb's tragedies. It imposes a provisionality on life that enables rebirth" (127). This is also true between the various genres he uses to tell and retell the story of Nedjma. Kateb, himself reveals that his works are all part of the same developing organism: "The reader was warned long ago that *Nedjma*, *Le Cercle de représailles*, *Le Polygone étoilé*, the poems to appear in an upcoming volume are all the breath of a single work always in gestation" (Kateb in Abdel-Jaouad 11). Evoking the process of fetal development in pregnancy suggests that his body of work is in constant development and even when it is complete, it will be subject to a new life outside of the

womb. There is only a distant sense of finality or death insofar as death comes to all living organisms. Any death that occurs within his texts is negated by the potential for life or rebirth in another form.

Nedjma's Everydayness

Nedjma's final development in novel form comes in Kateb's 1966 *Le polygone étoilé*—a title evoking his plays (“Toute l'ampleur de leur polygone étoilé”) and the Arabic translation of Nedjma's name, “star,” or “étoile,” in French. The form of this text most closely resembles *Nedjma* and the two lend themselves well to comparison. The cast of characters is the same, but shifts from orienting around the voiceless character of Nedjma to a configuration arranged more chaotically in terms of content and narrative form—including prose, verse, dramatic dialogue, historical writing, and news articles. This time, Nedjma's unknowability takes precedence over her physical presence. She is allowed a space to exist and construct her own multitudinous identity alongside the multitudinous history that Kateb constructs for Algeria in various forms throughout the text. She is one citizen among many who sometimes perseveres and sometimes fails. Her everydayness and complexity both resist metaphorization and give rise to an alternative mode of political participation away from the binary of pro- or anti-colonial.

Nedjma, the specter, reappears as a figure of continuity, but she has undergone significant changes since her initial iteration in the poem “Nedjma” that describes her in death. Rather than occupying a particular structural role in the text as she does in

Nedjma, she moves to the periphery of this novel. She occupies the characters in a more haunting way that disrupts their thoughts in the second novel rather than causing disruption through their obsession over possessing her body in the former. They admit the limitations of their knowledge of her rather than the possibility of her possession: “On connaissait Nedjma sans la connaître” (*Le polygone* 152). The question of Nedjma's possession has passed from a material to a more epistemological one. They know her without knowing her—accepting the limitations of their knowledge.

Nedjma's clothing in the second novel forms a kind of defense against the critical eyes of the women around her who attempt to objectify her. However, she is also described as a “phenomenon” that no one completely understands. Kateb prefaces their criticism by pointing out the limitations of their perspectives—“they know Nedjma without knowing her”:

On connaissait Nedjma sans la connaître... “*Bien sûr, un phénomène, le produit d'on ne sait quels mélanges, et pas bête du tout, une musulmane pas comme les autres, l'exception qui confirme la règle,*” disaient avec dépit les oies blanches du lycée... De pieuses femmes la rencontraient en robe courte et talons hauts, et les attaques, cette fois, venaient de l'autre bord: “*Après tout, nous n'avons pas connu son père, ni sa mère, cette bâtarde.*” Mais les mégères émerveillées pouvaient aussi la voir au sortir du bain maure, fraîche et brûlante sous un voile blanc troussé à l'algéroise, ou clair et chaud, largement ouvert, à la tunisienne, ou d'un noir implacable, comme on le porte à Bone, Constantine ou Setif, ou bleu foncé, à la maghrébine, qu'elle arborait souvent à visage découvert (d'autres fois se masquant d'un transparent triangle) et qui s'attachait à ses formes, signalant sa démarche, son moindre mouvement, par un frisson de soie, apparition inespérée des *Mille et Une Nuits*. Sa seule présence, en de pareils moments, niant le siècle colonial, ressuscitait les vieilles murailles dont il ne restait plus qu'une mosquée sur la mer. (152-53)

The Europeans of her school girl years act condescendingly even as they admit her

positive qualities. She is not a Muslim like the others, but is the exception that confirms the rule that all Muslims are stupid. The illogicality of this statement holding as a rule becomes clear as it is proclaimed—a faulty argument based on faulty logic. In contrast, the women of her community criticize her for her European dress and relate this with her uncertain paternity. Both her clothing and her paternity cast her as an outsider. However, when they see her in more modest, regional veils, she strikes them as an apparition of Shahrazad's *Thousand and One Nights*—the quintessential story of mixed origins. Ironically, when she evokes this transcendent, historically uncertain image, she “negates the colonial century”—erasing the history of oppression induced by colonialism for these women. Kateb gestures toward the multiplicity of interpretations that can be given to something like wardrobe or paternity. He also suggests that local expressions of identity can translate into more universalizable images of emancipation. By changing her garments, she resembles the legendary Shahrazad. The uncertainty of Nedjma's origins is both damning and liberating in this novel. Being a “bastard” seems to be an integral component in her ability to resist knowability by the women around her and allow her more agency in this novel than in the first. It is less about determining origins and more about revealing a multiplicity of perspectives—from the heritage of Shahrazade to French colonization to ancient Numidia.

In this novel, Si Mokhtar publicly acknowledges Nedjma as his daughter and considers her feelings and desires in a way that was absent from *Nedjma*: “Je connaissais son père. Tu l'as connu aussi. Souviens-toi: Si Mokhtar...” (156). She is the daughter of an illicit affair between Si Mokhtar (her captor in *Nedjma*) and a French woman. The

mysteriousness she possesses is no longer a result of the question of her paternity. Now, the mystery surrounds her subjectivity: “Oui, son vieux père suffoquant de n'avoir pas le droit de l'appeler “ma fille,” cette fleur solitaire, lointaine, irrespirable, rose noire échappée à toute les tutelles, cette sombre orpheline qu'on s'arrachait toujours comme une arme secrète et dont nul n'était sûr, jamais, d'être le maître...” (156). Her paternity and her marriage status lose their significance to her essential unknowability. She is inaccessible to her father who has lost “the right to call her 'my daughter'” by abandoning her at birth and abducting her as an adult in his ill-conceived trip to the Nadhor. Finally, he considers her feelings. Now that he has returned and accepted her as his daughter, he does not know if she reciprocates his love for her, “il ne pouvait savoir si Nedjma partageait cet amour malheureux” (157). The obsession of the men over her physical possession becomes a preoccupation with her unreadability. They admit that they do not know what she wants or how she feels. Now, she is a “somber orphan” who no one can “master.” She is no longer (and perhaps never was) a woman that anyone could know or master except by physical violence.

Nedjma changes from a character under constant threat of physical possession to one who independently asserts herself as a part of the revolution. Her “stifling” auburn hair from *Nedjma* transforms into a part of her costume for battle in *Le polygone étoilé*—calling to mind the blonde-haired revolutionaries hiding in villages by covering their hair in *El Moudjahid*. Here, however, Nedjma proudly displays her hair as a part of her revolutionary identity:

Coiffée au terme de son sillage/Du casque intimidant de la déesse

guerrière/Elle fut la femme voilée de la terrasse /L'inconnue de la clinique/La
 libertine ramenée au Nadhor/La fausse barmaid au milieu des Pieds-Noirs/
 L'introuvable amnésique de l'île des Iotophages/Et la Mauresque mise aux
 enchères (148)

Kateb evokes the mythic past in her resemblance to a “goddess of war,” but she is also the Nedjma of her own past in Kateb's earlier work: “the veiled woman,” “the unknown woman,” “the libertine,” “the false bartender,” “the amnesiac,” and “the Moorish woman.” In *Nedjma*, her identity was linked to elements of her physical appearance such as her clothes and her hair. Now, as a revolutionary, she can inhabit all of her conflicting identities simultaneously. Tracing the development of the role of Nedjma from the first novel to the second reveals a rupture of temporality structured around the materiality of the body. In the second novel, Nedjma's body, itself, plays a less significant role in structuring the narrative, but raises an alternative line of questioning beyond ambivalent binary hierarchization. Rather than locating Nedjma's naked, vulnerable body at the center with her clothes acting as a kind of mask to her true identity, she gives up her place of centrality in the narrative, but gains an identity—or rather, a multitude of identities—of her own.

The poetry fragments dispersed throughout the text reflects a formal multiplicity that reinforces Nedjma's changing identity. The verse could be read from left to right across the page, but it lends itself to its own kind of logic of simultaneous reading without a central locus of meaning:

Infestés en son absence

Nous avons pratiqué l'escrime
 Et renoncé à la rivalité

Heureux présage que
 son éloignement!
 En d'autres temps
 Elle eût pâli

Puisque ayant échoué	
Médusés	A la belle étoile
Versés dans les antres	Rapprochons-nous
D'un port qui nous distrait	dangereusement

Salut porte fermée
 Couverture d'un autre livre
 Abattue sur nous
 Les pages du livre déchiré
 Nedjma Nedjma ouvre ta porte ou ta fenêtre
 Ou trotte seulement dans ton couloir
 Ou parle ou crie ou chante ou pleure
 Jette sur nous le mensonge dû aux fidèles
 Ou la seau d'eau sur la tête des fous
 Envoie-nous ton chien ou ton chat
 Ou l'une des mouches de ta maison
 Secoue sur nous ton vieux tapis
 Je ne puis supporter cette solitude!

O noble hypocrisie
 Prétérition d'Andalous
 Et composant tous deux
 Le même poème, taciturnes
 Devant le même séjour désenchanté

Avec des ouf
 Bon
 Ah
 Eh oui
 C'est la vie
 Hein
 Hum
 Oh
 Ouf
 C'est comme ça

Une seule femme nous occupe
 Et son absence nous réunit
 Et sa présence nous divise (145-47)

The narrator notices the danger of being distracted by her and has “renounced [their] rivalry.” Their lives are written in a book of “torn pages.” Destruction and closure (“porte fermée”) comprise the foundation over which Nedjma arrives to “open her door or

her window” again as she did in *Nedjma*. Their physical obsession with her leads to closure, but now they call upon her for openness in their acknowledgement of her unknowability. This time she is given permission to do as she chooses: open the window, the door, walk the hallway, cry, scream, sing, speak.

Here, appropriation through force is less present in the text than in *Nedjma* or the physicality of battle in the plays. Rather than excavating history in order to reappropriate the past and the space of Algeria, there is more emphasis placed on interrogation and openness. A multitude of possibilities of action or inaction are afforded Nedjma instead of the intermittent opening and closure of the window in the first novel. The verse describes a communal composition of the same “taciturn poem.” Here, the emphasis is on form, mutuality of the process of composition, and the possibility of multiple readings and actions. Disenchantment with revolutionary ideals and forceful re-appropriation of the past gives way to greater freedom in terms of form and gestures. The verse occupies a space less governed by content and logical progression. Rather, standing disenchanted before the journey into the future of post-revolutionary Algeria gives way to interjections signaling affirmation (“Oh, Yes, That's life, It's like that...”), pain (“oufs”), and acceptance (“c'est comme ça”).

The verse ends with an account of Nedjma that reacts to the idealistic version of her painted by the earlier novel: “One lone woman occupies us. And her absence unites us. And her presence divides us.” Nedjma turns from an organizing principle of the first novel to a foundation for disjuncture, failure, and a multitude of possibilities in the second. In Kateb's first novel, Nedjma defies the expectations of the men even as they try

to possess her. She has no political conscience, no voice, and no autonomy over her decisions or actions. By the second novel, we see that she is “a lone woman” not Algeria—one voice among many subject to critique, failure, and subjectivity. She does not stand in for Algeria, but she can stand for Algerian women as both a particular woman and a woman subject to the desire and critique of those around her.

As a mere woman, she becomes a more complex character with conflicting desires and itineraries. As she lives and dies with each new iteration, Kateb constructs a character who comes into a political consciousness of her own while shedding the superficial projections of the men around her. Aresu argues that Kateb challenges patriarchal instability during the revolution with evocations of powerful female references: “Against the backdrop of male fatherlessness and tribal headlessness that underlies so many of Kateb's narratives, the recurrence of female astro-cephalic references suggests indeed an even more striking displacement of iconic significance” (227). He reads Nedjma as a figure who embodies both a cosmic symbolism as well as an open-endedness exemplified by Kateb's use of the words “sillage” (wake) and “sillon” (furrow) to describe her:

Whereas the former bespeaks elusiveness and the evanescence of her trajectory, the latter affirms its inaugurative inscription of open-ended direction, the very origination of being and becoming that presides not only over the sociopolitical complex of Kateb's writings but also over their textual mode of being and gestating. (228)

She asserts her uniqueness in her “wakes” and retreats into cosmic symbolism in her “furrows.” She asserts her singularity in defying expectations for her imposed by other characters as well as by readers of the texts.

This turn from the physical to the epistemological also marks a shift in Kateb's discussion of the political landscape. In *Nedjma*, the men fight against their masters by physical means and they dream of re-appropriating the land and railways. Here, however, Kateb reconstructs a historical landscape that can help give ideological shape to the future. The form is less certain than the example of the railway changing possession, but this opens up new possibilities for thinking about the revolution and the future of Algeria. Similar to the way that Kateb clears up the question of Nedjma's paternity, Kateb conjures a number of specters of Algerian history and mythology throughout his text to develop a picture of the present: *The Arabian Nights*, Napoleonic-era Governor Thomas Bugeaud, Jugurtha, King of Numidia during the first century BCE, and Abdelkader, the Algerian thinker and revolutionary who led the Algerian people in a prolonged battle against the invading French in the 1830s. Many of these figures evoke feelings of both hope and failure in the narrative.

Abdelkader, in particular, urges readers to consider the possibility (or certainty) of failure in constructing projects for the future. Despite the victory of the Algerian war for independence, Kateb highlights a sense of failure present in the post-war context of 1966. He urges a new look at Abdelkader as an imperfect figure of Algerian unity: "Il laisse une oeuvre encore mal connue et une parole lapidaire: 'Tout ce qui est arabe est voué à la ruine...'" (*Le polygone* 81). Neither this work nor this statement are well-known or included in nationalist discourse committed to unflinching success in the battle against the French. Rather than provide inspiration for success, here, the focus is on ruin. A far cry from the one-sided nationalism of *El Moudjahid*, Kateb calls attention to over-looked

aspects of dealing with regime change such as unknowability and consideration of disaster. Turning to an instrumental figure in the construction of Algerian nationalism in the war with France, Abdelkader, he questions the fate of the new regime.

Kateb transforms Nedjma over the course of his work from a woman with no voice or autonomy to a woman who asserts her political projects and renounces her negligent father in a community that acknowledges her essential unknowability. Her context, like the novel, transforms from one of hierarchical oppression to a more “democratic” one where various voices and forms of texts fit together to provide a foundation for future forms. Furthermore, Kateb includes Algeria's legacy of failure into his “democratic” setting in a way that resembles Derrida's concept of democracy to come. As though seeking to construct a democracy, Nedjma fights for the right to possess a voice amidst the voices of all of the male characters throughout the Nedjma cycle—even though she has been married off, abducted, experienced the death of her husband at war, and gone mad. Kateb points out that Nedjma's life—like Abdelkader's fight for independence—accepts ruin as a foundation for action. Derrida, too, acknowledges that the promise of democracy arises as a result of ruin:

At stake here is the very concept of democracy as concept of a promise that can only arise in such a *diastema* (failure, inadequation, disjunction, disadjustment, being “out of joint”). That is why we always propose to speak of a democracy *to come*, not of a *future* democracy in the future present, not even of a regulating idea, in the Kantian sense, or of a utopia—at least to the extent that their inaccessibility would still retain the temporal form of a *future present*, of a future modality of the *living present*. (*Specters* 64-65)

This idea of democracy to come is predicated on failure or disjunction—in this case coming out of the trauma of war and the initial disappointment of nation-building of the

independent Algeria. This disappointment and disruption provide a space on which to build a foundation for a new form of democracy that has not yet taken full shape conceptually and remains open to reworking. Likewise, Kateb illustrates that at the heart of Algerian nationalism lies the promise of ruin. This was not a recognizable component of mainstream nationalism touted by the FLN, but it accepts the role of an imperfect past with lessons for the future. Kateb's "democracy" develops over the course of his career, in part, by allowing Nedjma to develop into an unpredictable woman whose decisions sometimes align with tradition and sometimes perform new possibilities for Algerian womanhood.

By 1966, Nedjma had undergone a significant transformation in Kateb's work from a woman whose primary function seemed to both structure and disrupt the text and the desires of the men around her to a character who develops a voice of her own and eludes knowability by those around her. Emphasis on her paternity turns to questioning the foundation of paternity and she loses the high stakes position of providing the foundation for narrative structure. Observers offer a multitude of perspectives, she represents different things to different people, but ultimately, her future is uncertain. Similarly, the future of the independent Algeria is uncertain in 1966. Every political misstep does not necessarily preclude the possibility for sustainability of the new nation. Rather, the future is open to interpretation, the likelihood of failure, and a multitude of perspectives—like Derrida's democracy to come and like Nedjma. She is one woman in a much larger population and her perspective is of little consequence relatively speaking. It is precisely her everydayness that Kateb attributes to the revolution in a 1967

interview:

Les révolutionnaires ne sont pas du tout ceux qui veulent tout casser. Ce sont ceux qui veulent que le monde tourne comme il doit tourner. Donc il n'y a rien d'extraordinaire à être révolutionnaire. Ce n'est qu'une attitude. C'est tout simplement le fait d'être dans le sens de la vie. (Kateb in Tremaine 36)

The point of the revolution is not to “break everything,” but to enable the world to “turn like it should turn.” Revolutionaries are not born exceptional to accomplish exceptional feats, but they adopt a certain “attitude” to return sanity to the world. They live life in a way that makes sense (“dans le sens de la vie”) rather than trying to manipulate or exploit those around them. In this regard, the reality of the revolution does not fit Kateb's description in the Nedjma cycle or the description he gives in this interview. He describes revolutionaries who manipulate and exploit Nedjma in *Nedjma*. Her abduction does not allow her to live her life. However, by the end of the cycle in *Le polygone étoilé*, Nedjma is allowed more freedom to be herself and take a more peripheral role as one voice among many.⁵⁰

Nedjma's movement to the periphery of the narrative suggests a movement toward a more sustainable model for Algerian nationhood that takes into account everydayness and failure in constructing a project for the future. The emphasis on material spaces, Nedjma's body, and clothing persist from one novel to the next. However, in the first, the foundation for interpretation is much more binary. Either French or Arabic, either European or traditional clothing, either a friend or an enemy, either one father or the other. The interrogations yield results that perpetuate the violence of domination that

⁵⁰ In Chapter Four, I will turn to this subject of everydayness in women's participation in the revolution more thoroughly in the lives of every woman doing their best to survive.

comes with either/or political logic. In Kateb's second novel, however, he moves away from a binary logic. The very act of questioning origins, history, and desire become paramount to a future for Algeria that includes ruins of the past and a multitude of possibilities. His interpretative logic explodes outward into a multitude of possible futures. Nedjma is not necessarily European, but not wholly Arab. Her clothing evokes scorn as well as pride in the same population. Even though Nedjma's presence divides the people around her, she occupies everyone. Nedjma's structural position in this novel becomes more a *point d'interrogation*, interruption, or interjection than a force that causes the wind around her to circulate. Through Nedjma's transformation from object of desire to mourning wife to Algerian woman throughout Kateb's oeuvre, he illustrates a possible, multitudinous future for Algeria that elides the Algeria that Albert Memmi observes around him after the war: "Un jour, peut-être, lorsque nous serons tout devenus moins chatouilleux, moins jaloux ou moins inquiets, ces délibérations auront moins de gravité. Si l'on admet qu'un homme peut appartenir à deux, ou même trois communautés, sans être considéré comme un traître ou un monstre, ces problèmes n'auraient plus ce relent de scandale" (Memmi 13).

In the next chapter, I will explore the everydayness of political engagement in more detail in the context of Algerian women who never rise to the status of fictional heroine like Nedjma. The question of women's rights was co-opted by various political groups before real women even participated in the movement or in the discussion. Similar to what we saw in Chapters Two and Three, the perspectives of women were often clouded over by the desires of men to free themselves from guilt, to symbolize

“home,” and to idealize the nation. Over time, women participated more and more in political projects, but not necessarily in the same ways as men or in the ways that men expected. By comparing the way that actual women participated in the revolution with mainstream idealizations of their participation, I want to illustrate the significance of domestic everydayness in the context of the Algerian revolution. Algerian women participated in the revolution in large numbers, but their actions only rarely involved armed combat. Although most of their work involved attending to the needs of men, they also took on a number of responsibilities that had been outside of their domain before the beginning of the war. They put aside their fears, reservations, and at times, their veils, in the hope of enacting regime change and domestic social change.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ELOQUENT SILENCES OF ALGERIA'S SISTERS

File, file, voyageur

vers le Prophète

La marche est agréable

Oh mon Dieu, suivons le destin

Vous, vous partirez

Et nous, nous resterons

—Saadia Benabdellah

The voices of Algerian women before the end of the twentieth century are largely absent from literature, politics, and the archive. In Chapter One, I explored the development of nationalism and cultural hybridity from mostly male perspectives in a very pedagogical manner—focusing a great deal of attention on political, intellectual, and literary historical accounts. Chapters Two and Three highlight the limitations of speaking and acting on behalf of women from the inaccessible mothers of Camus and Derrida to the men who kidnap Nedjma in a forced return to her native land. Ultimately, Nedjma slips away from the idealizations and control of the men around her through a transformation into everydayness—as one voice among many in her community. In this

chapter, I will turn to the problem of the relative absence of women in the history of the French-Algerian War and begin to account for the silent mothers, wives, and sisters of the revolution—women who never achieved the degree of fame as Nedjma.

Women such as Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, Marnia Lazreg, and Assia Djebar have contributed a great deal to finding ways of raising awareness of these silent voices in their work through interviews, analyses, and literary figures. In *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*, Lazreg outlines the many different aspects of the relative silence of Algerian women from precolonial days to the revolution to the postcolonial period:

Silence as the absence of public voice is not synonymous with absence of talk or action. In fact, Algerian women acted throughout their history in ways that made their silences quite eloquent. Their silence was at times *circumstantial*, or the result of social, cultural or personal circumstances, such as trusting that the state would defend their rights and keeping quiet until these rights were grossly violated. At other times it was *structural*, or dictated by historically determined structures such as the colonial requirement that speech be expressed in French, thus disabling those who could not speak the language. *Strategic* silence was and still is a voluntary act of self-preservation when a woman feels it is better to keep quiet than to incur someone's wrath or disapproval. (18)

This “eloquence of silence” described by Lazreg addresses both the problem of having very little traditional, written archival material to rely upon for constructing a narrative of women's participation in the war and the problem of imposing a voice on these women from the outside. Circumstantial, structural, and strategic silences make it difficult to accurately gauge the form and extent of the contribution of women to Algeria's war for liberation. However, the collected testimonies, personal experiences, and literary productions of Lazreg, Amrane-Minne, and Djebar illuminate and contribute to the

piecemeal data and (often insufficient) historical analyses of the participation of women in Algerian liberation. In a sense, they provide private voices to supplement their collective “absence of public voice” in the archive.

In this chapter, I will look more carefully at the ways in which women of this period did speak—through their individual and collective actions when words were not available. Using Assia Djebar's novel, *Children of the New World* as a model for my analysis, I will discuss different types of participation of women from the rise of nationalism through the end of the war. At first, the question of women's participation in the movement was mostly an abstraction. As I will illustrate in the beginning of the chapter, both the French and indigenous political groups took up the rhetoric of women's rights in order to propel their own projects forward. This, however, did not provide a meaningful substitute for women's participation. When women began to act for themselves in the revolution, they did what men around them expected, but they also challenged social conventions. Idealized images of sisters, wives, and daughters of the revolution conflicted with the roles of sisters, wives, and daughters of indigenous families. Women participated in the war in ways that varied from armed resistance to adapting to life without men in the family. The vast majority of women who officially participated in the war were uneducated peasants who supported FLN fighters materially and through their intimate knowledge of the people and spaces of the *maquis*. Although not all women participated actively in resisting the French, all Algerian women were subject to random acts of violence and intimidation by French troops. In this chapter, I will show that these women provided meaningful contributions to the war effort

in a variety of performative ways overlooked by history—widening the sphere of their domestic duties, using their knowledge of their homes and land to support armed fighters, and spontaneously coming together to teach each other and stand up for themselves in the face of generations of repression.

Daughters of the New Algeria

Assia Djébar provides an alternative to a strictly pedagogical, historical account of the French-Algerian War in her novel, *Children of the New World*. From the perspective of the end of the war in 1962 when she wrote the novel, she describes a day in a traditional city, Blida, near the beginning of the war in 1956. Djébar's novel weaves in and out of a web of interrelated women who experience the war in a variety of ways from educated teachers and students ideologically opposed to colonialism to illiterate housewives who act in accordance with their hearts. In contrast to Kateb's untitled chapters weaving in and out of the consciousness of the male characters, Djébar entitles five chapters after women and four after the men who play important roles in the events that take place. No major battles are fought, but the novel gives a snapshot of some of the ways that women participated in the revolution in more subtle ways than leaving bombs in cafes as we see in Pontecorvo's iconic film, *The Battle of Algiers*. Perhaps even more significantly, it illustrates some of the repercussions women were subject to as the result of their participation at the hands of the French as well as the hands of their fathers

and brothers in the forms of murder, imprisonment, and harassment. The revolution she describes takes place both on the battlefield against the French and culturally in the home. Through the fictional representations of women in the novel, I will argue, Djébar gives voices to the silent women of Algeria's revolution without speaking for them. The women in the novel possess characteristics that resemble real women without excessively idealizing them—highlighting both their exceptionality and their everydayness.

Each woman represents a different form of participation in the revolution overlooked by the vast majority of historical accounts. Each chapter in the novel is named after a character who plays an important role in the intersecting stories in the text: from Cherifa, the uneducated housewife who leaves home by herself for the first time in her life to warn her husband that he is a suspected revolutionary to Touma, the Arab woman who goes to bars unveiled with French soldiers to the disdain of her community. I will use the characters of Djébar's novel as a way of structuring my analysis of the participation of women in the spread of nationalism through the end of the war with France. Focusing on both general developments in Algerian history and particular figures from history, newspapers, fiction, and interviews from women who lived these experiences, I hope to call attention to ways in which Algerian women “spoke” in words and actions without speaking for them.

Touma: The Anxiety of French Influence

Djebar's character, Touma, represents an extreme example of the dangers of French influence. In many ways, she no longer belongs to her indigenous Algerian community. She has been assimilated by the French completely in her habits, her clothing, and her contempt for her culture. Sitting in bars, unveiled, and commiserating with French soldiers makes her family and neighbors suspicious of her. Touma confirms their fears by acting as an informant for the French and expressing her hatred of the “Arabs” around her. She is shunned by her community, but the French do not accept her fully as one of them either. The French soldiers treat her like a prostitute and provide her with no protection against the community that increasingly grows disgusted by her and forces her to be silent. In order to better understand the impossible position of a woman like Touma, I will turn to the history of French participation in the affairs of Algerian women through the end of the war before returning to the particular case of Touma in Djebar's novel. The French attempted to win over Algeria's women ideologically by convincing them that they were being repressed by their husbands. Assimilationist strategies, however, were largely ineffective. Touma's silencing illustrates the failure of assimilation both in the European and indigenous communities.

Before the outbreak of the war in 1954, the vast majority of non-European Algerian women were illiterate, married, and only rarely left their homes. These women were mostly ignored or criticized by the colonial population for being hidden away by

their husbands. To their husbands, they were valued as mothers and wives, but with a limited scope of jurisdiction over household affairs. In part, it can be argued, this came as the result of the oppression that men felt under colonialism. As Alf Andrew Heggoy explains citing Jean-Paul Charnay and Pierre Bourdieu, “the limitations on women's role in Algerian society grew more severe because of the French imperial presence...denying native men normal pride and achievement [colonial society] forced them to assert themselves even more strongly in the family circle” (450). Colonialism contributed to the shape of domestic relationships between husbands and wives through excluding men from meaningful participation within the political, economic, and social spheres of colonial life. According to this argument, this caused men both to shield their women more vehemently from the public gaze and to assert their dominance more aggressively within the family sphere. As Marnia Lazreg powerfully corroborates in *The Eloquence of Silence* and “Gender and Politics in Algeria: Unraveling the Religious Paradigm,” the status of women among non-European men could not be easily explained by the repressive nature of Islamic fundamentalism before or after the war for independence:

The political history of Algerian women since the nineteenth century is one of ideological confrontations between men, between French and Algerian theologians and politicians, government and opposition leaders. These confrontations were the products of a complex interplay of economic, political, and cultural factors. (“Gender and Politics” 756)

Religion alone could not account for gender relations within or outside of the family sphere. The treatment of women comes as the result of a variety of interactions between a number of groups with differing agendas within the European and non-European populations including religious leaders, politicians, husbands, fathers, wealthy

Europeans, and French intellectuals to name a few. Although colonial rhetoric tried to name Islam as the irreconcilable point of contention between the two cultures and the root of the repression of women, it could not erase the effects of colonial domination on all aspects of life.

As a result of these “economic, political, and cultural factors,” women were largely absent from matters that would take them outside of the home before the war—most notably politics, education, and the workforce. Since their voices were missing from these areas, very little effort was given to changing their level of participation in them. As Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne points out in her enlightening collection of interviews, *Des Femmes dans la guerre d'Algérie*, Algerian women were almost completely absent from participation in politics: “Almost totally illiterate and absent from economic life, Algerian women were excluded from the political scene. They had no rights—not even the right to vote—and no political party envisioned posing the problem of the condition of women or recruiting women” (Amrane-Minne 17).⁵¹ Illiterate, uneducated housewives and mothers did not appear to matter much politically prior to decolonization. Before they were seen as useful to the independence movement, they did not possess any rights. This was perceived as problematic neither to the vast majority of native men nor to women. Lazreg argues that most women cared little for discussion of religion or politics; their silence was part structural, part self-imposed. Thus, they turned their attention to more “mundane” matters such as gossip, magic, and

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En presque totalité analphabètes, absentes de la vie économique, les Algériennes sont exclues de la scène politique. Elles n'ont aucun droit, pas même celui de voter, et aucun parti politique n'envisage de poser le problème de la condition féminine et encore moins de recruter des femmes.”

storytelling. (*Eloquence* 108-17). In Djébar's novel, Touma, too, has no interest in participating in political discussions. She enjoys the attention, the dancing, and the beer that comes with her involvement in French culture, not the political or social stakes of her actions.

Outside of the home, men started discussing education and the rights of women in response to increasing French interference into their private lives. The European population liked to call attention to the relative absence of women in the public sphere as detrimental to society and as a sign of a repressive religious culture. After the turn of the twentieth century, as non-Europeans moved away from assimilative practices toward forming independent resistance and advocacy groups, the Young Algerians and the *Ulemas*⁵² both called for improving the condition of women. The Young Algerians supported a form of social progress “conceived in French terms” (Lazreg, “Gender and Politics” 762) which would increase women's access to education, politics, and reform Islam in terms more palatable to the Western sensibility. This concern with French norms alienated them from the rest of the non-European Algerian community and left them socially, culturally, and politically ineffective. The *Ulemas*, led by Ibn Badis, turned East for inspiration in their actions advocating for women's education, but within a larger framework of religious reform toward an “ethic of original Islam” (Lazreg, “Gender and Politics” 762-63). The successor of Ibn Badis, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Bashir Al-Ibrahimi illustrates the significance of the project of improving the lot of women as ultimately a project for improving the lot of men. Lazreg cites him as claiming “wife and children” as

⁵² Both groups are discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.

integral components in the formation of “patriotic man”: “In fact, wife and children are the bonds that tie patriotic man to his motherland, and reinforce his faith” (*Eloquence* 84). Here, wives and children are significant insofar as they are instrumental in constructing a bond with the motherland⁵³ and with Islam. Beyond this purpose, the education of women held little significance. Lazreg argues that both of these early attempts at increased women's participation outside of the home had more to do with the concern of men for improving themselves and their own image than a concern with women, “upgrading women's status did not stem from an interest in women as women but from a concern for men's cultural identity” (“Gender and Politics” 764). Men decided how, when, and whether women should participate in Algerian politics based on how useful they were to improving their own positions—even writing feminist manifestos and reports for the International Congress on Mediterranean Women in 1932 (“Gender and Politics” 764).

The French “Emancipation” of Algerian Women

At the same time that the public status of Algerian women grew incrementally among non-European communities, the French turned their assimilation strategies toward “liberating” Muslim women from the repression of their men through “measures that included unveiling campaigns, mobile female medical teams in the rural zones (EMSI), improved access to schooling, youth training, joint European-Muslim women's circles,

⁵³ The original Arabic, “*watan*,” however, does not have the same female resonance as the translation, “motherland.”

extension of the vote, and a new family law” (MacMaster 94). From early 1957 until late 1959, women were encouraged to take part in public life and French culture with the thinly-veiled goal of winning over their hearts and minds to the virtue of the French. By this logic, the women would then be able to exert control over their husbands to the extent that they would want to adapt to the “modern” French way of thinking and be content to continue living under French colonial rule—a more enlightened society than their own. Frantz Fanon described the situation as a program of “destructuring Algerian culture”:

In the colonialist program, it was the woman who was given the historic mission of shaking up the Algerian man. Converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture. (39)

The French turned to the strategy of infiltrating Algerian society through interference into the relations between men and women. Apparently, they perceived their own efforts at manipulation as stronger than the private ties that already existed within the family. Again, this effort relied on the continued belief that they understood what was best for Algerian women—or at least they knew better than Algerian men. This latent paternalism was also noticed by Fanon: “Integration, in order to be successful, seems indeed to have to be simply a continued, accepted paternalism” (44, Note 8). *Algérie de papa* had already proven itself as a failure with the men, but the French made a last-ditch attempt at making it work with Algerian women.

Women did not rush to accept this assistance from the French, but the French had little to lose since they saw increased involvement of women in the liberation movement

by 1957 as a growing concern (MacMaster 96). The 1958 Plan of Constantine was laid out by the French in order to curb the liberation movement by economic, social, and psychological means. Through modernizing and developing the economy and improving the treatment of women, they attempted to infiltrate the enemy and create disjuncture between the sexes in the non-European population (MacMaster 96). In addition to giving women the vote (a reform which had been in the making since 1948 (Heggoy 453)), there was a major push at educational reform for girls.⁵⁴ Since education was widely accepted as a means for improving the lot of women among Europeans and non-Europeans men alike, French educational initiatives were not immediately rejected. However, as Fanon pointed out in 1960, schools were used as bases for infiltrating the family: “Schools for 'young Moslem girls' are multiplying. At their pupils' approach to puberty, the teachers or the nuns exercise a truly exceptional activity. The mothers are first felt out, besieged, and given the mission of shaking up and convincing the father” (Fanon 39, Note 6).

Daughters were used to convert mothers who were expected, in turn, to convert fathers.

Touma represents the failure of the assimilationist project. She internalizes the lessons she learns by attending French school, but her family does not follow suit. She begins to fraternize socially with her classmates and adopts their attitudes and public behaviors, but her interest in European culture alienates her from her family and community:

A year later she was quarreling with her brother, then barely twelve years old: he couldn't tolerate the fact that she was hanging out with Europeans in

⁵⁴ By 1954, only 16% of women were single, 4.5% could read and write, 3% held a job outside of the home (of which there were 6 doctors, 3 dentists, 4 pharmacists, and 23 teachers in secondary schools), and 22 of the 503 Algerian students at the University of Algiers were women. (Amrane-Minne 17)

public, all the more because she was seen at their dances. Coming from the big city for this sole purpose, some of her uncles had intervened and locked her up in the house. She'd vanished two months later. Since then, three years had gone by. God only knew what had become of her, and to spare the mother, her name was never mentioned. (Djebar 170)

After repeated interventions by the men in her family, she runs away from home in order to dress and act like a European woman. Despite this vast cultural distance, she remains in Blida—to her detriment. This proximity brings a great deal of animosity from the men around her who call her names, give her dirty looks, and shout profanities at her throughout the novel: “Bitch's daughter!” one of the waiters calls out. “Bitch's daughter!” he says again, louder now, in the direction of his colleague. “If she's going to hang out with ruffians like that, she could at least do it with her own kind” (123). She violates social norms of her culture by appearing unveiled in public bars consuming alcohol, but perhaps more importantly, she violates the aims of the liberation movement by spending her time with French soldiers. Her refusal to wear a veil only puts her refusal on public display to both the French soldiers and the non-European men who berate her from their seats at outdoor cafes. As we saw in the case of Nedjma, veiling and unveiling was one of the most superficial forms of cultural participation.

The Family Code of 4 February, 1959

When assimilationist rhetoric did not work for the vast majority of the population, the Gaullist French government made an official attempt at Europeanizing civil marriage law by passing the Family Code on February 4th, 1959. This code, modeled after the

Tunisian family code of 1956 was an attempt at imposing social reforms on the population from the top down in order to illustrate that the French took an active interest in the well-being of Muslim women. Most of these reforms were geared toward empowering and reducing the exploitation of women through actions such as enforcing minimum marriage age requirements, allowing women to choose their own partners, and making the repudiation of a wife more difficult (MacMaster 95).

This was an uncharacteristically aggressive act of interference into the realm of family law by the French. When Villeneuve, Deputy director of political affairs, was directed by General Salan (eventual leader of the brutal OS) to revive a draft of this code that had been abandoned in 1957, he warned that this measure would not be taken well by the general population:

This was too 'radical,' a tampering with the religious status quo, and a 'powerful attack on the Muslim *statut personnel*.' He noted that earlier reforms, such as the Kabyle law of 1930, had made little impact on behavior because of the backwardness of women. If a new law was to have any influence it needed to be preceded by 'an exceptional campaign of female education' and a prior evolution of the family cell towards a modern conjugal unit. (MacMaster 98)

The non-European Algerian population was used to making their own rulings on these kinds of cases in their own religious courts. Villeneuve anticipated that this action would not be well-received—less because of the “backwardness of women” and more so because it would be seen as an “attack” on the sphere of the family and culture not a liberation. The expectation to impose radical reform on a realm of law that had previously been inaccessible to the French was ridiculous—particularly at a time when French hegemony was quickly crumbling. Education of the women and legal reform was

not enough to compel them to ally with the French.

Ultimately, these reforms were largely ignored through passive resistance by the majority of the non-European population (MacMaster 99-101). Similar to the repercussions of the 13th of May unveiling spectacle, the population resisted the French through actively defying their expectations. Women neither removed their veils nor took their husbands to court more frequently. Rather they took measures similar to those depicted in places such as Gillo Pontecorvo's film, *The Battle of Algiers* by removing their veils when and if it suited them or worked to their advantage and bringing their weddings in front of FLN officials rather than the French courts (22:58). Lazreg points out that any non-European desire for assimilation had long since passed by the point of these French interventions:

It was Algeria's separate identity from France that gave the anticolonial struggle legitimacy. The ordinance was an attempt at blurring, perhaps even erasing, that separateness by giving individuals the right to question native family values. As far as the FLN was concerned, women's roles should change only according to nationalist designs, without colonial intervention. ("Gender and Politics" 769)

By this point, "separateness" was a defining factor of the liberation movement, which had become very widespread by 1959, so promoting policies of sameness had very little chance of effecting social or cultural norms in the direction wished for by the French. As one woman interviewed by *El Moudjahid* described in 1960, most women paid little heed to these French "decisions":

The majority of women were not interested in them because these were decisions made by the French. Algerian women were actually "in a state of hibernation." With regard to these problems, they only thought of living the life they anticipated after the Revolution. They didn't change their path

except for adopting that which could be traced by the Algerian government.
 (“Journal d'une Maquisarde”)⁵⁵

Algerian women were waiting for the new Algerian government to make reforms, not the French who they were trying to oust. In fact, they were so resistant to obeying the French that many were willing to live in “a state of hibernation” until liberation was won. They preferred the liberty of the Algerian nation to reforms in personal liberties at the time. This was not indicative of Villeneuve's idea of “backwardness” so much as a group of women who prioritized independence above all else and who were unwilling to be sidetracked by the seduction of French reforms.

Algerian men, however, did not “hibernate” in the same way that women did during this period. Rather, they developed more conservative perspectives about certain social issues which often conflicted ideologically with their efforts to involve women in the spheres of education and the liberation movement. The *Ulema* movement, for example, had been becoming more and more conservative over social issues since the 1930s (MacMaster 97). Fanon's hopefulness around the treatment of Algerian women resulted in somewhat contradictory perceptions regarding their treatment. Fanon described the insistence of women's participation in the movement as bringing forth a rapid ideological sea change. Fathers no longer worried about tradition, but worried about the safety of their daughters when confronted by the French :

The old fear of dishonor was swept away by a new fear, fresh and cold—that of death in battle or of torture of the girl. Behind the girl, the whole family—even the Algerian father, the authority for all things, the founder of every

55 Les femmes, en majorité, ne s'y intéressent pas, parce que ce sont des décisions prises par les Français. Les femmes algériennes sont actuellement “en état d'hibernation” à l'égard de ces problèmes, elles ne pensent vivre d'une vie telle qu'elle l'entendent qu'après la Révolution. Elles ne changeront de ligne de conduite que pour adopter celle qui sera tracée par le Gouvernement algérien.

value—following in her footsteps, becomes committed to the new Algeria.
(Fanon 60)

Fathers who were once reluctant to abandon their traditional treatment of their daughters now found themselves led to a “new Algeria” by their daughters who fought for independence alongside their sons. Traditions and values were changing faster than the old generations could dictate. According to Fanon, here, even traditional fathers had successfully changed in conformity with the times. In the same essay, however, he notes that French efforts to interfere in the social realm: “have caused a turning back, a regression” (Fanon 63) rather than the emancipation and progress that they had expected. This indicates that fathers had been led by their daughters to treat them with less concern for tradition, but French initiatives have led them back to the path of tradition that they had once abandoned—a rather reactionary assessment of the situation.

Baya Hocine illustrates this generational change in the conflict between her father and her brother regarding her education. Her father decided not to let her attend a French school, but her brother insisted on it:

Mon père avait décidé que je n'irais jamais à l'école française, mais Mohamed mon frère avait dit: “Non, Baya ira à l'école française.” C'est formidable, parce qu'il était jeune...les jeunes avait à l'époque plus de maturité que maintenant. J'allais à l'école en cachette. Un jour mon père s'en est aperçu et..j'en garde encore la trace. Il m'a donnée une raclée, quelque chose de vraiment inhumain, pourtant mon père n'était pas un homme à nous tabasser, nous battre ou nous engueuler, c'était un homme très pacifique et très calme. J'ai été obligé de rester à la maison. Puis il est retourné en taule et moi à l'école française. (Amrane-Minne 144)

Hocine describes her brother's generation as “more mature than today.” They adhered to their convictions even when threatened by their parents and the threat of violence.

Hocine attended French school at the insistence of her brother and was beaten by her father when he found out. This man who never resorted to violence was lured into beating his daughter because of his passionate response to his son's defiance. This illustrates the passion that accompanied the politics of the liberation movement as well as the repercussions it had on the traditional Algerian society. Different generations resisted colonialism in different ways, but ultimately, in Hocine's family, the young beat the old. When her father returned to prison, she continued her French education.

Other unpolitical parents rejected the participation of their daughters in the liberation movement outright. The form and content of the movement were mysterious to them as was the impulse to resist the French overtly. The FLN accepted women fighters while general social expectations did not: “Ma mère ne voulait pas que je milite. Elle rejetait vraiment l'idée que je puisse monter au maquis: “Je ne pourrais jamais accepter que ma fille unique parte avec ces gens-là, ce n'est pas une armée normale” (Zerrouki in Amrane-Minne 88). Most parents were not yet comfortable with the idea of their daughters leaving the house let alone leaving with strange boys to fight the French in the countryside. As a result of this conflict between increasing traditionalism and increasing nationalism, some girls were instructed not to tell their parents anything: “Ils m'ont conseillée de ne rien dire à mes parents, mais j'en ai parlé à la mère qui m'a donné une tannée: “Comment, m'a-t-elle dit, tu crois faire la révolution! Mais ils vont te rouler.” En 1956, les parents ne croyaient pas à la révolution. “Tu es une fille, ils vont s'amuser avec toi. Tu ne vois pas qu'ils se moquent de toi!” (Laribi in Amrane-Minne 75). Particularly in the early days of the war, many citizens did not know what participation in the

liberation movement entailed. Algerian men in the *maquis* were just as suspect as French men when it came to the possibility of violating or ridiculing their daughters who were not widely encouraged by their parents to fight alongside them.

During this time, resisting the French took precedence over women's issues—even issues like improvements in women's education that both Algerian and French political parties agreed upon. One Muslim dignitary, Hamza Bobakeur, decried the family code as almost heretical, “absolutely revolutionary in relation to marriage, its consequences and inheritance...it entails a total upheaval of Muslim law” (Boubakeur in MacMaster 98-99). As a result of the total resistance of Algerians to French social impositions, pronouncements such as Bobakeur's could be taken as liberation efforts rather than repressive toward women: “The dangers of an 'occidental contamination' of the Algerian family and by forms of secular liberalism that encouraged western women to lead a degenerate and hedonistic life-style, symbolized by the nudity of the beach and cinema screen” (MacMaster 99). Social and religious conservatism were given a fertile ground on which to flourish as it represented a counter to French-style social progress. Pontecorvo also depicts this in several scenes throughout his film. Most strikingly, a group of children beat an old man who may be drunk (19:20) after the FLN proclaims a ban on drugs, alcohol, and prostitution (18:00).

The FLN had little impetus to engage in meaningful social reform. They recognized the necessity of improving women's rights in their political rhetoric in an attempt to garner the support of women, but did very little to enact any significant change before or even in the first decades after the war (Lazreg, “Gender and Politics” 755).

Instead, the FLN claimed that “by participating in the war women had essentially freed themselves of the fetters of colonial oppression” (“Gender and Politics” 765). If women had already freed themselves, why would this matter need any further formal institutionalization? Again, this points to another instance in which “women's presence rather than their voice was given a space to fill in various native political associations” (*Eloquence* 96). The actions and opinions of women were constantly undercut by their symbolic places in political rhetoric on both the pro- and anti-colonialist sides of the war.

The character of Touma provides an excellent example of a semi-educated woman who makes a personal decision to discard her veil and is silenced violently by her family and neighbors. Over the course of the day in the novel, her estranged younger brother follows her from place to place threatening her life. In order to participate officially in the resistance, he must illustrate his disapproval with his sister's lifestyle. When she defies him and continues her public debauchery with the French soldiers, he murders her and the men of the community support this behavior. Police are not called, no investigation takes place, her brother feels no remorse for his actions. The only onlooker who expresses any concern is another woman, Lila, who sees a dead woman not a “bitch's daughter” who commiserates with the French:

“Who is she? Who is she?” she exclaims in unrestrained anguish. She cries it out in Arabic; a man with a churlish look indifferent to her mysterious grief, has heard her and whispers:

“A bitch's daughter who was betraying her brothers! For her the hour of justice has come!” (Djebar 152)

Touma's defiance leads to her death and a sense of “justice” among the men in her

community. Her comportment was deemed inappropriate by her brother and the rest of Blida, so they look the other way when he decides to end her life. For Tawfik, this act proves that he is committed to the liberation movement and not a traitor like his sister.

His sister defies convention in a way that differs from the other women in the book. In part because of the form of thought she was exposed to in her French education, she stands behind her body and pleasure before her country or her community. She perceives her community as her own personal tormentors, not the French who give her special privileges for inside information and whose young soldiers buy her alcohol and gifts and take her dancing. She enjoys the kind of attention she receives by the French despite the way her community perceives it:

She likes this place and comes here almost every day—nice and obvious, easily visible to the customers of the cafés on either side; she can picture how the desire of the men sizing her up grows sharper from being able to observe her...Touma likes being raped this way by these men; she sees it as a form of respect. The others make their face a blank when she passes. “The others,” she corrects herself, “the Arabs,” and pronounces the word as she lifts her head. She shudders with hate. (90-91)

She hates “the Arabs” more than the French soldiers with whom she spends her time even though she has grown up with them. They sneer at her and shout abuses at her constantly. What “the Arabs” perceive as “rape,” she enjoys and receives as positive attention. She will never be wholly French, but she no longer sees herself as one of “the Arabs.” Djébar depicts this ambiguous identity position as unsustainable through her murder at her brother's hand. Furthermore, the only people who care about Touma's murder are a stranger, Lila, and her mother who thinks she deserved it, too. Her silence results from the revulsion felt by both the French and the non-Europeans toward the dubious form of

her assimilation.

Lila's Educated Silence

Lila is an educated, married woman whose husband has left to fight in the *maquis*. Her father, who has left Algeria to participate in the independence movement from France, insisted on educating her in the French system—against the wishes of his family. He instilled in her a sense of independence that she holds in high regard. With no children, no father, and no husband in Blida, Lila finds an apartment for herself where she laments her life. As a result of her conflicting feelings concerning her education and her absent husband, she does not feel compelled to fight actively for the revolution. Lila's marginal cultural position causes her to listlessly await a change in her circumstances. She embodies the perspective of a French-educated Algerian intellectual who feels paralyzed between her ideals and the violent reality of the war. While studying at the university, Lila participated in the early resistance movements, but she becomes silent and withdraws from political activity as problems arise in her personal relationships. Tracing the participation of women in the resistance movements provides some context for Lila's prior political involvement. However, like Lila, many of these women retreated into silence upon the commencement of the war.

Gaining a Voice Through the Nationalist Movements

It was often the wives and daughters of politically-oriented men who first became invested in the war effort. The space of the family proved particularly important in the coming to political consciousness of girls since most did not have widespread access to formal education before or during the war:

Un parent militait activement, il recevait des copains, j'entendais leurs discussions. Pour les filles, l'influence du milieu familial est essentielle. Les garçons peuvent se retrouver entre eux hors du lycée et discuter. Les filles se voient à peine, un morceau de trajet ensemble, pour revenir à la maison, c'est tout. (Hemrouche in Amrane-Minne 64)

It was difficult for girls to organize and discuss issues with each other because of traditional limitations on their movement outside of the home. Boys could leave the house and many went to school, so they had access to spaces where they could meet and discuss issues. Girls, however, spent most of their time in the home, so they did most of their learning through observation of the domestic space around them. Even if not directly included, girls growing up in a political household such as that of Lila, listened to the discussions of their fathers, brothers, and uncles which inspired a form of political consciousness in them. Sometimes, this led to witnessing conflicting messages between family members such as found within one of Amrane-Minne's accounts: “A la maison on ne discutait pas beaucoup, mais chez mes oncles ils parlaient énormément de la révolution. De retour à la maison, ce n'était pas la même ambiance. A mes questions, ma mère répondait: 'Tu ne peux pas comprendre, ton père a une pension des Français'”

(Zerrouki in Amrane-Minne 87-88). These kinds of conflicts indicated a disruption of the social fabric of indigenous cultures which sometimes enabled women to develop their own voices and the desire to participate more actively in the resistance movement.

Early nationalist groups such as Messali Hadj's PPA (*Parti du Peuple Algérien*) (later known as the MTLD (*Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques*)) and the PCA (*Parti Communiste Algérien*)⁵⁶ began small recruitment campaigns—mostly among the wives and daughters of its members—in order to encourage the spread of revolutionary momentum. However, numbers of participants remained negligible (only five cells of 4-5 women participants in Algiers in the case of the PPA (Amrane-Minne 17)) as women were made to meet separately from the men in relative obscurity. Social norms had not sufficiently shifted to allow for mixed meetings, but the groups began to recognize the necessity for garnering support among the women in the anti-colonial pursuit. In 1954, Messali Hadj of the nationalist *Etoile Nord Africaine* called for the *en-masse* participation of women (Lazreg, “Gender and Politics” 765). However, at this stage, participation remained relatively miniscule and almost exclusively urban.

When groups specially designed for women were created as offshoots from these organizations, women began to participate in larger numbers, but their work was more social or cultural than political. The female partner organization to the PCA was the UFA (*Union des femmes d'Algérie*)—a largely social group comprised of mostly uneducated women “sans étiquette politique...Elles avaient un programme défendant la justice, les progrès sociaux (Benousmane-Zekkal in Amrane-Minne 20), but not the

⁵⁶ For more information on these groups, see Chapter 1.

explicit program of liberating Algeria. Educated women of European origin were also attracted to the PCA as a result of their familiarity with the communist party outside of Algeria. Jacqueline Guerroudj describes her interest in Algerian liberation as a direct result of her interest in the politics of the communist party in France:

Je suis venue en Algérie par hasard, j'étais communiste d'opinion mas je n'étais pas inscrite au PC [*Parti communiste*], donc je n'avais pas de formation politique et c'est pour cela que je suis venue en Algérie. Parce que si j'avais eu une formation politique, je ne serai pas venue, moi, originaire d'un pays colonisateur, dans un pays colonisé, ce qui est une situation fausse et absolument invivable. (181-82)

Guerroudj came to Algeria with communist sensibilities, but did not really understand the cause until she joined the PCA. When she intellectualized her position within colonialism in the context of Algeria, she realized that she should have never come to Algeria from France in the first place. However, rather than retreat to France, her guilt compelled her to stay in Algeria and fight against colonialism in a more direct way than would have been possible for her in France. This manner of involvement comes from a somewhat abstract, intellectualized commitment to the cause of class consciousness and “an application of the theory.” The PCA sought to illustrate that the way to independence was through a commitment to communism: “c'est l'union de tout ces gens, la conscience de classe, c'est comme cela que nous arrivions à résoudre un certain nombre de leurs problèmes” (Amrane-Minne 183). Elyette Loup and Rose Serrano also participated in Algerian liberation out of a sense of unity through class consciousness supported by the message of the PCA (Amrane-Minne 188, 194).

Djebar also acknowledges the participation of European women in Algerian

liberation through the character Suzanne. Lila's French friend from university does not completely understand the sense of interdependency inherent to the community around her until faced with the possibility of escaping impending violence. She is married to Omar, an Arab lawyer in Blida who leaves for France. She refuses to leave because she begins to understand this bond that had seemed simplistic when she first arrived. Like Guerroudj, she feels she belongs to this community in a way that compels her to stay:

She had never understood Lila's preoccupation with holding on to family ties. She had seen that same gregarious affection for the ancestral tribe in Omar, in Mahmood himself. She had wanted to make fun of it once, but had encountered such offended surprise in the two men that she'd suddenly felt isolated in this community, which before, from the outside, had seemed so simplistic, because all she could see was its faults. Since then, she tells herself without any irritability, she has learned about its internal laws as well as its dirt. (81)

Even though Lila is an independent, educated woman who lives in her own apartment after her husband leaves, she does not break all ties with her past. Suzanne does not understand this “preoccupation” of hers or the men in her life. The logic of the community evades her while she is blinded by its “faults.” It is not as “simplistic” as it had once appeared. Only after she lets go of her desire to understand it logically does it begin to make sense to her.

In 1947, the AFMA (*Association des femmes musulmanes d'Algérie*) was created from the MTLD (formerly the PPA) to reach women and begin to educate them about resisting colonialism. This group was more specifically oriented toward the Algerian liberation movement than the UFA:

Conscientes que leur action doit être dirigée vers les femmes, et profitant de

l'ouverture du mouvement nationaliste à la légalité, elles imposent, en 1947, la création d'une Association des femmes musulmanes d'Algérie (AFMA). Il leur est plus facile, dans ce cadre légal et uniquement féminin, de toucher les femmes, mais leurs activités deviennent surtout socioculturelles. (Amrane-Minne 17)

When nationalist movements were again legalized in 1947 (after having been previously forbidden for proposing violence and total rupture from France), the MTLN saw a need for bringing women into the movement. Nationalists sought to educate women in order to combat various forms of colonial repression—political as well as social and cultural. Little by little, they began sending their daughters to schools for girls that included standard academic subjects as well as religious and political education:

C'était une école moderne, pas comme les Sid el Iouhate. Nous étudions le Coran, les hadith, tefsir, le calcul. C'était une école politique. Bien que les chants nationalistes soient interdits, nous les apprenions. C'est là que nous avons appris, toute jeunes, que nous étions colonisés et qu'il nous faudrait un jour faire la révolution contre le colonialisme. (Bouhired in Amrane-Minne 129)

A “modern school” by nationalist standards included singing nationalist songs, memorizing anti-colonial messages, and education in the teachings of the Koran.

In an interview conducted by Amrane-Minne many years after the conclusion of the war, Fatima Benosmane-Zekkal reveals some of the ways in which women of the AFMA supported the PPA:

Les femmes participaient à mille et une petites actions. Lors des Congrès du PPA ou de réunions importantes, des militants venaient à Alger de toutes les régions du pays et elles se proposaient pour en héberger. Pour les fêtes, nous leur demandions de faire des gâteaux pour les familles nécessiteuses et ils étaient ensuite distribués. Pour les élections municipales ou à l'Assemblée, nous leur expliquions les mots d'ordre du PPA et elles faisaient de la propagande.

Indépendamment des questions politiques, on faisait prendre conscience à la femme de son importance. Comme l'homme, elle devait lutter pour son pays. (Amrane-Minne 20-21)

Benosmane-Zekkal joined the first cell of the women's branch of the PPA in 1945, then helped found the AFMA in 1947, so she possessed an intimate knowledge of the goals and methods of the AFMA. Through housing delegates, making and distributing food for needy families, and helping spread the word about the PPA, women undertook tasks with which they felt most comfortable. Although these tasks seem relatively minor in terms of European and American women's movements of the same period, simply raising awareness among diverse groups of women would have been a major accomplishment given their total lack of participation in public discourse and political matters under French rule prior to the 1940s and 50s. These domestic matters proved critical as nationalist movements developed into a full-fledged war for independence from France. Urban women in the *maquis* acting as educators and nurses and rural women housing and feeding *mudjahidine* fighters proved critical to the war effort since a great deal of the fighting occurred in remote areas which were difficult for the French to navigate.

In addition to these relatively banal tasks directly supporting the work of the PPA, the AFMA also found artistic, performative ways of informing the largely illiterate female public of their message. These women delegates performed sketches that conflicted with their social reality—and even criticized indigenous institutions such as marriage. Benosmane-Zekkal describes these activities as “*révolutionnaire*” for the period:

Nous avons constitué une cellule de femme. Les réunions se passaient dans

des maisons. Les femmes tlemcéniennes, qui pourtant ne sortaient pas, assistaient à nos réunions. Il y avait un répondant, tu ne parlais pas en vain, les femmes étaient disposées à aider. Parmi nous, il y avait des femmes lettrées en arabe, on choisissait une idée: le mariage par exemple. On faisait un sketch, on le jouait nous-même et on le présentait dans une salle de cinéma. A l'époque c'était révolutionnaire... Dans le sketch du mariage, nous critiquons la dot élevée, toutes les affaires que la mariée amenait comme trousseau, etc. Les problèmes sociaux étaient traités. Nous faisons cela pour ne pas nous cantonner aux problèmes politiques, c'était pour attirer les femmes, cela avait beaucoup de succès. (Amrane-Minne 22)

Meeting and rehearsing in the feminine space of the home, they would educate themselves—cobbling together the knowledge of their members—and compose sketches about a theme they had agreed upon. Then, they would take these sketches to public cinemas to perform in front of audiences of women. These “successful” performances not only critiqued colonialism, but also critiqued the traditional set of values in which they lived in their domestic lives. These critiques probably would neither have been readily accepted by indigenous society at large nor even the more traditional male members of the PPA. These women participated in events that helped change their sense of cultural belonging and political engagement, but their voices remained generally restricted to these private interactions in enclosed spaces leading up to the war. Unfortunately, very few ultimately participated in the war effort. Of the 10,949 former combatants to register with the Ministry of Former *Moudjahidine* after 1962⁵⁷, only six reported political activity prior to the start of the war (Amrane-Minne 18).

Until the 1940s, men in Algeria (European and non-European alike) showed very little initiative in encouraging—or even allowing—native Algerian women to participate

⁵⁷ As Amrane-Minne rightfully notes, this number does not accurately reflect the full extent of the participation of women in the war effort. It only accounts for women who survived the war and were literate and resourceful enough to navigate the bureaucratic machine to apply for benefits. (18)

in politics, public debate, or education. Although nominally in favor of advancing women's involvement in the movement, many women were met with a great deal of resistance—particularly from within their families as we see in the example of Touma. Often, this ambivalence would surface when women pushed the limits of tradition in encounters with their parents. Isa Benzekri, expresses the limits of her mother's willingness to allow her to participate in activity outside of the home: “Ma mère acceptait que je travaille, mais pas que je me sois dévoilée. Nous n'étions pas nombreuses à être dévoilées” (Amrane-Minne 27). She can accept that she works (she was assigned to work in a French lawyer's office by the PPA), but cannot accept that she refuses to veil herself. The simple act of not wearing a veil was enough to make even Benosmane-Zekkal's father uncomfortable—and he was a member of the PPA, himself: “Mon père admettait mes activités, mais il ne voulait pas que je m'attarde aux réunions, que je rentre et sorte comme un garçon, il fallait préserver le côté traditionnel” (21). Her father accepts her participation in political groups, “coming and going like a boy,” but insists on her maintaining a curfew. The side of tradition emerged to truncate the speed of reform in the lives of these women. Publicly, there was a recognition that women must participate in the liberation movement, but privately, social reform was necessary for this participation to take place.

The anti-colonial movement catalyzed this conflict of political and social reform with tradition. Men had brought women into the mostly empty, self-serving rhetoric of revolution many years earlier. Now, they were finally bringing women, themselves, into the realm of action with these early meetings of the UFA and the AFMA. In fact, by the

1950s, there were a few educated, non-European Algerian women who called attention to the “double imperialism” of French colonialism and the form of Islamic conservatism under which they lived: “we, the women of Algeria, have two gaolers: colonialism...and the apathetic creatures who cling on to customs and traditions inherited not from Islam but from their ignorant fathers. The second gaoler is worse than the first” (Ahmed in MacMaster 97). Although not a wide-spread view when this statement was made in 1953, Ahmed calls attention to a generational break from the father⁵⁸ as well as a gendered break. As the example of Benosmane-Zekkal's father illustrates, even fathers of the PPA were not willing to let their daughters participate in an equal capacity to their sons in the liberation of their country. Raising the level of awareness and education among women began to reveal contradictions and ruptures within the social fabric—not just with regard to women's treatment by Europeans, but also by indigenous Algerian men before the war even began.

Like the majority of women who participated in these pre-war political groups, Lila remains silent during the war, too in Djebbar's novel. She blames herself and her estranged relationship with her husband on her failure to participate. At the time of Djebbar's narration, she regrets not asserting herself more in her relationship and in her political activities:

“Yes,” Lila continues, “in the end it was all just a pretext. We'd been living side by side for such a long time, no longer immersed in one another, hostile even. I let it all come apart! What was the use of saying to him, 'Let me go with you! Let me participate in what you're doing!' as he was leaving? There was no place for me in his activities; I'd neglected to find a place there for myself. (79)

58 As previously discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

Her husband did not ask her to participate in his political activities, but she recognizes that she never asked to join him or forge a place for herself. She did not realize this until it was too late—blaming herself, not her husband or her culture. She takes responsibility for her silence.

However, by the end of the novel she realizes that she is implicated in the struggle despite her silence. She is arrested as the result of her position within a wider web of political action as the cousin, wife, and daughter revolutionaries. She has not participated directly in any activities, but her relationship incriminates her:

“The student” (he pronounces the word contemptuously) “was first seen near Ferrand's farm, just moments before the fire. If he's the one who pulled that off, then he was part of a cell in town. As for the girl, it's very odd how she came here to live. Her cousin spent the night with her and yet his parents know nothing about it. She's married to another student, of whom there's no trace. Finally, her father has been in our files forever. A lot of coincidences all at once, wouldn't you say? Through her, I do believe, we have a very good chance of getting to the network.” (195)

The police assume that Lila would have intimate knowledge of the resistance network in Blida because of the proximity of her relationships with her cousin, her husband, and her father. In reality, she possesses almost no information that would be of any use to the police. Her interest in political activity ended years ago and she has been estranged from the men they mention for years. Her isolation is the result of her inability to deal with her husband's departure or the status of their marriage. It has nothing to do with her involvement in “the network.” These “coincidences” they see are just that: coincidences. The relationships they trace exist, but do not reflect any meaningful correlation to political activity. Rather, she is a troubled woman trying to cope with her sense of

loneliness and this visit from the police wakes her from her solitary existence. At the police station, she refuses to answer their questions. At first, she thinks her silence is the same kind of silence she had been living in since Ali's left her:

“...What I'm most familiar with is silence, immuring
silence...refusal...challenge.”

No, still on edge, she is, in fact, mistaken: nothing is familiar to her. Not the exaltation of finally feeling she's reached the place where cold pain, the screams of bewildering nights, the chorus of the victims' victories, open up; not the palpitation of the new world to which she's going to belong, finally delivered from herself, from the tangles of youth, from the plains of her solitude. No, nothing will be similar to the dizziness that once used to possess her, those magic spells. She's mistaken: she thinks she's relearning the challenge, while everything behind her has abruptly found its course. Facing the ordeal that's beginning, she thinks that one single certainty awaits her: the triumph of her arrogance and pride in the duel, while from here on in it's actually a question of her being born—of a true awakening. (197-98)

Upon further reflection, she realizes that the quality of her silence has changed due to her circumstances and her maturity. She is not the same woman she once was. She feels a sense of solidarity with her community that she did not feel before and a sense that her past actions have found their places in her life. In fact, the officer was correct in recognizing her position in her web of relationships. Now, she takes ownership of her knowledge and silence in a different way. In the interrogation room, she faces a new challenge that she has never faced before—the probability that these police will abuse her and the challenge of remaining silent throughout the ordeal. She sets out to “triumph” in her will to remain silent and already has a sense of “pride” in her success. Her “awakening” takes place in the police station as a result of working through her separation with Ali, witnessing her cousin's murder by the police hours before, and

recognizing the importance of her silence in her commitment to her community. This woman is left behind by the men in her life: her father, her husband, and her cousin. In the police station, she is now faced with responsibilities with much larger stakes than she has experienced previously in her young life.

Salima, Urban Fighter and the Battle of Algiers

Salima, another educated woman in Djébar's novel depicts an example of a women who participated in the urban resistance. We know very little of Salima's specific actions prior to the time of narration, but we know that she has always gone against the grain of tradition in her education and her profession as a schoolteacher:

Her teacher facing her, a mature city type who at times avoided her, sliding her gaze up and down over her long braids ("Moorish style," a young beauty, coming to class in high heels at age fourteen, once mocked behind her back), over her too-dark complexion ("Perhaps she's got black blood too," she'd hear as she passed by). And then Salima would tense up again, having chosen once and for all to persevere, to continue in spite of everything—the contempt of these foreign girls, the indifference of her own people—in spite of so many other obstacles. Her present rigidity, and more specifically her air of severe rectitude, was what was left of her opinionated, adolescent silence, at a time when the dominant impression was one of choking, but with clenched teeth. (63)

Here, as in the case of Touma, her resistance to abide by the standards of tradition makes her the object of contempt of both her own people as well as the Europeans. Salima, however, is educated beyond the scope of Touma's preference for European culture. Her "air of severe rectitude" differs significantly from the playful adolescence of Touma. She has learned the lessons of the French and adapted them to develop her own convictions.

She feels that she is “choking, but with clenched teeth” as she sits silently in prison awaiting her fate surrounded by the wails of fellow suspected resistance fighters. With Salima's silence, the secrets of her brothers and her experiences in prison remain unspoken.

Of all of the women who participated in the revolution, educated women, like Salima, saw the most publicity in *El Moudjahid* and in the international media. When women did speak in the media, they were typically well-educated and from urban areas. Sometimes these women were persecuted simply on suspicion of participation, sometimes they took a more active role in the fighting as in the case of the Battle of Algiers where women sometimes laid bombs in public places. These women were commemorated by Pontecorvo's film, *The Battle of Algiers* as bravely placing bombs in civilian cafes in Algiers and chanting alongside men in demonstrations. However, these women represent a negligible minority of those who participated in the revolution and the reality of their participation varied from the idealized images represented in the media. In general, the popularized representations of women fighters did not align with reality. The actions of the vast majority remain obscure and unspoken.

The Rhetoric of Women in the War

Although *El Moudjahid* would have its readers believe that women had “freed themselves” through their participation in the war and Fanon decreed that men and women were beginning to “create new dimensions for Algerian society” (60, Note 14)

that would last well into the independent nation, there is not a lot of evidence to suggest that these radical developments extended beyond empty rhetoric in a large-scale way. Certainly, there were instances of *moudjahidates* who fought with men in the *maquis* and carried bombs during the Battle of Algiers, but the women who participated in these actions were few and far between. By and large, the participation of women masses was more subtle, domestic, and often circumstantially-imposed. Exact numbers of fighters are difficult to ascertain, but officially, only 10,949 women registered with the Ministry of War Veterans after the war (Lazreg, *Eloquence* 119) as potential recipients of military pensions. This does not account accurately for every woman who fought in the war since many died before the end of the war or did not possess the competence (or desire) to navigate the bureaucracy of registering with the department. This estimation also excludes all of the women who participated in less overt ways such as providing support and assistance to soldiers in the *maquis* and taking on new responsibilities after the departure of their men.

One explanation for the relatively low official numbers of women fighters that Lazreg posits was that nationalist leaders did not want women to participate fully in the liberation movement to the same extent as men:

It was often against some nationalist leader's will that women joined the armed struggle. Indeed, the nationalists' perception of women as "passive" and in need of protection was out of step with women's own conceptions of their capabilities. Women's nationalistic feelings were just as deep as men's. In many ways, by joining the movement women acted as contestants of men's monopoly over nationalist militancy. ("Gender and Politics" 767)

This would help to explain the small number of women who registered as former fighters

at the end of the war. Relatively few women wanted to go against the grain of the expectations of men even though liberationist rhetoric would indicate otherwise. Furthermore, if they did, FLN leadership was comprised solely of men, so they would have had very little opportunity to arm themselves or find themselves in a position with the expectation of combat. As Lazreg also points out, the expectations for women participants were laid out very differently from those of men. On August 2, 1956, the FLN released a position paper known as the Soummam Platform which outlined the role of women as: “a) providing moral support to fighters and resisters; taking care of intelligence, liaison, food supplies and sanctuary; c) helping families and children left behind by those at the front, in prison or in detention camps” (*Eloquence* 129). This left women at a removal from direct action in urban and guerilla warfare. Ideally, they mostly filled the role of providing material and emotional “support” for the FLN fighters. Although some women resisted these roles and sought greater involvement, most participated in this way and would not necessarily have been counted as official participants by the Veterans office.

Expectations for women were culturally conflicting as well as conflicting in the FNL rhetoric. In *El Moudjahid*, women were lauded as achieving their own liberation independently of men, relegated to support positions, and depicted as fighting alongside men in the *maquis* in various articles. For Lazreg, this amounts to rhetoric that is “ideologically undeveloped and lacking in conviction” (*Eloquence* 130)—probably too closely affiliated with FLN propaganda to be seen by her as a source of unbiased information. Fanon, too, discusses women as achieving independent feats of social

change alongside their Algerian brothers—“side by side with us, our sisters do their part in further breaking down the enemy system” (67)—in the same breath that he describes their weaknesses. Only exceptional women would fight for their place among the ranks of men and only exceptional women would be able to do so. According to Fanon, the expectations for women were higher than those of men because of their perceived weakness:

The women's entry into the war had to be harmonized with respect for the revolutionary nature of the war. In other words, the women had to show as much spirit of sacrifice as the men. It was therefore necessary to have the same confidence in them as was required from seasoned militants who had served several prison sentences. A moral elevation and a strength of character that were altogether exceptional would therefore be required of the women. (48)

For some reason, women seeking entry to the battlefield would need to be as trusted as “seasoned militants who had served several prison sentences.” This was a lot to ask of an uneducated woman who had been relegated mostly to the domestic sphere of her family. For full inclusion, a woman needed to go above and beyond reasonable expectations for a novice male fighter. Lazreg attributes these differences in criteria as related to the female body:

They had to be like men and perform better than men. Why? Because of their body. Repeating what was at the time a standard notion among Algerian men and colonists, Fanon argues that women's “cloistered life” made their bodies feel less at ease moving about in the city streets. In addition, letting them into the movement might endanger their lives. Neither reason is compelling. (*Eloquence* 126)

Women's bodies were perceived to be weaker as a result of their confinement to the home and the veil. They were not used to walking around freely and confidently (according to

Fanon), so they would not be able to carry out military duties as effectively as their male counterparts. To some degree, they needed to prove that they were able to manipulate their bodies in a way that would hide their weaknesses by easily veiling and unveiling based on the task at hand. At the same time, women's participation in liberation movements was not unprecedented, since at least the second half of the nineteenth century, they had proven themselves as competent political and military allies of their men.⁵⁹ Writers in *El Moudjahid* even drew parallels between Algerian women and famous women in French resistance such as Joan of Arc (“Après l'assassinat”). But, again, these representations and voices tended to drown out the voices of the Algerian women who sought to liberate their country from French oppression from 1954-1962.

Women at War

As previously mentioned, 10,949 women registered with the Ministry of War Veterans after the war. However, this figure does not include women who played unofficial support roles, villagers who assisted *moudjahidine*, and women who were called upon to take on new roles after their husbands, fathers, and brothers had left for the *maquis*. Urban women smuggling weapons and fighting alongside men have long been memorialized through political propaganda and representations such as Gillo Pontecorvo's iconic 1966 film, *The Battle of Algiers*. While these women possessed great significance and represent shifting ideologies regarding the capacity of Algerian women,

⁵⁹ See Lazreg, *Eloquence*, Chapter Two, for an analysis of women's historic participation in liberation conflicts.

women carrying bombs and engaging in “paramilitary acts of destruction of civilian targets” comprised only 2% (65 women) of the total number engaged in the war effort (Lazreg, *Eloquence* 124). Only about 11% of the total (205 women) involved were officially members of the FLN's National Liberation Army “which meant wearing a uniform and taking part in combat or auxiliary services such as nursing, communications, engineering, food preparation and so on” (Lazreg, *Eloquence* 124). The following table lays out some of the tasks assigned to both military and civilian women according to an assessment by Djamila Amrane. She even includes women who undertook such tasks as cooking, laundry, and guiding *moudjahidine* through the *maquis*. However, it too, will prove insufficient when compared with accounts made by rural women such as those in Amrane-Minne's book of interviews and the totals do not align with those of the 10,949 women registered with the Ministry of War Veterans. It does, however, give some sense of the kinds of tasks and the way these tasks might have been proportionally distributed among Algerian women.

Functions	Civilian Women	Military Women	Total
Sanctuary/Supplies	1,958 (63.30%)	6 (2.90%)	1964
Liaison and Guide	677 (22.10%)	-	677
Fund-raising, Medical/Arms Supplies	286 (9.30%)	-	286
Nursing	56 (1.80%)	101 (48.30%)	157
Cooking/Laundry	-	991 (44.40%)	991
Urban Guerrilla	65 (2.10%)	-	65
Sewing	19 (0.60%)	1 (0.50%)	20
Clerical	5 (0.20%)	3 (0.40%)	8
Political Commissar	-	2 (1.00%)	2

Armed Soldier	-	1 (0.50%)	1
Total	3066	205	3271

Source: Marnia Lazreg, Adapted from Djamila Amrane, “La femme algérienne et la Guerre de libération nationale,” In *Combattantes de la lutte Armée*.

Of the women undertaking these tasks, those from urban areas made up only 20% of the total involvement. These women were: “... Generally drawn from the French-educated middle class, although other social classes were represented. Those who became famous because the media seized upon their plight were graduates of French *lycées*, or still attending one when they joined the FLN” (Lazreg, *Eloquence* 120-21). One woman also recounts fighting alongside European women in Oran in an interview in *El Moudjahid* (“Femmes algériennes”). Amrane-Minne describes women of European origin as in a very difficult position because of their insistence to fight against the traditional division lines of colonizer versus colonized: “Les combattantes d'origine européenne sont très peu nombreuses, mais leur engagement est exemplaire parce qu'elles ont agi à contre-courant de leur environnement social et culturel” (Amrane-Minne 180). The composition of this group was similar to that of the early PCA and PPA nationalist organizations before the outbreak of the war—women who fought for inclusion in the male-dominated liberation movement, educated women, or who were already included by virtue of their husbands' and fathers' involvement.

Similar to the recruitment efforts of the PCA and PPA, wives of militants were some of the first participants in the war effort when fighting began as a result of their husbands' engagement with FLN activity. Fanon recognizes these wives as belonging to the first category of women “to be chosen” to participate in the resistance:

The married women whose husbands were militants were the first to be chosen. Later, widows or divorced women were designated...But the woman's duties as mother or spouse, the desire to limit to the minimum the possible consequences of her arrest and her death, and also the more and more numerous volunteering of unmarried girls, led the political leaders to make another leap, to remove all restrictions, to accept indiscriminately the support of all Algerian women. (51)

Fanon glibly minimizes the efforts undertaken by early women nationalists to participate in the war in the place of traditional social restrictions. Even as we have already seen, parents and husbands of these women did not always approve of their activities. Some women, were indeed “chosen,” but many others fought for involvement. He does, however, indicate that later during the war “unmarried girls” such as Salima insisted on participation which compelled the FLN to allow them greater opportunities within the movement. By this account, leadership also recognized that the “support” of Algerian women in liberation aligned with “duties as mother and spouse.” This assessment better reflects the mixed composition of women as well as the various kinds of expectations placed upon them. Women must uphold their positions as mothers and wives before their political duties in a way that was markably different from men as husbands and fathers.

Urban Guerrilla Girls

By official accounts, women's participation in urban warfare was considerably lower than all other areas—Amrane counts only sixty-five total in her estimate. However, these women were the most iconic and widely-discussed due to the attention they received in Fanon's essays, Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers*, and their

inclusion in the pages of *El Moudjahid* and other media outlets. These women embodied radical political and social change in the post-colonial world, so their image was dispersed widely throughout international media and discussions. Carrying bombs under their veils and weapons in their baskets, they flew against traditional society and colonial oppression with their participation in the war and their willingness to deploy symbols such as the veil strategically to carry out their ends. However, the most famous accounts—including Pontecorvo's—fail to depict the sometimes grisly consequences of their participation—imprisonment and torture. They also fail to describe the full extent of their participation beyond veiled bomb carriers.

Women fighting as urban guerrillas were raised almost exclusively in urban centers such as Algiers. The culture of Algier's Casbah became increasingly occupied with the liberation movement during the 1940s and 50s becoming a hotbed for male and female involvement in resistance. Fatma Baichi, a veiled seamstress, was militarized by her brother, but describes the Casbah as her inspiration for her action:

J'étais toute jeune mais je brûlais du désir de militer. C'était les chants patriotiques que j'entendais à la Casbah, les tracts que l'avais lus qui m'y poussait. Je me rappelle, quand il y avait des fêtes: mariages, baptêmes, il y avait un orchestre dans la cour centrale des maisons. Et toujours à la fin ou à mi-temps, ils arrêtaient tout, se levaient pour faire une minute de silence pour les morts de Sétif et de Guelma de 1945, puis il y avait des chants patriotiques. A la Casbah tout le monde était nationaliste, dans le sang.
(Baichi in Amrane-Minne 111-12)

Baichi describes a common feeling of resistance throughout the Casbah after the Sétif massacre⁶⁰ of 1945 included in daily life as well as special occasions (marriages and baptisms). Through songs and tracts, inhabitants of the Casbah educated one another in a

⁶⁰ See Chapter One for more details.

variety of ways to develop a strong ideological resistance to colonialism. According to Baichi's account, it seems there was very little opposition to the growth of nationalism in this sector of the city where “everyone was a nationalist in their blood.”

Not to be overlooked, the Casbah also harbored a deep sense of traditionalism. Zohra Drif (who would become a lawyer and vice-president of the upper house of the Algerian Parliament after the war), describes her experiences living clandestinely in the Casbah with various families as “extremely traditional”: “C'est en réalité un milieu extrêmement traditionaliste. Chez la famille B.H. par exemple, où nous avons souvent été hébergés, les femmes ne devaient même pas rire bruyamment, mais nous y étions respectées” (Drif in Amrane-Minne 138). The women of the household were kept in check, but the women fighters were accepted and “respected” by these men. This double standard was often described as a component of male nationalist thinking—both encouraging equal participation by women, but resisting the participation of the women of their own households. The women of the B.H. family could not laugh too disruptively, but the men welcomed women fighters into their home at the risk of torture, imprisonment, or death if they were caught. On the other hand, Drif describes her desire to remain in the urban center where she can participate in armed resistance rather than venture out to the *maquis* where they may ask her to participate as only a “nurse or secretary”: “Je voulais participer à l'action armée. Je pensais qu'au maquis je ne serais utilisée que comme infirmière ou secrétaire, je voulais donc entrer dans un groupe terroriste, ici, en ville” (Drif in Amrane-Minne 138). Drif recognized that in order to fight alongside her patriotic brothers, she would have to remain in the city. The deeply

traditional family she describes resides in the deeply radical urban center of Algiers. These somewhat contradictory accounts illustrate the underlying tension between the political agenda and the social reality of Algeria during the period of decolonization. The public spaces of the Casbah did not always correlate to the expectations within private spaces of the Algerian family.

The Battle of Algiers exemplifies urban warfare during the French-Algerian War. Urban combat was rare with the majority of the armed conflicts with the French occurring in the *maquis*, but ideological shifts culminated into a battle in Algiers during this period. On 19 June 1956, two FLN prisoners were executed at the Barberousse Prison. In retaliation, FLN leadership were ordered “to shoot down any European, from 18 to 54. No women, no children, no elder” (Horne 183-84). Forty-nine civilians were ultimately shot down by the FLN. This led to a spiral of retaliation between the French and the FLN on the militant and civilian populations. The French imposed tighter and tighter restrictions on the non-European residents of the Casbah including check-points, curfews, raids, and bombings. Pontecorvo's film shows that the French prevented Algerian militants from even seeking health care when they were injured as a result of urban clashes. They were prevented from buying supplies for caring for wounds in their own homes and all wounded entering the hospitals must be reported to French authorities (29:00). Ultimately, thirty thousand soldiers and police surrounded the 300,000 Algerians of the Casbah of Algiers (of whom about 500 were armed FLN militants). As Pontecorvo's film depicts, the French initially began planting covert bombs in the Casbah on the night of August 10, 1956 (37:30). Supposedly intending to punish the armed

militants, the French killed FLN members along with a number of Algerian civilians. This put in motion the famous series of bombs set by Algerian men and women in locations throughout the European quarter of the city. Pontecorvo's film depicts Algerians pulling the bodies of adults and children out of the wreckage in the Casbah with a parallel scene of innocent French victims being pulled out of civilian targets fifteen minutes later in the film (38:45, 53:45).

In the film, French bombing of the residential Casbah signals a change in attitude of the FLN from the effort to not take the lives of women and children. When the people spontaneously band together to rally against the French, a child reasons with the crowd telling them “the army will slaughter you...the FLN will avenge you, so stop marching!” (40:50). Time and again, little Omar speaks as the voice of reason as well as the rally cry for the FLN. He embodies the universality of the independence movement as well as the necessity of remaining disguised and covert in combat operations. Little Omar's voice helps organize the people—both ideologically and militarily throughout the film. They did not have the same arms or budget as the French, so they must use their numbers and the French incompetency of Algerian culture to their advantage.

As the French began to understand Algerian strategies in the battle, their operations became more and more transparent. Thus, they began to call upon women to carry out more important tasks that would require them to move outside of their traditional roles and domestic spaces—from transporting arms to relaying secrets. At first, this meant taking off their veils to move about among the European population. By appearing European (or at least very Europeanized), women could carry out their

missions undetected. Fanon argues that these women mostly came from very traditional upbringings and would not have been familiar with a precedence of women undertaking covert operations:

... The committed Algerian woman learns both her role as “a woman alone in the street” and her revolutionary mission instinctively. The Algerian woman is not a secret agent. It is without apprenticeship, without briefing, without fuss, that she goes out into the street with three grenades in her handbag or the activity report of an area in her bodice. She does not have the sensation of playing a role she has read about ever so many times in novels, or seen in motion pictures. (50)

Unlike a European (or Europeanized) woman, these women would have a more authentic relationship to their tasks. They would not have recognized that they were playing a certain type of role that had been played before from which they would be able to draw inspiration. Instead, she went “without fuss” into the urban battlefield and carried out the assignment given her—ostensibly putting her at greater risk than a woman familiar with this kind of role. Fanon endowed the Algerian woman with less experience and greater insight than a European woman. She did not completely understand her role as secret agent or her role in the larger picture of the liberation movement, but she instinctually carried out her duties in the name of freedom from oppression. Fanon describes these women as very traditional and “awkward” in the face of their new duties which include taking off their veils in public: “She has to create for herself an attitude of unveiled-woman-outside. She must overcome all timidity, all awkwardness (for she must pass for a European), and at the same time be careful not to overdo it, not to attract notice to herself” (59). Against all odds, these women must intuitively project a kind of public confidence in unfamiliar spaces with an unfamiliar script. Even more challenging, she

must project confidence without seeming over confident. Her acting must be exact in order to preserve her life and carry out her mission—with only one chance at convincingly undertaking this role with no script and no director.

The example of Zohra Drif conflicts with Fanon's account. Drif was educated in the French system, studied law during the outbreak of the battle, and insisted on fighting in an urban context because she wanted to carry out more dangerous missions than she would in the *maquis*. Pontecorvo, too, depicts these women fighters as relatively comfortable and competent without the protection of their veils. In one of the most important scenes of the film, traditional music fills the silence of a group of women preparing to go into battle. They take off their veils and traditional clothing and undertake the hairstyles, make-up, and fashion of European women (41:40). A man checks their work when they have finished (43:10), but without any pictures or prompting, they successfully disguise themselves for their mission—convincing the Algerian man as well as the French soldiers at the check-points throughout the city that they pose no threats to the European city (45:40). Clearly, they already possess the cultural cues, experience, and confidence to pass themselves off as European. They flirt with the guards, speak fluently in French, and describe their trips to the beach in ways that extend beyond intuition or memorization of a script given to them by their superiors.

Malika Ighilhariz recounts her participation in urban warfare as a fluid movement between traditional and revolutionary roles:

J'avais les cheveux au vent, je passais tous les barrages avec de grands sourires. Pour rentrer à la Casbah, je stationnais boulevard de la Victoire, juste à côté de Barberousse, près de la Gendarmerie. On me voyait descendre

de la voiture, à la française, j'entrais dans un immeuble où je mettais mon voile et ma voilette, je ressortais voilée et descendais à Casbah. Je déposais ce que je devais remettre et reprenais ce qu'il fallait sortir de la Casbah, des messages, des armes. Et je refusais le même manège. Dans le couloir d'un immeuble, j'enlevais le voile, je remettais mon rouge à lèvres, mes lunettes, je sortais et je remontais dans ma belle voiture. (Ighilhariz in Amrane-Minne 149)

Ighilhariz describes moving back and forth between European and Muslim identities and spaces with ease. In her European car, she parks near the police station and descends with no hesitation “à la française” into a building where she veils herself to reenter the Casbah. She picks up her arms, enters the building again and takes off her veil before returning to her car. Feeling equally at ease veiled or unveiled, she fit in as both a traditional Muslim and a French woman manipulating a variety of props from cars to lipstick to sunglasses to veils. She performs whichever role she needs to depending on the context. Fanon, however, describes moving back and forth between veiling and not veiling as separate phases in the participation of women in urban warfare:

The Algerian woman's body, which in an initial phase was pared down, now swelled. Whereas in the previous period the body had to be made slim and disciplined to make it attractive and seductive, it now had to be squashed, made shapeless and even ridiculous. This, as we have seen, is the phase during which she undertook to carry bombs, grenades, machine-gun clips. (67)

Again, he seems to oversimplify the complexity of the role of women in urban warfare. In one phase, they must overcome their “awkwardness,” in the next, they must don the veil again and counteract the “attractive and seductive” qualities they had acquired in order to move about freely on the streets without a veil. Ighilhariz illustrates the continuity between these roles and spaces as well as the ease with which they were

undertaken by certain women.

Absent from other accounts, Amrane-Minne interviews European women from a variety of backgrounds who participated in urban warfare—blending in undetected among those they fought against. Although reluctant at first to accept them fully, the French-born Jacqueline Guerroudj describes acceptance into the liberation movement: “Mais très rapidement, quand ils ont vu que je faisais mon boulot correctement, cela c'est très bien arrangé, au contraire, ils étaient fiers et enthousiastes, ils sont passés d'un extrême à l'autre” (Amrane-Minne 185). Spanish housekeeper, Rose Serrano, also became accepted into the movement by the women as a result of her earnestness in seeking a better future for the country:

J'étais la seule Européenne, et l'administration pénitentiaire espérait que cela allait se passer très mal. Mais en fait cela s'est passé très bien. Alors je les gênais plutôt qu'autre chose. Les femmes me disaient que j'étais une mère de famille et que j'avais pris position pour la révolution, qu'elles étaient contentes de me connaître et puis on parlait, on dansait, on chantait, on ne se laissait pas abattre. (Amrane-Minne 194)

Entrance into the political life of her countrymen through her involvement in the FLN also gave her access to domestic spaces in which she could “dance” and “sing” with the wives and mothers of the non-European population.

Zohra Drif describes the role of women in the context of urban warfare as not only equal to, but more important than those of men after a certain time. The participation of women actually saved the men who had become imprisoned within domestic spaces:

Au début, j'étais une simple exécutante, mais les conditions devenaient de plus en plus dures. La Casbah était quadrillée, les frères auraient été

immobilisés si nous n'avions pas été là. Nous vivions la même vie, mais sur le plan d'activité, nous avions une vie plus intense qu'eux parce que nous pouvions nous déplacer voilées. C'est eux qui se trouvaient cloîtrés. A un moment, on les voilait pour qu'ils puissent sortir, ils devaient se couler en nous pour mettre le nez dehors. (Amrane-Minne 138)

The manipulation of the veil gave women combatants an opportunity to move about the Casbah more freely than men in the heat of the battle. As Drif describes, “we [women fighters] lived the same life, but along the lines of activity, we had a more intense life than them because we could move about veiled.” In a complete reversal from tradition, the men were “cloistered” and the women were free to move about publicly.

Beyond the transport of weapons and secrets made famous by Fanon and Pontecorvo, Algerian women also took on a variety of other domestic responsibilities in urban warfare including cooking, providing safe housing for men and women in hiding, and storing weapons for distribution. Kheira Bousafi recounts her efforts to provide urban domestic support before she joined the fighters in the *maquis*: “Je travaillais et j'ai habité seule pour pouvoir héberger les frères. J'avais un deux pièces, les frères venaient, ils dormaient, mangeaient. Recherchés, ils restaient nuit et jour sans sortir” (Amrane-Minne 49). The “brothers” counted on her to hide and protect them when they were pursued by the French. This level of involvement put her at equal risk of imprisonment or torture as they were.

Fatiha Bouhired, aunt of Djamila Bouhired (a bomb-carrying woman made famous by her experiences being tortured by the French), describes her work in relation to Djamila's: “Nous travaillions ensemble Djamila et moi. Djamila au-dehors, elle faisait les liaisons, moi, je cuisinais. Djamila et moi étions seules au courant. S'il y avait des

armes, Djamila et moi seules le savions. Elle les apportait et je les cachais dans ma chambre” (Amrane-Minne 129). Fatiha worked inside, Djamila outside, but they worked “together.” They were the only ones around them who knew whether there were weapons in the house at any particular time. Both adopted equal risk and responsibility for carrying out their respective tasks, but one acted in the domestic space, one in public. They were privy to more information than the men of the household thus taking on more of the burden.

Fatiha also describes her continued involvement in the liberation after the death of her husband. She used the money he left to his family to buy a safe house in the Casbah where the final showdown between Ali LaPointe and the French military takes place in Pontecorvo's film:

Je l'ai acheté avec l'argent de mes enfants. La maison ne me plaisait pas, dans mon coeur je ne voulais pas. C'était l'argent que Mustapha avait laissé à nos enfants. Il était mort et les avait laissé orphelins. J'aurais voulu leur acheter la villa de Kouba, elle avait du terrain. J'ai acheté la maison trois millions. J'ai fait une cachette, et ils sont venus chez moi: Yacef Saadi, Ali la Pointe, Zohra, Hassiba, le jeune Omar. Ils étaient chez eux, ils n'étaient plus caché chez les gens, ils étaient chez moi, chez eux. (Amrane-Minne 134)

Not only did she buy the house against the will of her “heart,” but she considered the people she harbored as family. “They were in their home, they were no longer hidden in the houses of other people, they were in my home, in their home.” She continued her husband's vision because it is also became her vision for her country.

Certain situations arising in urban centers led women to feel a sense of equality among their male counterparts that did not necessarily persist after the end of the war. Perhaps unique to her situation, Zohra Drif discusses the feeling of being on equal

footing with FLN leadership in the urban battle. She praises one leader, Yacef Saadi, as willing to discuss important matters with the women around him:

Une des qualités de Yacef était que la discussion existait. Nous parlions du choix, des objectifs. Il faut se représenter nos problèmes à cette époque, surtout vers la fin. Nous étions sept chats et nous devions donner l'impression que nous existons.. Nous voulions faire le plus et le mieux, mais limités par nos moyens, nous savions que ce n'était qu'une goutte d'eau. Nous étions conscients de notre faiblesse, mais nous avions la conviction terrible que tous les paras du monde n'arriveraient à rien contre nous. (Amrane-Minne 140)

These seven women felt like they “existed” when they spoke with him. They were convinced that they could contribute meaningfully to the revolution and to society and were treated as though that were a possibility. This may not have always been the case in different times and places throughout the war, but the unique factors contributing to the Battle of Algiers provided a space for women to flourish in the liberation effort. They had access to spaces not available to men, used their knowledge of French culture to elude the French, and had meaningful discussions about the future of their country in mixed company.

Algerian women of all classes and ethnicities banded together with their male counterparts to resist the French. In urban centers, especially, this was a particularly risky business. Although a woman fighting as an urban guerrilla was relatively rare in the context of women's participation in the war effort, these women were given a great deal of responsibility and were often able to accomplish tasks that would have been impossible for men. Coming primarily from the educated sector of the Muslim population, these women went willingly into battle with a firm grasp of the stakes of their

missions as well as the potential for violence at the hands of their enemies. When the imprisoned Ben M'Hidi gives a press conference for Western media in Pontecorvo's film, a reporter asks whether he thinks it is cowardly to use women to carry bombs. He responds with an equally valid question for the French: "Isn't it cowardly to kill everyone in villages?" (1:28:45). Throughout the film (as well as by all other accounts), we see that the participation of women has nothing to do with cowardice. Even Fanon underestimated the bravery and autonomy of these women in their decision to participate. Particularly in the case of urban warfare, women seemed mostly knowledgeable and eager to participate (when they chose to) as a result of their lived experiences of oppression by the French and the diffusion through the Casbah of nationalist rhetoric. Tellingly, Pontecorvo's film ends with the "frightening" traditional cries of the Muslim women (1:56:20): *yoyous* carried into the night signaling triumph as well as an uncertain future.

Prison Lessons

Salima's story takes place exclusively in prison in Djébar's novel where she awaits the mysterious punishment for her undisclosed crimes among the screams of her countrymen. We never know whether she is innocent or guilty of these crimes, but we know that she will remain silent throughout her imprisonment as did many other women in similar conditions. Despite their relatively limited participation in acts of violence, women were not spared the infamously gruesome acts of torture by French soldiers. Two

of the most famous women imprisoned and tortured by the French also belonged to this class of urban guerilla fighters: Djamila Bouhired and Djamila Boupacha. These women gained international notoriety, in part, as a result of their representation by French lawyers who brought media attention to their cases. Bouhired was involved in planting bombs during the Battle of Algiers and was very close with one of the highest-ranking FLN commanders, Saadi Yacef (both of whom were depicted in the film, *The Battle of Algiers*). Yacef refused to relent carrying out violent acts of retaliation on the urban population for her imprisonment, torture, and death sentencing (Horne 211-16). Adding to this high-profile commitment by Yacef in Algeria, Bouhired's case was taken on in 1957 by Jacques Vergès who framed the case in terms of French violence against civilians. Vergès used this case to raise international awareness of the dubious methods used by the French on Algeria's civilians—particularly on women. In 1960, Djamila Boupacha became another poster child for excessive French violence against Algerian women while they simultaneously rallied for women's liberation from the oppression of Algerian men. Accused of setting off a bomb (which she likely could not have done under the circumstances), Boupacha was imprisoned, violently tortured, and raped by the French military. Her brother contacted the French lawyer, Gisèle Halimi on her behalf who agreed to come to Algeria to take on her case. Halimi chronicles government efforts to prevent the trial from taking place fairly in her 1962 book, *Djamila Boupacha*. As a result of the egregious blunders made by the Algerian justice system, her case was heard in France, but she was still sentenced to death in 1961—which she ultimately escaped upon Algerian independence. Again, this sequence of events caused an uproar in the

French and international communities where Boupacha's cause found the support of figures such as Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Aimé Césaire.⁶¹

These examples expose rather common-place acts of violence and injustice against women involved in (or suspected to be involved in) FLN activities. According to Amrane-Minne's interviews, urban women involved in liberation activities were extremely likely to be arrested and tortured. Among the eight women she interviewed who had participated in urban warfare (Fatma Baichi, Yasmina Belkacem, Fatiha Bouhired, Zohra Drif, Baya Hocine, Malika Ighilhariz, Goucem Madani, and Mériem Madani), every one was imprisoned and half were tortured by the French regardless of the degree of their involvement. Baichi describes being “tortured to death” by the French: “J’ai été torturée à mort...Ils m’ont torturée à la baignoire, tu sais les mains et les pieds attachés...je ne pouvais plus parler. Je n’ai parlé de personne” (Amrane-Minne 118). Even in the face of this brutality rendering her physically unable to speak, she did not give information to the French. In prison, she also saw a fellow Algerian “brother” being tortured, Si Bouzid. Her blind support and commitment to him in the face of imminent violence is so strong that the French mistake this bond for one formed by a sexual relationship:

Ils m’ont confrontée avec Si Bouzid que je ne connaissais pas. J’ai pleuré quand je l’ai vu, le pauvre, ils l’avait tout lacéré avec la lame Gillette. Il était presque nu, attaché. Je lui disais: “N’aie pas peur, mon frère.” Ils ont cru que j’étais sa maîtresse, alors que je ne le connaissais pas, je ne l’avais jamais vu. (Amrane-Minne 118)

61 Pontecorvo's film also immortalizes the French use of terror and torture against civilians, but does not focus on women. The film begins with a tortured prisoner turned informant who leads the military to the Bouhired safe house containing Ali La Pointe and Zohra Drif. For other scenes depicting or justifying violent interrogation methods or violence against civilians see also, for example, Pontecorvo 59:50, 1:35:40, 1:27:50, 1:53:20.

This event illustrates the deep sense of commitment felt between Algerian combatants fighting for their independence that the French did not understand. They interpreted this kind of connection with a personal, sexual bond not a shared political agenda. She felt a deep sadness for this maimed man who shared her willingness to suffer torture in order to protect his comrades.

This describes something stronger than a political agenda—a shared commitment to fighting colonial oppression for a free Algeria. This sentiment extended beyond class or ethnic divisions and was felt equally powerfully by certain European women involved in the struggle as well. Elyette Loup, daughter of colonial land-owners, describes a scene involving her French torturers who have severely beaten her: “J’avais l’impression d’être dédoublée, d’être réduite à un petit noyau qu’il fallait sauver, le corps n’avait plus d’importance. J’ai gueulé, j’ai souffert, mais je me concentrais sur ce petit noyau: il ne fallait pas parler” (Amrane-Minne 191). Throughout the experience, she focused on reminding herself not to speak in order to maintain some degree of composure. Like her non-European sisters and brothers, she did not reveal the secrets she possessed. In retrospect, she focuses on the ways that speaking about these experiences can be useful. For Loup, knowledge is power when it comes to resisting torture: “Ce qui est intéressant dans l’histoire des tortures, c’est ce qui peut aider les autres, car il faut savoir pour pouvoir résister” (Amrane-Minne 191). Informing the world about French torture methods could help garner support for Algerian independence and help prevent the future use of torture in other contexts.

Women also witnessed other forms of transformation in the context of torture and

imprisonment—indicating a fissure in the strictly binary pro- or anti-colonial rhetoric during the war. Not all French soldiers shared the same sense of brutality and animosity toward the Muslim population. One French paratrooper sees the face of his sister in Baichi and expresses regret for what is happening to her in the prison: “Il y avait un para qui m'a dit: “Tu sais que tu me fais de la peine. C'est sincère ce que je te dis, tu me rappelles un visage qui n'est très cher, celui de ma soeur. Quand ils te torturaient, je voulais éclater, j'avais l'impression que c'était ma soeur qu'ils torturaient. Mais je ne peux rien faire” (Amrane-Minne 119). He claims that despite his sympathy for her, his hands are tied. He cannot act on her behalf for reasons he does not explain.

Assia Djebar's novel depicts another guard whose commitment to the French also wavers. An Arab prison guard repeatedly returns to Salima and eventually sees his sister in her:

He came back several times after that. The same lament, the same plea. He expressed it with contained passion; one day he wasn't able to speak, he sputtered as he came closer to her, and repeated, “I'm one of the guards. My name is Taleb! My sister, oh my sister!” and he was trembling like an orphan. (58)

The guard, Taleb (whose name means “student” in Arabic), is torn between his duty to the French and his connection with his brothers and sisters fighting for national liberation. He is described as an “orphan” who has no rightful place with either the French or the resistance movement now that he has betrayed the Arab family who Salima represents for him in this encounter. Prison put fighters from both sides next to each other in close quarters. At times, these guards questioned the finality of the division between prisoner and captor in a way that challenged the ideological underpinning of the battle. Seeing

these women at close proximity reminded the guards of their sisters. This caused them to call their position as captors into question in both cases.

Men and women also used this close proximity to one another as prisoners to strengthen their solidarity and educate themselves. In Djébar's novel, an uneducated housewife, Cherifa, asks her husband what prison was like: "I was lucky; that's where I discovered my Arab brothers, where I became a man... Young Youssef was discovering that a native country is not shared land, not even shared misery, but blood, shed together on the same day, the same songs interrupted" (121). After this experience, Youssef rises through the ranks to become a leader of the urban resistance fighters in Blida. The discoveries he makes in prison do not result from a conventional education, but are the product of shared experience and a shared desire to resist injustice. For this reason, Salima's guard does not belong to this brotherhood that extends beyond family or land. He does not shed blood with his brothers, choosing to collaborate with their oppressors instead.

Groups of women likewise used their time in prison together to form bonds and educate themselves. In *El Moudjahid*, a woman describes her experience in the women's ward as space for communal education:

Nous avons organisé des cours, chacune faisait ce qu'elle pouvait. Une couturière nous expliquait ses secrets...de manière théorique! Nous avons appris l'arabe à toutes les Européennes, la lecture et l'écriture arabe à celles des musulmanes qui n'étaient pas trop âgées pour le faire. Nous faisons des cours de philo aussi, des exposés sur toutes sortes de sujets, en particulier politiques. ("Femmes algériennes")

Each woman brings her particular knowledge to the table. A seamstress teaches the

women her secrets, the Arabs teach the Europeans Arabic, and those who have received a formal education teach those who have not. They capitalize on this opportunity to learn from one another rather than become depressed by their inability to act. In Djébar, Salima, too, turns her solitary confinement into a generative experience. At first, she is fearful of the tortured people screaming around her, but eventually she sees it as a rallying cry:

Why run away from it? One should listen! She is seized by wild exaltation. “This is the song of my country, this is the song of the future,” she whispers, an upright silhouette in the center of the empty cell, quivering with zeal and joy—and why not (how distant now the little teacher, stiff in front of her students, in front of the men who run into her in the street, bowed down in the evening over her notebooks and corrections, locking herself away in hypersensitive desiccation). “This is the song of my country,” she repeats, trembling all over. Later, when the man falls silent, she is overcome by fear. She is careful to wait, wait for another scream, another sign of life and horror at the same time. (113)

Salima undergoes a personal transformation as she begins to understand these screams differently. She is no longer the timid teacher “stiff in front of her students,” but an “upright silhouette...quivering with zeal and joy.” The screams signal defiance to give in to colonial oppression, solidarity in the battle for national liberation, and the continuation of life. As long as she hears these screams, she knows that secrets are safe, the struggle continues, and life persists. For the silent Salima, screams turn into a “song” expressing the pain and hope of her people whose secrets she keeps.

Hassiba, Maquisarde Fighter

Since the vast majority of battles were conducted in the countryside, many urban men and women went out to the Algerian *maquis*, to participate in active warfare. By Amrane-Minne's account, about two thousand women lived alongside men in mixed cells dispersed around the country mostly working as nurses, cooks, and taking care of other domestic duties for the armed fighters. After the urban guerrilla bomb-thrower, the image of the *maquisarde* was commonly depicted by the FLN and idealized in rhetoric of the liberation. *El Moudjahid* featured a recurring column titled “Journal d'un Maquisarde” in which a woman described her daily life in the *maquis* and the heroic women she encountered—sometimes arming themselves against their foes to protect the innocent. Contrary to romanticized notions of women carrying guns and fighting alongside men as equals, very few women participated in armed resistance—Djamila Amrane includes only one in her analysis of women's duties. Most of the women in the *maquis* were very young with about 88.8% under the age of 30 and 52.1% under the age of 20 (Amrane-Minne 32). As we saw in the previous section, young women heard about the revolution from their brothers, in the streets, and even in schools, so they were eager to participate for themselves. Unlike the division of the sexes prevalent in early urban nationalist cells, these women lived alongside their “brothers” and were exposed to the same hardships and dangers: “Aux côtés de leurs frères de lutte, elles on connu le froid, la faim, les marches forcées et les accrochages meurtriers” (Amrane-Minne 32). Each cell would typically include a maximum of only one or two women, so separating them from the

men was not a very practical option. Conditions in the *maquis* were not always ideal or comfortable, so these women needed to accommodate to the harshness of this lifestyle quickly so they did not slow down the men. In Djébar's novel, the character Hassiba ventures out into the *maquis* with Youssef, the husband of Cherifa. Like many of these women, she was very young with ill-developed ideas regarding her role in the war beyond the idealized accounts in the press. Although she plays a secondary role in the action of the novel, the story ends optimistically with Hassiba experiencing her first day in the countryside alongside her countrymen and villagers they encounter.

Hassiba's life story resonates with many of the accounts of urban women who decided to fight for the resistance in Amrane-Minne's collection of interviews. Her family experienced a number of hardships directly and indirectly related to colonialism: unemployment, death, and imprisonment. When asked “what [it] means” “to work for the revolution,” these negative life events come to mind first. Through these life events, she recognizes *why* she wants to fight, but probably has not considered *what it means* to fight:

Hassiba is well prepared; no other thought has occupied her mind. She never questioned the cause. Never. Images file rapidly past her, she's looking for the answer: her father, a railroad man in the capital, came home after his accident saying, “France has fired me.” Then poverty followed, the father's death, her mother forced into cleaning the homes of other people in the better areas of the city, in despair when her son, at an age when he could be working, was arrested by the authorities as soon as the first troubles began. “Condemned to death,” they told her. “The day I went to see him,” Hassiba remembers, “the guards sent me away. They sent my mother away. They sent all of us away. That's when I went to see the brothers for the first time. 'I want to work!' I said to them.” She reviews the past but is still searching. She's silent. (148-49)

Hassiba recalls her father blaming “France” for losing his job and setting off a chain of destructive events for the well-being of her family. After poverty strikes the family, her brother is taken away and sentenced to death without any mention of his role in the liberation movement or his potential guilt. This chain of events sets off her desire to participate in the revolution that she has “never questioned.” She knew that she must “see the brothers” to determine her role, but she is silent when trying to determine *what it means* to participate.

This question finally forces her to consider the meaning of her involvement rather than blindly follow her passion into the *maquis*. Eventually Hassiba draws a connection between the revolution, colonialism, and the denial of basic rights enforced by the French:

“The revolution,” she says solemnly, “is the whole country's battle against colonialism, and colonialism is France, which doesn't want to recognize our rights!” She then concentrates, reflects, and adds what she had heard one day from the mouth of a brother, a doctor who was teaching her how to be a nurse, “There are French people who recognize our rights. They understand us because at one time they, too, had a revolution. Now it's our turn...” “The revolution,” she repeats seriously, raising her head, “is everyone's battle.” (149)

In drawing connections between personal liberties and colonialism, she pieces together things she has seen and heard in the past. A doctor who trained her to be a nurse tells her that the French understand the concept of fighting for national liberation because they have had their own revolutions. She parrots part of his message, but also draws a connection between what she has experienced and what she has heard. Passion does not completely take over her actions, but it contributes largely to the persistence of her

involvement. Real-life *maquisarde*, Baya Laribi, explains the source of her desire to join as another form of idealism to relieve the poverty around her: “C'est bien chez toi, ton père travaille, pourquoi es-tu montée au maquis?” Je leur ai montré en bas des gens très pauvres: “Ce n'est pas pour moi, c'est pour ces gens-là qui crèvent de faim” (Amrane-Minne 80). Her family did not have to deal directly with the problems related by Hassiba, but she did not want to live in a society where people around her were dying of hunger. Through eliminating colonialism, she sought to eliminate poverty.

Going into the *maquis* to fight was romanticized among Algeria's more radical youth in part because it represented a significant break with traditional society. Men and women occupied close quarters out of sight of their parents in danger of sexual relationships or abuse by their “brothers” or the French. A *maquisarde* in *El Moudjahid* recalls age restrictions placed upon women fighters: “Dès le début, j'exprimai le désir de monter au maquis où je savais que des jeunes filles comme moi servaient déjà, à côté de leurs frères, notre Révolution. Mais on me répondit que j'étais encore trop jeune. J'attendis encore” (“Journal d'une maquisarde” 6/22/59). She had wanted to go out to the maquis, but “the brothers” decided that she was too young to leave her family. This made it difficult for parents like those of Fatiha Hemrouche to accept. She was allowed to live a relatively free life by her mother, but it took time for her to support:

C'est vrai, elle me comprenait, me laisser faire beaucoup de choses, mais à ce moment-là, elle n'aurait pas accepté que j'aille au maquis. Plus tard, je suis revenue à la maison pour des soins dentaires, elle avait accepté, je suis repartie sans problème. Je crois qu'elle-même se serait engagée si elle en avait eu la possibilité. (Amrane-Minne 64)

In her absence, Hemrouche's mother came to peace with her decision to leave the family

to live and fight among men. Eventually, Hemrouche even believed that her mother would have participated if she had been given the opportunity. Over the course of the war, parts of society had changed sufficiently to allow (and even encourage) this kind of behavior by women.

The Reality of the Maquis

Upon arrival, many women were surprised by what they saw in the *maquis* because reality often did not conform with their romanticized notions of what they would experience. Rather than soldiers with bombs and guns, they saw poorly-dressed men with very few weapons between them:

Ma première impression...je me suis dit, c'est ça les Moudjahidines? Moi qui pensais trouver des Moudjahidines en tenue, armée jusqu'au dents et tout ce que j'ai vu c'est des hommes en burnous avec très peu d'armes. Ce n'est qu'après quand on pénètre et qu'on mène la vie des maquis qu'on commence à comprendre. Je n'avais que vingt ans. (Outata in Amrane-Minne 82)

Baya Outata describes a scene that is considerably less glamorous. As a result of insufficient FLN arms, not all men were given weapons—leaving virtually none for the women. Women often came to the countryside with a newly-acquired education in nursing, but no training in any other aspect of duties or expectations of life in the *maquis*. Malika Zerrouki describes her experience there as an education in itself: “Mon école a été le maquis, j'y ai vécu et j'y ai tout appris” (Amrane-Minne 87). The life these women experienced was different than any they had lived before or any expectations they had for what their lives would look like in the countryside. In *El Moudjahid's* “Journal d'une

Maquisarde,” the narrator describes a scene involving a nurse, Malika, who protected her injured by shooting at the French before being heroically killed herself:

Un jour, les troupes françaises firent irruption dans l'infirmerie et ouvrirent immédiatement le feu en direction des deux jeunes filles et des blessés. Malika, très prompte, saisit une mitraillette et, sortant de l'infirmerie, se mit à tirer. Elle ne s'arrêta pas avant d'avoir épuisé deux chargeurs. Alors seule et sans munitions, elle succomba. (“Journal d'une maquisarde” 6/22/59)

When the French descended upon Malika and her patients, the nurse protected them by firing all of her ammunition at them at which point, they shot and killed her. This type of an encounter would have probably been a complete anomaly given the short supply of weapons and the oral and written records describing the involvement of women in the *maquis*. One aspect of this scene that would, however, have been more common is the nurse's death at the hands of the French. About 10% of women in the *maquis* were arrested by the French (usually after being wounded) and about 20% of women were killed (Amrane-Minne 32). The *maquis* was no safer for women fighters than it was for men. Even though they were almost never involved directly in combat, they ran nearly identical risk of imprisonment, torture, and death.

When presented with the danger of a French raid on a nearby village, women would often try to fit in with the local inhabitants by disguising themselves as children and wives deserted by their husbands. In *El Moudjahid*, a woman described this process as relatively simple and effective: “Il suffisait aux citadines de cacher leur teint trop blanc et elles paraissaient alors avoir vécu dans les montagnes depuis leur naissance” (“Journal d'une maquisarde” 8/17/59). Covering their dyed hair could transform an urban *maquisarde* into a simple villager. Again, this publication oversimplifies the reality of the

situation—romanticizing the role of female fighters to appeal to their readership. Mimi Ben Mohamed, Baya Laribi, and Baya Outata all describe much more difficult scenarios in interviews about their own experiences. Beyond the problem of looking the part, they describe failed interrogations and reasons why they seem slightly out of place:

Il m'a regardée et m'a dit: "Toi, tu n'es pas d'ici." Je lui ai répondu: "Si, je suis d'ici, je me suis mariée très jeune et je suis partie dans une autre dechra." J'avais avec moi une vieille qui disait être ma mère. Il a dit: "Non, celle-là, je crois qu'elle n'est pas d'ici." Ils m'ont mise à part avec la vieille femme, et m'ont emmenée voir le capitaine... (Ben Mohamed in Amrane-Minne 48)

The most common trap they would fall into is lack of knowledge of the local language:

Les militaires sont arrivés. C'étaient des paras. Il y avait des poules dans la cour. Ils voulaient les attraper, mais n'y arrivaient pas. L'un d'eux m'a dit: "Attrape la poule, espèce de salope, attrape la poule." Sans m'en rendre compte, j'ai répondu en français: "Non, je n'attraperai pas ta poule." "Ah, c'est l'infirmière!" Je me suis sauvée, j'ai couru, j'ai couru, ils tiraient derrière moi, mais ne m'ont pas touchée. (Laribi in Amrane-Minne 77)

Baya Laribi betrayed her identity by speaking French with a soldier who had asked her to catch a chicken for him. Luckily, she managed to escape imprisonment and death. Baya Outata also describes a scenario involving a Harki who tested her knowledge of the local language: "Un Harki est venu me parler en chaouia, je ne savais pas lui répondre. J'ai reçu deux gifles magistrales, ils m'ont secouée, mes lunettes sont tombées, puis ils m'ont fait monter dans une jeep et emmenée au camp" (Outata in Amrane-Minne 85). When the French did not possess the cultural competency to root out combatants, they would employ (or threaten) local guides to help them root out members of the resistance. Many women could not elude the French by simply changing their clothing in the *maquis* in a way that they could in urban warfare during the Battle of Algiers. When they were

caught deceiving them, the French employed the same violent torture methods they used on urban guerrilla fighters. Laribi describes a horrific scene in which she was tortured naked with water, cigarette burns, and various other methods:

Ils voulaient que je monte avec eux au maquis en zone I pour leur montrer les casemates, les caches. Tous les jours ils me torturaient, ils m'ont déshabillée, mise dans la baignoire, brûlée avec des cigarettes, des tas de choses. Un jour des civils de la PRG, deux gaillards, sont venus, m'a dit l'un d'eux en me montrant la Casbah, tous les Arabes on va les exterminer. (Amrane-Minne 79-80)

She refused to give them the information they sought from her, so they tortured her in cruel and unusual ways. Soldiers viciously informed her that they wished to “exterminate” the Arabs of Algeria. This reveals more than a political drive to maintain French Algeria. These men viciously employed every tactic they can think of to commit genocide on Algerian Arabs.

Beyond the danger of the French, local populations and their “brothers” in arms, treated Algerian women very well. Contrary to urban fears that women would endanger themselves living among strangers and men, they were treated mostly with respect and generosity in the *maquis*. Even with linguistic and cultural barriers between them, villagers mostly welcomed *maquisarde* with open arms—making every effort to protect them:

Je suis arrivée chez des gens, ils m'ont vue, j'avais peur et ne pouvais pas leur expliquer, je ne sais pas parler kabyle. Un vieux a dû comprendre, il m'a tout de suite fait entrer et sans parler, mais très gentiment il m'a fait retrousser mon pantalon et a même déchiré le col de mon pull. Il m'a donné une grande gandoura kabyle et un foulard et je suis ressortie avec lui. (Zerrouki in Amrane-Minne 89)

This man helped Zerrouki by finding her clothes appropriate to her new position when

she arrived in this foreign place where she does not understand the language.⁶² The men fighting alongside them also treated them generously and respectfully—as if they were their own sisters: “Ils étaient très, très gentils. C'étaient de vrais frères. Par exemple, ils avaient un morceau de pain, ils le partageaient entre quatre ou en cinq. Il n'y a jamais eu de problèmes. Au contraire, ils faisaient tout pour s'aider. Ils ne pensaient qu'à l'indépendance...et à la mort” (Ben Mohamed in Amrane-Minne 46). Unlike the tension Kateb describes when Nedjma speaks French with a fellow non-European, these villagers strive for communication regardless of the language spoken. Men and women lived communally far away from social norms or the eyes of their communities, but they maintained a deep sense of respect for one another. There were instances in which men were reluctant to accept a woman into their cell, but these seem relatively infrequent and short-lived (Hemrouche in Amrane-Minne 66-67). In the most extreme example, this skepticism lasted several months: “Après, au fil des mois, ils ont reconnu notre valeur. Ce n'est qu'à la longue qu'ils ont compris le sens de notre lutte, surtout au moment des accrochages, des opérations” (Cherrad in Amrane-Minne 55).

In fact, sometimes women would be reluctant to accept new women into their cells. Baya Laribi describes an encounter she later regretted between herself and some new recruits to the *maquis*:

En 1957, d'autres jeunes filles sont montées au maquis...elles étaient bien habillées, avec du rouge aux ongles, de jolies chaussures, des pantalons bien taillés, elles portaient des soutien-gorges. Moi, j'avais perdu l'habitude d'être bien habillée, je ne me rappelais plus de ce qu'était une vie féminine...J'ai été méchante, je leur en ai voulu à mort, je leur ai fait des histoires...Elles sont parties dans une autre zone. Je suis restée seule en zone I, seule avec ma

62 See also Baya Laribi in Amrane-Minne, 75.

musette. (Amrane-Minne 78)

Her behavior actually resulted in their leaving for another zone. She criticized them for wearing nail polish and beautiful clothes while she went braless—thinking about her tasks instead of worrying about her appearance. It is as though by 1957 (only one year after the beginning of the war) she has almost forgotten what her life was like before life in the *maquis*. Women did not always support one another or encourage each other to participate in the war.

Unfortunately, the egalitarian, communal sense of belonging felt by women from men in the *maquis* did not follow them when they returned to their urban lives after independence. Some foreshadowing of this could even be seen in conversations between men and women living in the *maquis*. Ben Mohamed describes conflicting views between men she was living among with regard to the question of the veil and the future role of women in Algeria:

Pour la femme indépendante, ils n'étaient généralement pas d'accord. Pour le voile, il y en avait qui étaient contre, d'autres qui étaient pour. Moi, j'étais toujours pour la femme dévoilée. Il y en avait qui mettaient la religion au milieu: la femme doit se couvrir, la femme doit porter...comme les soeurs musulmanes maintenant. On ne savait pas du tout comment allait être l'indépendance puisqu'on ne voyait rien. On était tout le temps dans les montagnes. Que je suis au maquis, ça ils étaient d'accord. Il fallait aider, il fallait tout faire, mais demain à l'indépendance... (Amrane-Minne 46)

Unlike the picture of a free and equal Algeria painted by the rhetoric of *El Moudjahid*, even men who treated women with respect and generosity in the *maquis* did not completely change their views of the role of women in an independent Algeria.

Discussing the issue of the veil with unveiled women who shared their living quarters

was not enough to convince many men to abandon their traditionalism. They were reluctant to carry lessons they learned on the battlefield back to their daily lives. For both men and women, the liberation came before questions of social change. Unfortunately, this meant turning more vehemently back to tradition in an independent Algeria.

The Nameless Villager

By contrast to the educated, urban minority, 80% of the women involved in the liberation movement were uneducated and illiterate. The voices of these women are mostly absent from historical accounts, fictional representations, and critical scholarship. Amrane-Minne describes these women as definitively not included among the urban elite with access to education or financial security:

Mais la plupart sont des anonymes, souvent illettrées, dont il a fallu traduire les propos de l'arabe dialectal, 80% des militantes recensées par le fichier du FLN étaient des moussebilate (service civil) recrutées parmi les villageoises et le ménagères des casbahs, qui nourrissent, hébergent, soignent et cachent, étonnamment habiles à user des espaces secrets de leur maison ou de la protection de leur voile et des gestes quotidiens. (8)

These women used the knowledge they acquired in their daily lives to facilitate their involvement in the liberation movement. Their own personal stories of hardship, repression, and abuse compelled them to fight against colonialism. These women were not free from the possibility of imprisonment, torture, or even death at the hands of the French: "One woman in five was either imprisoned or killed. Testimonies provided by surviving women reveal widespread torture and rape with a variety of objects, including

glass bottles” (Lazreg, *Eloquence* 124). Although the vast majority did not engage in acts of terror or violence against the French—mostly serving support roles to the militants—any woman suspicious of supporting the *moudjahidine* was subject to arrest, torture, and imprisonment. Even women who were not involved in the war could be killed or maimed without trial if their village was suspected of harboring revolutionaries. In short, Algerian women suffered mostly the same consequences as men, but were less likely to be directly involved in military activity. Conversely, among Algerian men who spent a great deal of time alone with these women, almost no instances of sexual or physical abuse were ever reported despite the unprecedented mixing of sexes in close quarters in the *maquis* (Lazreg, *Eloquence* 133). It would appear that the primary threat of women fighters came from the French—both in terms of their interference into the development of the role of women in Algerian society as well as their willingness to attack them with equal vehemence as their male counterparts on the battlefield.

Fanon describes the risks run by Algerian women as evidence of the inhumanity of the French. Women “at the heart of the combat” supported the men and served as “witness” and victim of French violence: “The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured, raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and to his inhumanity. As a nurse, a liaison agent, a fighter, she bears witness to the depth and density of the struggle” (66). Most of their involvement in the liberation movement was non-violent, but they were subject to very violent repercussions for their actions.

Djebar's novel ends with an image of Hassiba and her group entering the *maquis*

and finding a village woman with her child. These women are depicted as strong and silently enduring the war without fear. Largely ignored in most historical accounts, Djébar leaves readers with this image to suggest the village woman's importance. She does not, however, explain her significance overtly. These women provided material support to soldiers and were subject to the same punishments if they were suspected of involvement in the revolution.

Civilian Women of the Villages

Civilians comprised the vast majority of the women actively involved in the wartime effort: 94% (3,066) by Djamila Amrane's estimate. These women carried out similar tasks to those officially involved with the FLN as nurses and seamstresses. They also uniquely provided services to fighters as local guides (677 women), fund-raisers and procurers of arms (286 women), and integral components of the supply chain for soldiers (1,958 women). Technically, even the urban guerrilla fighters (65 women) considered earlier in this chapter were civilians. The vast majority of civilian women did not participate in armed resistance in urban centers or in the *maquis*, but provided integral forms of support for the men. Significantly less glamorous and typically less educated than urban women planting bombs or venturing out to the *maquis* to fight for the FLN, the efforts made by the majority of women have gone underrated and mostly unnoticed in historical accounts.

Women living in villages typically took on the majority of the responsibility for

taking care of *moudjahidine* while fighting in the *maquis*. These everyday tasks contributed invaluable to the survival of FLN troops in regions that were mostly unknown to them: “Parcourir plusieurs kilomètres à pied pour faire des liaisons ou des achats, cuisiner pour des dizaines de maquisards sont des tâches épuisantes, qu’il faut renouveler jour après jour, mais qui n'apparaissent pas comme des faits de guerre” (Amrane-Minne 94). Although most of these tasks were not obvious acts of war, they were critical to the liberation movement which did not possess the same arms or economic support as the French. Women villagers were generally older than recruits from urban centers (30-50 years old) and had husbands and children of their own—some of whom would have been fighting or imprisoned as a result of the war (Amrane-Minne 94). Urban women in the *maquis* remember these women as “devoted” to the cause and happy to contribute in any way they could:

Les femmes du village étaient très dévouées. Parfois elles se levaient à 3 heures du matin pour faire le pain. Elles allaient chercher l'eau, le bois. Et quand elles le faisaient, c'était avec plaisir, ce n'était pas par force. Elles ont beaucoup souffert. Elles se sont habituées aux ratissages, elles se sont habituées aux coups, elles se sont habituées à tout... (Ben Mohamed in Amrane-Minne 47)

Life in the villages did not include modern conveniences such as electricity and running water, so women would have to begin preparations for the day very early and work very hard to accommodate the extra mouths—far from a small feat considering the poverty in which most of them existed. Another common theme in the accounts of the *maquisardes* is the suffering these women would have to endure at the hands of the French. Villages were often raided and women were beaten, imprisoned, tortured, and raped. Ben

Mohamed describes that women she encountered were used to this kind of ill-treatment, but cheerfully continued their support roles. Hemrouche describes a similar scene of women welcoming women fighters into their homes facing their possible suffering without fear: “Les femmes ont toujours été accueillantes, je n'ai jamais ressenti chez elle le rejet ou la peur...la souffrance, oui” (Amrane-Minne 69). Not only do these women face the possibility of suffering without fear, they “accept everything” in the name of the possibility of freedom from French oppression. Zerrouki claims that their involvement comes from a sense of political awareness, not just a sense of duty, obligation, or coercion: “Les femmes des villages avaient une maturité politique, je ne sais pas si c'est le fait de se trouver au milieu du danger, mais je crois qu'elles étaient plus politisée que celles de la ville. Elles acceptaient tout” (Amrane-Minne 90). She credits these villager women with a kind of political awareness absent on such a large scale in the urban context. They accepted everything in hope for a better future.

Djebar also endows women of the villages with a political capacity and a determination that goes above and beyond the expectations of the city-dwellers. When Hassiba and the rest of the group venturing out into the *maquis* encounters a woman with her daughter in the final scene of the novel, they are surprised by their fearlessness:

“Were you afraid yesterday?” Mahmoud asks the woman when she tells them that she and her child are now all that's left of the *douar*.

“No,” she answers, “why should I be afraid?” And she looks at them with trust.

“Were you afraid?” Ali asks in turn as he goes toward the little girl. “How lovely,” he thinks, “in the heart of all this carnage.” He's still thinking about it, he won't forget, he repeats to himself as they retrace their steps.

The little girl had given him a vague, shy smile.

“Were you afraid?” Ali had insisted.

She shook her head no. He was still looking at her, and she smiled at him a second time, more bravely, then fled at a run: she was going off into the sun to play with her goats. (199)

Neither the woman nor the girl were frightened by the razing of their village. They persevere in the face of this adversity and continue going about their business as usual. The woman looks at the group “with trust” and the little girl “bravely” smiles at them before she runs off to play with her goats. They remain optimistic and trusting of the liberation movement in spite of the death surrounding them. Life continues as does the movement of fighters to the *maquis*. This woman embodies the fearlessness and kindness described by the accounts of the *maquisardes*. Djébar gives this woman and the hope for future generations that accompanies her the final word in her novel. We do not know how Hassiba will adjust to life in the *maquis* or whether she is adequately prepared for her duties, but we do see the reaction of this anonymous woman to the destruction of her village. She fearlessly accepts the deaths around her and moves forward optimistically with her daughter into an unknown future.

In the Afterword to Djébar's novel, Clarisse Zimra reads this scene as a parallel to the opening scene of the book depicting the accidental death of a family matriarch sitting on her doorstep when the French attack. Over the past several years, the woman has slowly retreated into silence as a result of her son's marriage. She gradually gives up her voice as her daughter-in-law gains hers. Then, she unexpectedly dies in a French air raid. Here, too, generational change is represented, but the urban scene seems more pessimistic

than the closing one: “If the beginning gives us the absurd death of a feeble-minded old woman on her doorstep, the ending moves us upward, physically and spiritually, with the arrival of guerilla fighters on a reclaimed mountaintop that stands, potentially for an entire country: free at last” (214). As previously mentioned, the closing scene incites a certain sense of freedom, but it is significant that it comes from a rural woman rather than an urban one. I would argue that the guerilla fighters who arrive on the “reclaimed mountaintop” find a form of freedom, but that freedom was already present for the woman and girl who they find. The actions of this pair (more so than the group of guerillas) embody freedom, confidence, and a sense of hope for the future.

Turning to interviews given by the women in similar villages confirms that they made sacrifices to accommodate these sometimes very large groups of fighters—of up to sixty or more (Ghomri in Amrane-Minne 101)—and to treat them as members of their own families. “J’ai hébergé des femmes de maquisards. Nous habitons ensemble, la même cour, la même marmite, me même couscoussier. Aussi quand les maquisards venaient, ils se rendaient chez moi” (Benabdella in Amrane-Minne 95). Saadia Benabdella describes housing the wives of fighters and providing a safe space for them to meet their husbands. They all share the same space and meals like a very large extended family even though they were all strangers.

Intimate knowledge of village culture made alternate forms of resistance available to these women as well. They could feign ignorance of the locations of fighters, dress up women to make them look like locals, and defy the French clandestinely in their own languages. Benabdella recounts a situation involving French soldiers demanding a

cultural performance from a village they had invaded. When all of the other women refused, she agreed to performing with an old woman. Rather than singing the traditional song, they improvised one to urge the French to leave:

Un jour les militaires nous ont fait sortir du village et rassemblé en contrebas.
Ils voulaient que nous leur fassions un “ourar” (réunion de femmes qui chantent et dansent entre elles). Les femmes que j'hébergeais ont refusé catégoriquement, j'ai essayé de leur expliquer que c'étaient des soldats et qu'il fallait s'exécuter. Rien à faire...J'interviens alors et leur dis que j'allais chanter avec une vieille à laquelle j'ai demandé de m'aider. J'improvisai alors ceci à l'oreille de l'adjudant:

File, file, voyageur

vers le Prophète

La marche est agréable

Oh mon Dieu, suivons le destin

Vous, vous partirez

Et nous, nous resterons

Alors il a ri, il était content, il pensait peut-être que ce que je chantais était agréable. Les femmes avaient peur que les Harkis comprennent le sens de mes paroles et que nous ayons des ennuis...Les militaires m'ont cherchée. J'avais toute mes affaires chez ma soeur, ma vaisselle et mes bijoux en argent cachés, enterrés. Ils sont allés chez ma soeur, ils l'ont malmenée, bousculée, battue. (Amrane-Minne 98-99)

Knowing that Harki informants were present in the audience, other women feared for the consequences that Benabdella may face, but she did not hesitate. She uses the local language to suggest that the French leaving is destined to happen. This performance resonates with the improvisational skits performed by urban women to educate others about resistance in the early days of the revolution discussed earlier in this chapter. Here,

however, everyone who understands the message already agrees with it: when the French leave, they will rest. It appears that the villagers give the French the cultural performance they demand, but in reality, they resist them and assert their confidence in the future. This act of defiance was enough to warrant severe punishment by the French. Since they did not find Benabdella, they beat her innocent sister instead.

Like the *maquisardes*, village women were subject to the same punishment by the French as men—regardless of whether or not they had done anything. Aïcha Kemmas describes her experience being questioned by French soldiers when she was suspected of housing a nurse:

Une fois j'ai été vendue, des gens leur ont dit que je recevais une infirmière aux cheveux blonds. Ils sont venus, je leur ai dit que je ne la connaissais pas, que je ne l'avais jamais vue. Ils m'ont pendue à un eucalyptus, et ils me frappaient, l'un d'un côté, l'autre de l'autre côté. Ils m'ont cassé un bras, j'ai perdu des dents. Kheira (l'infirmière en question) était cachée dans la casemate de Halima. Halima aussi a été arrêtée et frappée. Nous n'avons rien dit, ils sont partis sans avoir rien trouvé. (Amrane-Minne 104)

Although she did not house the nurse and claimed to know nothing about her, they brutally beat her and continued their search. Ultimately they beat another woman for housing the nurse as well, but never found her. These women stayed true to their cause and would not succumb to the brutal interrogation methods of the French. They eluded the French, but not their wrath.

Cherifa, The New Algerian Wife

Cherifa, the married, childless housewife is perhaps the most overlooked of

Djebar's female characters. She is uneducated and does not participate in activities that take her beyond the walls of her home. However, the day of the narration, she finds out from her neighbor that her husband is suspected of involvement in the revolution. This compels her to find her husband at his shop immediately—even though she has never been there personally. Shielding herself from the stares of the men in the streets under her veil, she takes on new responsibilities dictated by her context. She loves her husband and knows what she must do to protect him. Although Cherifa seems inconsequential at first, a deeper look at her role in the novel and the roles of other seemingly traditional, civilian women, reveals a much more important role in the war for independence from France. Cherifa works towards the liberation of her country as she pushes the boundaries of her traditional culture and the roles imposed on her by it. These women were excluded from historical accounts—even from Amrane's figures—but their participation in the war effort was crucial in advancing women's rights in Algeria and changing the potential of domestic spaces. Cherifa's silence in the streets does not betray the strength of her transformation that begins spontaneously when she sets out to save her husband's life.

Mothers, Daughters, and Wives of the Revolution

Even more frequently than civilian women played support roles for FLN fighters, they were left to deal with the repercussions of the fathers, husbands, and sons leaving them to fight in the *maquis*. Thousands of women who had existed primarily in the domestic sphere were suddenly called upon to take care of affairs outside of the home.

Many of these women had only rarely left their homes previously and practically never without the supervision of a male family member or husband. Amrane-Minne describes this as a “brutal overturning” of their lives: “Et puis, il y a toutes ces femmes dont la vie a brutalement basculé à la suite de la mort, de l'arrestation, du départ au *maquis* d'un fils ou d'un mari qui souvent était leur soutien et leur seul lien entre le monde extérieur et la maison” (202). Women were left to perform a variety of unfamiliar duties outside of their homes with the departure of their men. Djébar extends this to include women whose husbands are away at work outside of the home as well. Acts of war such as bombings and raids occur around them in the absence of their men: “When these spectacles occur, which is regularly once or twice a month, only the women are at home, because the husbands have already left for work...” (3). The onset of the war brought a range of unfamiliar activities to which women would have to accommodate their lives and behaviors.

Djébar describes a number of different absences throughout her novel. Some men are at work, others in the *maquis*, still others abroad or dead. Every woman struggles to deal with the absences left by the men in her life. Cherifa regrets her silence when her husband decides to leave for the *maquis*. Cherifa describes a similar silence to that of Lila when she hears that her husband must depart for the *maquis*. He tells her that a “city girl” will join their group departing soon for the *maquis* and she expresses surprise when she realizes that women can participate in the resistance in this way:

“A girl you said? A city girl who's joining the resistance?”

“Yes, a young girl; she's not the first one!” he replies, surprised at her

question whose meaning escapes him. Cherifa is in his arms again; hope glimmers in her eyes.

“Youssef! Oh, Youssef! I'd like...”...

“What I wanted to say,” Cherifa now explains to Lila, who has come to visit her—a happy surprise on this day that she must somehow bring to an end.

“What I wanted to say was, 'Take me along too, since there are other women up there...' But I didn't dare.” (145)

Cherifa has never expressed an interest in his political activity, so Youssef does not recognize that she is interested in joining him in the *maquis*. Again, Cherifa expresses regret that she did not assert herself at a relevant time. Now, she is left behind to take care of their home and wait for Youssef to return or hear news of his death or imprisonment. Here Cherifa awakens to the thought that she might play a more active role in national liberation.

Djebar pairs Lila with Cherifa in the regrets they have for remaining silent as well as their mindsets for waiting for the return of their husbands. Lila perceives Cherifa as “actively preparing herself to wait” while Lila experiences waiting as “merely another form of sleep” (146). Again, this indicates Lila's gradual progression from political consciousness as a student to her dysfunctional marriage with the militant Ali. She spends her days lamenting the choices she has made alone in her apartment rejecting the activism of her husband and father. Cherifa, on the other hand, has just awakened to the possibilities available to her. During the course of the day in which the novel takes place, she finds the courage to venture outside of her house for the first time to warn her husband that the French have become suspicious of his political activity. Her husband tells her that he will leave for the *maquis* in order to evade the French and she reacts by

engaging with the process of waiting, not sleeping through it like Lila. Lila, too, recognizes their differences in experience: “While Cherifa talks about Youssef’s departure, Lila is thinking, “Here I am, finally emerged from my solitude, here I am alive as well, but undoubtedly not in the same way as she...” (146). For Lila, the day of the novel also marks her emergence from the solitude in which she had been living since Ali’s departure. She begins to come to terms with her feelings and recognize the importance of having a social network of support around her that she had temporarily abandoned in her depression.

Women took on new responsibilities after the departure of their husbands that represented a “rupture” from traditional society. Amrane-Minne describes the new responsibilities taken on by 22 year-old mother of three, Djamila Briki, when she learned of her husband’s arrest in 1956:

Du jour au lendemain, elle rompt avec le mode de vie traditionnel. Elle passe des journées entières dehors pour obtenir un permis de visite, pour déposer un panier de victuailles à la prison, pour attendre un parloir de cinq minutes, pour assister aux procès de son mari, mais aussi à ceux d’autres militants. Elle organise des manifestations de femme pour défendre les droits les plus élémentaires des détenus. Elle fait signer des pétitions. (208)

This break from traditional life came abruptly and without precedence for Briki. She found herself in a world full of different expectations and tasks that would take her outside of her previous realm of responsibility. Before, she had never left or worked outside of the house. Her mother now takes a position as a housecleaner while she attends to her new responsibilities: “Je n’avais jamais travaillé, je n’étais jamais sortie de la maison. Ma mère travaillait pour nous tous: moi, mes enfants et me soeurs. Elle

faisait des ménages toute la journée” (209). Now, she must deal with prison bureaucracy to see and feed her husband. His imprisonment mediated their life together as well as her life at home. Here, too, she takes on additional responsibilities with larger stakes such as “organizing protests” and writing petitions. The new life she is thrown into by her husband's imprisonment awakened her to new commitments and political ideals that had perviously been outside of her realm of interest or engagement.

In Djebbar's novel, Cherifa also awakens to new responsibilities through a sense of necessity to protect her husband rather than an overtly political commitment to liberation:

For a happy wife, living inside a house she never leaves, as tradition has prescribed, how for the first time to decide to *act*? It's a foreign word for someone imprisoned in custom (and to experience that custom as an instinct, as if every woman in her family, in the neighboring homes, in all the previous generations, had bequeathed it to her in the form of imperative wisdom). The custom of having that behavior be intended only for a man, the husband, the father, or the brother, of being able to glimpse the thousand incidents in life only through the shelter of his authority, through the mirror of his judgment. It is a new word toward which fate is pushing her (“fate, really?”) and suddenly she sees it emerge, rich in promises and results... (84)

Cherifa acts because her husband's life is at risk. She ventures into the streets of Blida to track him down even though she has never left the house before. Djebbar points out the significance of this unprecedented act in terms of her tradition: action is “a foreign word for someone imprisoned in custom.” This custom is “an instinct” in the sense that her husband does not forcefully impose it on her. She did not leave the house because *she* did not feel it was proper before, not because *he* locks her inside. “Fate” is pushing her to expand her horizons of consciousness, duty, and her responsibilities as a wife and woman.

Djebar also describes women who fight for their rights in her novel alongside their men. Their manner of fighting resonates with their daily existence—their point of reference for the actions being “rolling semolina for the evening meal”:

Behind them, the women stopped singing and were suddenly busy, armed with the same zeal they used at home when rolling semolina dough for the evening meal. They brought out old baskets, filling them with stones, putting some of them in their skirts and veils, and they, too, entered the fray. A laughable battle—people using their bare hands against bullets. (120)

They stand no chance at winning this battle “using their bare hands against bullets,” but they do not give up the larger war. These women relate to fighting in a different way than the men beside them, but use their knowledge and experience to do their part. They bring out “old baskets, filling them with stones,” bringing their domestic concerns and knowledge onto the battlefield with them.

Women also take unprecedented political initiative in these new roles—particularly in the absence of their men. Briki recounts banding together with the other women who wait outside of the prison to take on new responsibilities spontaneously. They demand to see their husbands and organize themselves in the most effective way they can envision:

Toute les femmes et mères de condamnés à mort, nous nous voyions devant la prison et nous avons décidé de faire quelque chose. C'étaient toutes des femmes comme moi, voilées, illettrées ou ayant été en classe un tout petit peu...Nous avons manifesté devant la prison et nous sommes parties toutes ensemble jusqu'au Gouvernement général pour réclamer le droit de visite. (Amrane-Minne 211)

She describes a mass of traditional, uneducated women who stand up for themselves in a way that could not have been familiar to them before their husbands were imprisoned.

These women would have had few or no responsibilities outside of their homes before the departure of their husbands and the idea of protesting would have been only an abstraction. Regardless of their lack of experience, they demand the right to visit.

Briki describes their protest as “a women's battle” which included some men, but was led and enacted by women. Unlike other forms of urban warfare, this battle took place openly in front of government officials and typically did not result in arrest or torture:

C'était une bataille de femmes, il y avait des hommes, surtout des jeunes et des vieux, mais à côté des femmes, on pouvait les compter...Et elles se sont retrouvées comme ça, des jeunes filles, des moins jeunes, des vieilles, le voile tombait, la voilette tombait. On sentait que c'était véritable, que ça sortait du fond, on avait gardé, gardé et puis c'était l'explosion: il y avait des cris, des youyous, les foulards étaient déchirés pour faire des drapeaux. (Amrane-Minne 214-15)

Briki describes these protests as producing their own form of “explosion” producing considerably less damage than those set off by urban guerrillas. She also describes veils spontaneously falling and triumphant youyous accompanied by the raising of flags. This scene resembles images at the end of Pontecorvo's film. However, Briki describes a “women's battle” that takes place at the direction and discretion of women. These women found themselves in the position of having to care for themselves upon the departure of their husbands. This led them to the prisons where other women with the same desire congregated. Rather than sit silently waiting for the guards to allow them in, they took the initiative for themselves and make a concerted effort to demand their rights.

Fatma Bedj claims that women started and ended the revolution, but she does not mean this in the sense that women perpetrated the first attacks against the French in 1945

or 1954. Rather, the issue of women and the role of women in Algerian society was always an underlying question throughout the course of the liberation movement:

Nous avons travaillé, la révolution a commencé avec nous et elle a fini avec nous. Tout le monde me disait: “Ya el Hadja, demande une pension, demande quelque chose.” Je n’ai rien demandé, pas même une épingle, nous avons travaillé pour la cause de Dieu. Mais maintenant je te dis la vérité, je regrette, je regrette mes milles...(elle pleure) (Amrane-Minne 206)

She seeks no pension for her service to her country. Rather, she is distraught over the lack of effectiveness of the actions of women on the form of independent Algeria. She saw her work throughout the course of the war as “God's cause,” not a military or political matter. The thought of the disappointing outcome of their work brings her to tears during the interview.

Resistance From Within

Throughout the war, Algerian women came into new forms of political and social consciousness in a variety of ways. As we have seen, for some women, this involved a formal education and intellectual exposure to other liberation movements. Others were encouraged by the participations of their brothers, husbands, and fathers. For many, these changes developed abruptly out of necessity. When faced with the absence of the men, they needed to make decisions and take action outside of the home in unfamiliar ways. No matter what the particulars, most Algerian women experienced a different way of living throughout the war. Assia Djebar explores several different kinds of experiences in the lives of the women in her novel, *Children of the New World*. Some of the forms of

liberation sought by women extended beyond French colonialism to their private lives. For example, women's sexuality became a topic of exploration for some women including Djébar during this period. Veering away from a vehemently nationalistic position, Djébar focuses on the nuances of women's experiences in her first three novels written during the war: *La Soif*, *Les Enfants du nouveau monde*, and *Les alouettes naïves*. This included the way these women experienced their bodies. Clarisse Zimra discusses Moroccan writer and critic Abdelkébir Khatibi's reaction to her provocative subject matter:

...While looking at all three novels, [Khatibi argued that Djébar] zeroes in neither on the party line demanded by Algiers, nor on the ethnographic documentary expected by Paris. Instead, as early as the first novel, he aligned Djébar's explicit political stance with a far more implicitly challenging private one, the evocation of female sensuality: "Has anyone truly understood that the discovery of her own body, for the central character of *La Soif* is just as important a revolution?" (211)

The revolution fought by Algerian women included rethinking their relationships with the French as well as with their men and with their own bodies. This put women into a unfortunate position. Since defeating the French was their top priority (and the whole reason they underwent ideological and social change in the first place), social revolution with regard to issues such as veiling, education sexuality, and employment were less pressing.

The picture Djébar paints of women in 1957 in *Children of the New World* includes small feats of resistance to traditional society excluded by most of the historical narratives which tend to focus on urban guerrilla fighters such as Djamila Bouhired or women who join fighters in the *maquis* as nurses. Revealing the subtle forms of conflict

between the men and women of Algerian society illustrates that the concerns of women were not necessarily recognized as different from those of the men. It also shows that liberation from French colonialism was not the only form of liberation at stake during the war. Before he leaves for the *maquis*, Lila describes her husband as “rigid” and “sectarian” even though he is educated, far from traditional, and respects his wife's independence and intellect: “‘You're so rigid,’ she said to him calmly and coolly, because she was falling out of love with him and sensed it ever more inescapably. ‘You're inflexible. You're sectarian’” (73). Ali, too, recognizes that his wife, Lila experiences the revolution differently than he does. “New times” are emerging in Algeria and he senses that women “belong” to these times more than he will:

Still he sensed that if anyone was to belong one day to the new times emerging that he, for one, impatiently awaited, it was perhaps Lila. With that same lucidity he saw her use to find the truth of their love, only she would be able to restore the thread that would be fatally broken, and that was already breaking, between the period of submission and silence and the approaching one that had set the mountains ablaze and run across the land and whose eruption of blood but also of hope pierced the illusory opacity of the towns. (Djebar 37)

Women such as Lila would be better equipped at “restor[ing] the thread” between submission and the fervor of liberation “that had set the mountains ablaze” in Algeria. Socially and politically women are used to various forms of submission under colonialism from inside and outside of their native cultures. They have more to gain and less to lose in the liberation movement, so they can take a more even approach to thinking through possible futures. In one of their first meetings at the university, Ali tells Lila, “‘Defiance looks good on you,’ he says vaguely, not realizing he's paid her a

compliment” (110). He does not realize that his statement could be empowering, but also potentially harmful to their relationship. He becomes more rigid in his views as the revolution progresses and her defiance and fluidity puts her at odds with him. Fighting the French can turn even the most open-minded men “sectarian” in a way that women like Lila can recognize and potentially counteract while she adapts to life without her husband.

Lila's life has enabled defiance to come easily for her, but it also has had its drawbacks for her—particularly among older family members. Her father taught her that her world could extend beyond the constraints of her family, but this has led to alienation and isolation after Ali leaves her:

She used to say blatantly to a smiling but disapproving Ali, “I have no ties, no constraints! Thanks to my father, thanks to happiness, I was able to escape from my mother, grandfather, aunt, second cousin, the cousin's son-in-law, and so on, with all their opinions, principles, fears, and cowardice—in short, from everything that remains of a clan, tribe, and a dead past!” That painless liberation did, indeed, seem fortunate to her. (130)

Her “painless liberation” enacted by her father made her feel “fortunate,” but when both her husband and her father leave, she has no one left in her life and no network of support. She flies into a deep depression until her friend Suzanne returns to her life and she has meaningful human contact once more. She has experienced a form of social “liberation,” but without any society around her, “liberation” makes no sense.

Very few men took Ali's open-minded approach and recognized the potential of the women around them in a liberated Algeria in any meaningful way. Djébar also depicts the resistance experienced by women in the face of raising their voices against

their men during this period. For example, Cherifa stands up to her first husband when she decides that she does not want a baby with him and wants him to divorce her:

What had she experienced just then, in the arms of that man? Her refusal—she no longer added the words “sent by God”—but by herself! Had this burst forth from the man's desire, brutally hurtled at her in the sun without the excuse of conjugal nights? From her disgust? As she searched for an answer, she struggled against some form of complacent ignorance that could have turned her into a puritan one day, just like the other women in her world, but the questions kept rushing at her so pointedly that she almost felt awed, without quite understanding why. It was a feeling of having faced an enemy at last, if only for an instant, and of having been able to stand up to it, to be.
(14)

Cherifa refuses to allow him to decide whether or not they should have any children. She does not want any and even though she is uneducated and traditional, she takes a stand against him by the limited means available to her. Her “complacent ignorance” and traditional society in the form of her adamant husband represent two “enem[ies]” who prevent her from making decisions about her own body. Her husband responds “brutally” to this defiance of traditional norms and ultimately repudiates her. In a sense, this was the outcome for which she had hoped even though it means her financial abandonment. She is free to pursue other romantic relationships in which she may be able to more fully assert her control over her body.

Cherifa's second husband, Youssef, allows her to make decisions regarding her body and does not pressure her into having a family with him. She still lives a relatively traditional life and does not leave the house prior to the day that she finds out she must warn her husband that his life is in danger. However, she no longer feels that she lives “a lie” (15) like she did with her first husband. Youssef, too, falters in his treatment of the

women around him. As the legal guardian of his sister, he decides to force her to marry a man against her will. He later recognizes his misdeed when he reflects on his wife's life story: "In the deep waters of his wife's eyes he thought he saw the image of so many drowning women whose destiny had been taken away forever and who tried to fight back" (29). He recognizes that he has contributed to "drowning women" in his culture by taking away their agency. Youssef treats his wife respectfully with her own will, but does not treat his sister with the same courtesy.

Cherifa, too, is respected by her husband, but encounters revulsion and overt objectification by the men of her community when she leaves her home to warn her husband that he may be in danger. She "senses danger" (87) all around her as she walks past cafes and streets full of men unashamed to stare at her and speculate on her social status and purity. Zimra argues that Cherifa's veil actually calls attention to her in the streets of Blida:

Although Djébar has already shown Cherifa as quite capable of asserting herself, this is hardly a celebration of unhampered female agency: rather, it is a double-bind. The veil that should have protected her against the colonizer's gaze and gained her the respect of her compatriots has, in fact, made her sexual prey for the loiterers on the square, who, in their prurience, "unveil" every inch of her. She is far from invisible and certainly not protected. (222)

The men recognize that she is not a typical street-walker, European, or poor woman who must work outside of the home. The style of her veil betrays her status, but the men do not accompany this realization with the respect due to her status. Cherifa should feel empowered and strong because she has mustered the courage to track down her husband, but social norms make her feel self-conscious and endangered.

The French woman, Suzanne defies her Algerian husband in a much different way when she refuses to leave for France with him. She has built a new home in Algeria with their daughter Nadia that she does not want to give up on account of the war:

Omar wanted Suzanne and Nadia to leave with him. “No,” Suzanne had replied. And Omar knew it would always be no. “Our place, for all of us, is here! This is not a time to leave. No.” She had repeated it, oh, very calmly; she didn't have enough violence in her to give her decisions any appearance of bravado. (77)

She reacts more calmly to the situation than her husband. He recognizes that he is “fleeing” from the war and is “annoyed” that she prefers to stay and fight (77). Suzanne's home is Algeria now and she does not want to give it up. In this sense, she chooses her community and her convictions over her family. She has worked hard to fit into this new society and does not want to flee from it with Omar.

The other young girl at the center of the narrative, Hassiba, defies tradition by aligning herself with the liberation movement. She, too, goes against community norms by traveling out to the *maquis* with a group of men, but she stays “with her own kind.” Zimra compares Hassiba and Touma as central to the competing tensions in the novel:

Touma, the young stool pigeon who will precipitate Saidi's death and Youssef's run for the hills, stands as the political, social, and psychological mirror opposite to Hassiba, the young urban partisan on her way to the mountain. Their positioning at the center of the story on either side of Hakim, forms a figure of unresolved and unresolvable contradictions. This growing sense of contradiction suggest to the reader that taking sides is not as simple, the distinction between good and evil, not as pure as we may have thought. For the year is 1956, the crucial internecine period among the various revolutionary factions, when brothers murdered brothers and women fighters were made unwelcome on the battlefield. (215)

Reflecting the thematic centrality of their opposition to one another in the novel is their

placement of their eponymous chapters in the center of the book. They both turn unabashedly away from social norms to pursue their passions. Neither of them take full consideration of logic or their positions within a larger scheme. They defy convention with little consideration of the potential consequences or their bodily safety by asserting possession over themselves and their actions. Hakim, whose chapter sits between them, is an Arab police officer who works for the French. He beats Saidi, a member of his community to death during an interrogation at the station, but also craves connection with the Muslims around him. As a result, neither community respects him, trusts him, or wants to socialize with him. His position on both “sides” makes him welcome with neither. Djébar paints a bleak portrait of living a non-sectarian existence in Blida in 1956. “The distinction between good and evil” is not clear in this novel because it seems that any meaningful “good” is impossible to achieve without a trace of “evil” or the possibility of violent repercussions. What is “good” for Touma is perceived as “evil” by her community. What is “good” for Hassiba is bad for the family who worries about her well-being. What is “good” for Cherifa is perceived as “evil” by the men who leer at her in the streets as she goes to warn her husband. Ultimately, what is “good” for the women in the novel is complicated by Djébar by the men in their lives and the social norms to which they are expected to adhere.

Silent Sisters

For Algerian women, the period of the war was a period of great change and

unprecedented fluidity. The rhetoric of women's rights came to the forefront on both pro- and anti-colonial agendas. Some urban, educated women contributed to this debate, but most remained silent. They took their duties as wives, mothers, and sisters very seriously. Participating in a women's liberation movement within their own culture came as a secondary concern to the liberation of their country. However, wartime brought with it a sea change of responsibilities and norms which changed the roles of wives, mothers, and sisters in considerable ways. Traditionally, women were not allowed to leave the home without a veil and a male family member or her husband. Working as an urban guerrilla, transporting supplies in the *maquis*, housing guerillas, or coping with the departure of male family members changed this. Some women chose to endanger their lives to fight against colonial oppression, but many simply adjusted to a form of life that emerged with the war. Women had to leave the home to complete a variety of tasks that they had never taken on previously. In this process, some banded together to support one another or to demand their rights. Adjusting to their new responsibilities, these women were, more often than not, left out of history books, newspapers, and the archive.

Most women did not see their actions as exceptional, but accomplished out of a sense of duty to their families and to their countries. We began to see this in Nedjma's transformation from a subject-less image of Algeria to everydayness. In *El Moudjahid*, one woman describes that these radical adjustments to daily life are not heroic, but natural: "Chacune de nous, Algériennes qui croyons que notre devoir est d'être près des combattants au maquis, faisait son travail modestement. Ce sont pourtant certaines parmi nous que l'histoire un jour appellera "héroïnes." Nous, nous préférons le simple titre

d'Algériennes” (“Journal d'une maquisarde” 7/20/59). This woman prefers the title “Algerian woman” to “heroine” despite the heroism involved in changing deeply ingrained cultural and social norms under Islam and French rule. Most were accustomed to living life modestly, so it is not surprise that they adjusted to their new lives “modestly” as well:

Nous accomplissons notre devoir modestement, parce que nous ne regardons en général que notre travail quotidien, cette vie dont j'ai déjà parlé, avec ses risques, avec ses joies. Mais il nous est arrivé à chacune d'entre nous, à certains moments graves, de comprendre que cette vie nous finissons par trouver normale avait une importance qui dépassait notre cadre individuel, que notre pays, et pour toute les femmes de notre pays, elle avait un sens bien plus large. Celui de l'exemple, celui de l'avenir. Car, en faisant notre devoir auprès de nos frères, nous témoignons de ce qu'est, de ce que sera la femme algérienne libre. (“Journal d'une maquisarde” 7/20/59)

Most of the work undertaken by women during the revolution took place at the level of daily, domestic life and duties. However, these domestic duties became increasingly dangerous and unstable. In order to feed their husbands, many had to deal with prison bureaucracy which led to protests when their tasks were hindered. Women continued cooking and taking care of the men in their families, but this definition expanded to include their new “brothers” in the liberation movement. Women wore their veils to leave their homes, but under these veils, some women transported bombs or weapons. The nature of these tasks were not heroic in themselves, but they were faced with the possibility of imprisonment, torture, rape, or death if they were caught undertaking them. In this sense, Algerian women remained Algerian women, but the very definition of this word changed. The meaning took on a greater importance than it once had. They became “the example, the future” for free Algerian women coming after them.

Fanon describes the Algerian couple as taking parallel, but interrelated paths in the liberation movement. Together they comprise the point of departure for the construction of a new Algerian culture free of colonial oppression:

That is why we must watch the parallel progress of this man and this woman, of this couple that brings death to the enemy, life to the Revolution. The one supporting the other, but apparently strangers to each other. The one radically transformed into a European woman, poised and unconstrained, who no one would suspect, completely at home in the environment, and the other, a stranger, tense, moving toward his destiny. (57)

The man and woman support one another, but act in very different ways. Fanon describes the woman as simply “transform[ing] into a European woman,” but the man as morphing into a “stranger, tense, moving toward his destiny.” This undermines the unique form the transformation of women took on over the course of the war. By and large, they did not imitate European feminism or transform into European women. They did not achieve the same tasks as women during European wars or adhere to the word of European women who joined them in their struggle for national liberation. If anything, they forged new paths for themselves using their skills and experience with domesticity as a model for their actions. As we have seen, European women who wished to participate in collective action were made to prove themselves as loyal to the cause, not held on pedestals as models for action. The Algerian couple provided a point of reference for new possibilities for women's comportment during the war, but extended beyond the duties of wives to act as sisters and mothers to other women and men around them fighting for liberation.

In *The Eloquence of Silence*, Marnia Lazreg interprets the modesty and relative

absence of historical voice of the women in the liberation movement as speaking volumes. The rights of post-independence Algerian women did not improve considerably after the war. Most women went back to their pre-war duties in their domestic spaces. The most important goal, liberation, had been achieved, so many were content with returning to tradition and to their former positions in their households. Lazreg argues that the situation was more complicated than Algerian women being “duped” into fighting for men with the intention of forcing them back into submission after the war:

The prevailing feminist view, according to which Algerian women, like so many other women before them, were duped into joining the nationalist movement by unscrupulous men who later did not share with them the spoils of independence, must be rejected for its derogatory connotations that deprive women of will and agency, and its lack of understanding of the dynamics of Algerian nationalism. (*Eloquence* 118)

There is little evidence to support the idea that men forced their women to join the nationalist movement in Algeria. As we have seen throughout this chapter, women joined the nationalist movement out of their own desire for liberation, as a result of their own set of experiences, or as a way of adapting to new responsibilities brought on by the war. Social and religious conservatism emerged, in part, as a reaction to French pressure for reform during the course of the war. Changing the family code and forcing women to unveil was meant to infiltrate and disrupt the Algerian family structure in a last-ditch attempt at renewing French hegemony. These tactics were largely rejected by Algerians who valued the protection provided by their families over that of the French.

To write-off measures taken by Algerian women during the war as a product of male pressure and trickery undermines the risks taken by them and the accomplishments

they did succeed. Among their successes, Lazreg lists that as a result of the war they “forged bonds with one another,” acquired “a sense of responsibility and purposive action” and “confidence in themselves,” “[took] charge of a farm or business left behind,” “rubbed shoulders with men,” and expressed their “will” (*Eloquence* 138). Furthermore, they took on more risk than Algerian men because they risked ramifications within their communities as well as from the French :

More than men, their participation in the war entailed greater personal sacrifices and dangers. Indeed, women risked loss of the protection and safety of their homes and families and the possibility of good marriage and family life, and faced the omnipresent danger of rape. They headed for an uncertain future, having radically upset the value system that had hitherto governed gender relations by stepping out of their usual home-centered social roles and into the world of urban and rural guerrilla warfare. (*Eloquence* 119)

Women not only feared retribution in the form of imprisonment, rape, torture, or death at the hands of the French. They also faced social consequences from the communities around them if their participation put them in roles and situations that had not previously been socially acceptable. These “personal sacrifices and dangers” are not clear in all historical accounts of the war because they were not always overt as those undertaken by men. In Pontecorvo's film, for example, the fate of the women who participate in the bombings is ambiguous as are the bodily and social risks they take on by agreeing to their assignments. Even considering the risks that are depicted by the film, this type of work was only undertaken by a handful of women during the war. On the other hand, the fates of Djamila Boupacha and Djamila Bouhired are well-known as they gained international notoriety from their mistreatment by the French. These consequences, however, do not shed light on risks coming from their own culture during the war or after liberation.

Lazreg, too, fails to consider fully the lives of women whose roles transformed in more subtle ways. Very few women actually ventured out into guerrilla warfare in cities or in the *maquis*. Amrane-Minne's series of interviews reveals a much larger range of work undertaken by a much larger group of women as liaisons, guides, homemakers, mothers, daughters, and sisters. These women describe some of the personal risks they encountered during this period as well as their impact on the future of Algeria after liberation. Djebbar's novel sheds light on some of the subtleties of more typical risks undertaken by women during this period as mothers, wives, and sisters. In order to save her husband's life, Cherifa must leave her house for the first time and deal with the scornful attitudes of her community. Touma's refusal to veil herself and the possibility of her participation with the French leaves her murdered by her brother in the town square.

The difficulties these mothers, wives, and sisters would have to endure in an independent Algeria was not unknown to women fighters. Many challenges (that remain to be entirely worked out even today) persisted after the conclusion of the war. One unidentified woman interviewed in *El Moudjahid* in 1960 explains the uncertain future for women in Algerian society in remarkably un-hyperbolic language:

Nous savions que les jours de l'indépendance seraient difficiles, que nous étions une faible minorité. Nous pensions qu'il fallait nous organiser pour apprendre aux autres le peu que nous savions nous même, pour reprendre la tâche entreprise par les maquisardes. Dans l'Algérie future, nous imaginions toutes les femmes dévoilées, bien sûr, mais je ne crois pas que ce soit là le problème essentiel, le voile tombera progressivement de lui-même. ("Femmes algériennes")

This woman recognized that Algerian society would not reorganize itself in any lasting way after independence was achieved. Not all Algerian women wanted to participate in a

women's rights movement—activists were a “feeble minority.” A great deal of education needed to continue after the fall of colonialism for women to empower themselves. The “tasks undertaken by the *maquisardes*” needed to be attempted again after the French had left because socially, a lot of work remained to be done in their spirit. The important thing is that they have begun this work and they have confidence in Algerian society eventually catching up with the potential women have recognized in themselves. The veil and tradition will not fall overnight with the persuasion or the evacuation of the French, but it will “fall progressively on its own” in the context of a free and independent Algeria. When asked what the “essential problem” of Algerian women was, if not the veil, this woman answers that education lays at the heart of a women's revolution: “Faire prendre conscience à toutes les femmes du rôle qu'elles ont à jouer dans la société. Dans l'immédiat, les femmes devront continuer à bien élever leurs enfants, mais celles qui en seront capables devront éduquer les autres femmes” (“Femmes algériennes”). She does not restrict the idea of women coming into consciousness to something that takes place inside a classroom or accomplished by men around them. Rather, she encourages women to raise the consciousness of other women through activities belonging to the domestic sphere. As wives, mothers, and sisters, they must raise their children well, but also educated one another by means that are accessible to them. Education for women by women in the sphere of the family can lead to meaningful social and political change outside of the home in ways that will gently lead to the veil falling on its own accord.

*Oh you the spectators of this Nouba
 You are cloaked in the darkness
 Oh Queen of Chenoua, accept my prayers
 Oh your heart grieves for past misfortunes
 Every night, every morning, your eyes are sad
 For you, who understands the symbols
 My song always speaks of freedom
 God protect the women martyrs
 And save others from oppression.
 She who is ill will recover
 She who longs for home will be reunited with her people.
 She has kindled the spark of the past.
 Oh, those who have understood her as I have.
 Women shall never return to the shadows.
 Let's ask the present, you and I.
 She has kindled the spark of the past.
 Oh, those who have understood her as I have.
 She has kindled the spark of the past.
 Oh, those who have understood her as I have.
 During the occupation, the veil had a reason.
 But the sun of freedom has risen.
 You the spectator, you hide yourself.
 But we, we shall look at ourselves in the pure light of day.
 Everything will bloom again.
 Say "Amen" with me.
 Daughter of Chenoua, live in joy!
 And all over the mountains, do like her.
 At Menacer, fear has left the tree.
 Women of Cherchell, let the horses go free.
 Zoulikha still lives in the mountains
 She leaps like a mare
 Zoulikha still lives in the mountains
 All that was difficult will become easy.
 The land of exile, leave it behind.
 We'll live in a dream of bounty and ease.
 We'll reign in freedom and joy.*

—Assia Djebar, *La Nouba des femmes de Mont Chenoua*

CONCLUSION: ALGERIAN *NOUBA*

After a period of eight years of silence following the French-Algerian War, Assia Djebar released her first film, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* in 1977. This semi-documentary, semi-autobiographical film follows an Algerian engineer, Lila, who has been living in exile in France for many years as she returns to Algeria. Although the film follows no prescribed narrative, Lila seeks out the women of Mount Chenoua to tell stories of their pasts away from an analytical or judgmental gaze. Her mission is only to find these women and to “listen.” Structured roughly as a musical composition itself, the film culminates with a song, a *nouba*, or “everyday story of women” (Bemsmaïa 882) sung in dialectical Arabic (like the rest of the film).

Djebar's *nouba* is sung to a montage of women performing everyday activities from carrying grain to taking care of their children to dancing. Men are absent from this final performance except as the detached voice of the singer performing the *nouba*. In this way, the male gaze is acknowledged without overpowering the voices of the women. Despite the fragmentary nature of the film, there are coherent messages that can be taken away. The content of this song centers on the experiences of women and the significance of the perspectives of women in Algeria: “Women shall never return to the shadows./Let's ask the present, you and I./She has kindled the spark of the past.” The singer promises to

Queen Chenoua that women will remain in the light of day, not in the “shadows” where they had once lived. The singer asks the spectators to “ask the present” in order to construct a narrative through the process of interrogation instead of the foreclosure of perspectives in the construction of a unified storyline. This interrogation of the present results in an interrogation of the past. The singer indicates that a meaningful engagement with the present must include a consideration of history. In giving women voices in the present, there must be an acknowledgement that they were silent—and silenced—in the past.

Djebar takes away some of the violence inherent in the perspective of the spectator or male gaze in her treatment of women by calling attention to the absent participation of the spectator in this song: “You the spectator, you hide yourself.” Djebar accounts for the structural necessity of the spectator, but allows for her subjects in her film to “look at ourselves in the pure light of day.” Here, the spectators lurk in the shadows and the subjects shine—performing their everyday activities proudly for each other. This spectator is one gaze among many in a community of women.

This simultaneous acknowledgement and explosion of the gaze in the song is one way in which Djebar turns domestic spaces outward in her film. Private, family spaces gain public recognition with minimal exploitation. Women perform their everyday actions for the spectator, but ultimately for themselves. As Réda Bensmaïa argues: “In contrast to the way domestic space—one is tempted to say domesticated—fosters a turning inward of the self, an involution, what emerges now is a turning outward, an infinite unfolding toward the external world and toward others...” (878). Space is not

“domesticated” or brought inward into the family space, rather domestic space itself is turned outward in the film. Djebbar allows the world of women to invade the “external world” with a multitude of female gazes and domestic affairs. The film's star, Lila, gives these women space to speak, to listen, and to participate with one another in an attempt at healing the wrongs that have been committed against them in Algeria's violent past. Bensmaïa argues that the purpose of this kind of investigation lies primarily in its healing aspect on both personal and collective levels:

...The line of force that pervades the film: that of a woman who chooses to lie fallow and who allows everything that was submerged in silence by the war to bob to the surface again: women's voices, women's dances, women's laughter. These elements will make it possible, perhaps, to take stock for the first time; this is the chaos that engenders the true labor of mourning and anamnesis, and perhaps of reconciliation with Algeria's painful past. (883)

In her filmmaking, Djebbar enables us to listen to the stories of Algeria's past that had been kept silent. From the perspective of Algeria in 1977, this includes Algeria's relationship with France as well as its relationship with itself. Algerian women never achieved the full scope of what had been promised to them by their men, but Djebbar's work gives them an opportunity to mourn their losses in their own words and actions—“women's voices, women's dances, women's laughter”—in order to make space for possible futures: “The land of exile, leave it behind./We'll live in a dream of bounty and ease./We'll reign in freedom and joy.” Djebbar acknowledges that this promise might first exist only as “a dream,” but this dream is inhabitable and represents the first step in leaving behind “the land of exile.”

As suggested in Djebbar's *nouba*, I turned to history to do justice to the absent

perspectives of colonialism and the rise of nationalism in Chapter One. From a multiplicity of literary and political perspectives and identities, only two surfaced as significant during the war: pro-French and anti-French. Those who resisted reduction to this binary either became silent or were silenced. The literary sphere, however, persisted as a space in which alternatives to this binary could find some degree of expression. In particular, the literature of the Generation of '52 depicted possible ways of nonviolently constructing an Algerian national identity when state projects such as assimilation and the Social Centers were failing.

In Chapter Two, I developed my analysis of family relationships more thoroughly by turning to two notoriously “French” intellectuals: Albert Camus and Jacques Derrida and their relationships with their mothers. I read their respective silences throughout the war as reflective of their relationships with their mothers. Ultimately, Camus and Derrida paint the inaccessibility of their mothers' perspectives as a way of justifying their own silences. Unlike political rhetoric of the time, they do not co-opt their mothers' perspectives, but they fail to allow them the opportunity to speak or develop independently as subjects. In this way, the domestic underscores their work in an abstract way, but never fully materializes. Mouloud Feraoun also discusses his relationship with his parents. However, he allows his family history and the history of his country to inform the present in his work. He invites the domestic and the past to enter his work in a way that complicates the present beyond a blindly pro- or anti-colonial political project.

Tracing the character Nedjma in Kateb Yacine's work, in Chapter Three, I argued that she turns from a symbol of exploited Algeria into one voice among many. She still

attracts attention from characters due to her mixed origins and refusal to conform to cultural norms, but she loses her status as a source of desire for possession by Kateb's second novel. Her subjectivity is exhibited in the characters' acknowledgement of the limitations of their knowledge of her. She is no longer defined primarily by her veils or her relationships with others. She possesses a life and identity outside of the constraints of the narrative voice.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I focused more closely on the participation of women in the war. The women's cause was taken up by both pro- and anti-colonial fighters before the war began, but often with little concern for transforming their material reality. Women, however, did participate in nationalist groups before the war as well as a variety of tasks throughout the war. Beyond the heavily publicized images of women carrying bombs in the Battle of Algiers or fighting in the *maquis*, the involvement of women included a transformation of their domestic lives. Even women who had never taken a political position before the war were thrown into positions of involvement from housing fighters to taking care of household matters alone. Their very everydayness was itself a form of political action largely overlooked by most historical accounts. Through calling attention to the revolutionary potential of the domestic through “women's voices, women's dances, women's laughter” in Algeria, I hope to contribute to the actualization of the project of women's “reign in freedom and joy” in all parts of the world.

Throughout the previous chapters, I have attempted to call attention to places where domestic spaces appear in public. During the French-Algerian War, the life of the family was put on display in a variety of ways—through political rhetoric, literature,

performances, and bringing women increasingly into public spaces. Most often domestic spaces were ventriloquized to support particular ideological perspectives as we saw in the case of women's rights in Chapter Four. However, sometimes the domestic spoke through—or despite—these ideological projects as some of Amrane-Minne's interviews suggest. The content of these messages was far from apolitical, but the ideology differed significantly from the increasingly polarized, often violent, pro-colonial or anti-colonial perspectives. Bringing the domestic into the “external world” provides alternative political positions beyond the French/FLN binary.

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