

**CONFLICT AND REMEMBRANCE IN FRANCO-ALGERIAN
LITERATURE, 1981-1999**

Submitted by Jonathan George Lewis to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the
degree of Doctor in Philosophy in French
In February 2012

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material
and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper
acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and
that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree
by this or any other University.

Signature: Jonathan Lewis

Abstract

The Algerian War of Independence (1954-62), which brought an end to over a century of French colonial dominance in Algeria, is widely viewed as one of the most violent wars of decolonisation, the repercussions of which continue to prove pertinent to contemporary French society. After a thirty-seven year period of widely acknowledged state amnesia in France, the French government finally recognised the Franco-Algerian conflict as a war in 1999. This phase of forgetting persisted in spite of the visible reminder constituted by the sizeable population of Algerian origin living in France: a population that bears the legacy and memory of the war and transmits it to subsequent generations. The hesitation of the state to confront its colonial past in this way has exacerbated the sense of exclusion of France's Algerian population, and has hindered its capacity to integrate into French society. Through a study of literature, this thesis addresses these issues of remembrance and exclusion.

Taking as its primary corpus novels by four authors who embody the divisive past shared by France and Algeria – Azouz Begag, Mehdi Charef, Mounsi, and Leïla Sebbar – this study investigates the ways in which Franco-Algerian literature has represented the marginalisation of France's ethnic Algerian population, and posited routes of escape from this marginalisation. Furthermore, it analyses the extent to which the primary texts challenge the history of silence maintained for so long by the French government, and bring to light instead a complex, plural historical narrative as opposed to the monolithic version of history put forward by the state. By examining texts published between 1981 and 1999, the thesis traces the increased presence of the children of Algerian migrants in French society during the 1980s, which leads into a greater attention to history and a wave of remembrance in the 1990s, prefiguring the eventual official acknowledgment of the Algerian War by the French government in 1999.

Acknowledgements

My thanks, first and foremost, to Dr Helen Vassallo for her expert supervision, encouragement, and guidance. I would also like to thank Dr Chloe Paver and Dr Paul Cooke for their valuable input and advice. I am grateful to the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Exeter for awarding me a Doctoral Bursary to fund the research for this project, and for offering me teaching opportunities which allowed me to share my interest in French language and literature with undergraduate students.

The conferences held at Lancaster University (Minorités en vue, 2011) and at Queen's University Belfast (Cultures of Violence, 2011) proved particularly inspiring and encouraging in the final stages of my writing. Similarly, the annual conferences organised by the Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France and the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies provided a supportive environment for the exchange of ideas and for meeting others working in the same field, senior academics and postgraduate students alike. I am indebted to the reviewers of an article submitted to *Modern & Contemporary France* for their timely thoughts, which helped to shape one of the chapters of this thesis.

I extend my thanks also to Dr Richard Mansell for his advice in the transition from Masters to Ph.D., and offer a special thank you to Professor Martin Sorrell for first introducing me to the work of Mounsi, and for being a true inspiration. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Tim and Katerina, and my partner, Vicki, for their support, both financial and emotional.

List of Contents

Introduction: Remembering and Negotiating a Divisive History	5
Chapter 1 History and Future: The Vicious Circle of Ill-fated Beginnings and Dystopian Endings	52
Chapter 2 (In)Visibilisation: Affirming Ethnic Difference and Confronting Marginalisation	107
Chapter 3 Entanglement: Making Visible an Other History	172
Chapter 4 <i>Errance</i> : Wandering, Delinquency, and the Perennial Migrant	229
Conclusion Remembering Franco-Algerian History in the Twenty-First Century	292
Bibliography	311

Introduction: Remembering and Negotiating a Divisive History

In November 1954, armed uprisings instigated by Algerian nationalists marked the beginning of eight years of conflict which eventually led to the loosening of France's colonial grip on Algeria, and Algeria's subsequent independence in 1962. Far from signalling the end of France's relationship with its largest former colony, the Algerian War of Independence has left a legacy that continues to manifest itself in contemporary France. Large-scale immigration from former colony to former metropolitan centre, before, during, and after the war, has led to the establishment of an Algerian population that remains the largest immigrant population resident in France.¹ Over the course of the fifty years since the war and the end of colonisation, the memory of this past has been passed down the generations, and is now carried by the children and grandchildren – holders of French nationality – of the first generation of Algerian migrants, a number of whom have used writing as a means to articulate the memory of this history of conflict. This thesis examines texts by four francophone authors of Algerian origin – Azouz Begag, Mehdi Charef, Mounsi, and Leïla Sebbar – in whose work we can discern the multiple ways in which the past shared by France and Algeria – comprising colonisation, war, and subsequent immigration – has etched itself on French society, and informs our understanding of dominant French attitudes towards ethnicity and nationality. In particular, the texts included in the primary corpus allow us to examine the extent to which the children of Algerian migrants, embodying a divisive past, are marginalised from French society, history, and identity, the ways in which they attempt to negotiate this marginalisation, and the diverse effects of such endeavours.

¹ France's national institute of statistics (INSEE) affirms that, in 2007, Algerian immigrants made up 13.4% of the total French population, making the Algerian population the largest immigrant group in France. See 'Répartition des immigrés par pays de naissance', *Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* (2007)
<http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=immigrespaysnais> [accessed 11 July 2011]

From 'Beur' to 'Franco-Algerian' Literature

Much of the scholarship that studies the literary output of the children of Algerian migrants to France places itself under the study of 'Beur' literature, as exemplified by the title of Alec G. Hargreaves's *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction: Voices from the North African Community in France* (1991), the first full-length study to be devoted to this branch of literature. As Hargreaves himself observes, the term 'Beur' has become problematic due to its appropriation by hegemonic forces such as the mass media in France, neutralising the 'spirit of autonomy and [...] subversion' originally attached to it.² As the verlan³ term for the pejorative 'Arabe', the word 'Beur' functioned as an 'alternative form of self-designation', allowing those to whom it was applied to escape the negative connotations associated with the term 'Arabe'.⁴ However, as Hargreaves and, more recently, Laura Reeck, observe, the term 'Beur' remained a form of self-designation and so signifies a movement in time 'with social and political valence'.⁵ During the 1980s, when the term first came to prominence, the sons and daughters of Algerian migrants began to make themselves visible in France on a social and political level, and this increased visibility was reflected in the 1983 'Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme', eventually dubbed 'la Marche des Beurs'.⁶ This demonstration march, initiated in response to the growing success of the extreme right-wing in France, marked the 'Beur generation's political coming-of-age',⁷ and Hargreaves also notes that

² Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur fiction: Voices from the North African Community in France*, rev. edn (Oxford: Berg, 1997), p. 31.

³ A form of slang which inverts the first and last syllables of words, verlan became a popular means of communication for young people of North African origin living in the Parisian *banlieues*, as it allowed them to speak to each other without being understood by others, especially figures of authority. See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 29. Verlan is now a popular form of slang and is used within the wider French population.

⁴ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 30.

⁵ Laura Reeck, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 4.

⁶ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 31.

⁷ Reeck, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond*, p. 5.

debates on immigration at this time, from which arose the demonstration, aided the development and success of Beur literature, which grew over the course of the 1980s.⁸

Another reason for the emergence of Beur literature in the 1980s was the more literal coming-of-age of this generation of writers. Having moved to France with their parents at a young age around the time of the Algerian War of Independence, or having been born in France to migrant parents during this period, the Beur generation had reached adulthood by the 1980s.⁹ Mehdi Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983) is widely accepted as the first Beur novel, even though Hocine Touabti's *L'Amour quand même* preceded it by two years.¹⁰ In this thesis, Leïla Sebbar's *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (1981) is the earliest text to be included in the primary corpus, as it engages with similar issues to those common in Beur novels. In this way, I posit Sebbar's text as a precursor to the body of Beur literature that emerged in the 1980s. In fact, in his *Anthologie de la littérature algérienne, 1950-1987*, Charles Bonn begins a final section on what he calls the 'deuxième génération de l'émigration' with *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*.¹¹ Nonetheless, I would call into question the inclusion of Sebbar within this group of the second generation of immigration, which is largely synonymous with the Beur generation even though, as Hargreaves rightly observes, many Beurs 'have never migrated from one country to another'.¹² Unlike those who are grouped within the so-called second generation of immigration, Sebbar was not born in France, nor did she move to France from Algeria at an early age with her parents. She moved to France from Algeria to pursue her university education,

⁸ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 30.

⁹ Hargreaves notes that 'the earliest significant stirrings of creative output' amongst youths of North African origin appeared in the 1970s, though 'none was published commercially'. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁰ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 28, and Nada Elia, 'In the Making: Beur Fiction and Identity Construction', *World Literature Today*, 71.1 (1997) 47-54 (p. 47). Both Hargreaves and Elia comment on the virtually nonexistent attention with which the publication of Touabti's novel was met.

¹¹ See Charles Bonn, *Anthologie de la littérature algérienne, 1950-1987* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1990), p. 227.

¹² Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 1.

leaving her parents in Algeria, though they then moved to France themselves a few years later.¹³ Furthermore, Sebbar herself states that she does not belong to a Beur community since, according to her, ‘né en France de parents algériens immigrés, c’est la définition de Beur’,¹⁴ a definition to which Sebbar does not conform. Indeed, if we take this definition of the term ‘Beur’, then only one author of the four to be studied in this thesis, Azouz Begag, strictly qualifies as a Beur, since both Charef and Mounsi were born in Algeria, though they moved to France at an early age.

The inconsistencies that arise from the definitions outlined above give reason for this thesis’s intention to move beyond an understanding of this body of work as ‘Beur literature’, referring instead to ‘Franco-Algerian literature’ which, furthermore, reflects the simultaneously dual and opposing nature of the identities and histories which the thesis seeks to explore. While it is not my objective to deny the indisputable significance of the existence of the Beur movement, a central concern of this study is to examine the literary output of authors who have inherited the legacy of colonisation, war, and immigration which characterises the history that France and Algeria share. However, in acknowledgement of the significance of the Beur movement to this body of literature, the thesis studies the work of two authors who were central to the Beur movement of the 1980s – Begag and Charef – alongside two authors, Sebbar and Mounsi, who reject the Beur label and refuse to be placed within this group, thus giving further reason to use the term ‘Franco-Algerian’ to denote the literature with which this study engages.

Moreover, it is significant to note that Begag and Charef were not necessarily advocates of the use of the Beur label. For instance, Begag recognises the media’s role in the appropriation of the term, and the simplistic, erroneous image it conveys of a

¹³ For bibliographical information on Sebbar, see her official website <http://clicnet.swarthmore.edu/leila_sebbar/> [accessed 27 September 2011].

¹⁴ Jane Hiddleston, ‘Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l’oubli: entretiens avec Leïla Sebbar et Azouz Begag’, *Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literatures in French Bulletin*, 22 (2001), 6-29 (p. 9).

homogeneous North African community.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Begag does acknowledge the positive role played by the term, which allowed for the increased political and social visibility of the children of Algerian migrants in the 1980s through enabling identification with an emergent definition of selfhood.¹⁶ Thus, by playing a major role in developing the definition of Beur identity during the 1980s through the success of their early works,¹⁷ these novels by Begag and Charef also hold a significant place in the wider field of francophone literature by authors of Algerian origin due to their representation of the experiences of the children of Algerian migrants, inheritors of the simultaneously shared and divisive Franco-Algerian past, and it is for this reason that their early works are included in the primary corpus.

Representing the specificity of the experience of North African migrants and their children in France is also at the heart of Mounsi's work¹⁸ but, as his first novel was published in 1990, after the Beur trend of the 1980s, he is already set apart from the Beur movement. Indeed, in the only published work to date dedicated solely to Mounsi's literary oeuvre, Jeanne-Marie Clerc and Fabian Cruveiller state that Mounsi disputes the validity of the Beur label, which he associates with a failed French policy of integration of the 1980s.¹⁹ This model of integration demanded that migrants and their children lose references to their ethnic origins in exchange for equal access to the spheres of French society,²⁰ and is indicative of the French Republic's strict adherence to a model of citizenship that is based on unity by uniformity and, therefore, hostile to ethnic difference. According to Clerc and Cruveiller, Mounsi is wary of falling into this

¹⁵ Hiddleston, 'Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l'oubli', p. 20.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁷ For an outline of the considerable attention which greeted the publication of especially Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* and Begag's *Le Gone du Chaâba*, see Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, pp. 33-35.

¹⁸ See Jeanne-Marie and Fabien Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue: Mounsi* (Montpellier: Éditions du CERS, 2009), p. 5.

¹⁹ See Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 5.

²⁰ See Patrick Simon, 'La Stratégie de la discrimination positive: Sarkozy et le débat français sur l'égalité', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 17.4 (2009) 435-50 (p. 438).

‘piège identitaire’ set up by the Republic, into which the Beur movement descended.²¹ Instead, Mounsi reclaims ‘une interpénétration culturelle plaidant une “légitime différence”’, refusing to be labelled an ‘Algérien de France’ nor a ‘Français d’Algérie’.²² This cultural interpenetration and desire to retain legitimate difference, rather than have ethnic difference dissolve within hegemonic conceptions of identity, is reflected by the hybridity of the term ‘Franco-Algerian’. Thus, in comparison to Begag’s and Charef’s early texts, Mounsi’s work provides a different perspective on the marginalised ethnic Algerian population in France and, furthermore, its greater attention to history inscribes this experience more explicitly in the wider Franco-Algerian historical context.

Mounsi’s rejection of being labelled an ‘Algérien de France’ or a ‘Français d’Algérie’ is similar to Sebbar’s assertion that she does not consider herself part of any community, French or Algerian.²³ Both writers refuse to be categorised in such a way that identification with one culture is privileged over the other, again reflecting the hybridity of the term ‘Franco-Algerian’. Indeed, Sebbar herself states that she is ‘[une] croisée’ in *Lettres parisiennes: histoires d’exil* (1986),²⁴ a collection of correspondence with the Canadian writer Nancy Huston, and this self-portrayal feeds into Sebbar’s literary work, which is shaped by ‘l’intersection de pays, de cultures, d’identités et d’Histoires différentes mais en contact’.²⁵ In its location at the intersection between French and Algerian cultures, identities, and histories, Sebbar’s work encapsulates the major concerns of this thesis, and ties together the various preoccupations of the work of the three other authors included in the primary corpus. Through a close analysis of this corpus, the diverse tensions that come into view when dominant French culture,

²¹ Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 6.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²³ See Hiddleston, ‘Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l’oubli’, p. 8.

²⁴ Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes: histoires d’exil*, (Paris: Bertrand Barrault, 1986), p. 134.

²⁵ Michel Laronde, ed., *Leïla Sebbar* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003), p. 19.

identity, and history come into contact with the legacy of France's colonial, Algerian past will be explored over the course of this thesis.

The Children of Immigration: Descendants of Colonisation and War

An examination of the collection of texts included in the primary corpus broadens our understanding of French society's problematic confrontation with the ever-present spectre of its colonial past, and of how literature has encouraged new approaches to coming to terms with this past. Reflecting the emergence and increased visibility of the children of Algerian migrants on the political and social scene in France, Begag's and Charef's earlier novels are similar in that they centre on the difficulties faced by their Franco-Algerian protagonists as they attempt to negotiate 'the paradoxical situation of being natives of a country from which many of their parents had struggled to be independent'.²⁶ This is especially evident in Begag's first two novels, *Le Gone du Chaâba* (1986) and *Béni ou le paradis privé* (1989), in which the young protagonists move back and forth from the setting of the family, and its attempts to uphold the traditions and identity of the Algerian homeland, to the school, where the protagonists come into contact with the dominant, majority ethnic population. This opposition of family and school is less evident in Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, in which the protagonist's failings at school lead to his unemployment as a young adult, though his family remains very much infused by Algerian culture and tradition. However, the protagonist, Madjid, still suffers from an inability to place his nationality and identity, exemplified by the indication, introduced at the outset of the novel, that he is

²⁶ Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Generating Migrant Memories', in *Algeria & France 1800 – 2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*, ed. by Patricia M. E. Lorcin (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), pp. 217-27 (p. 223).

‘convaincu qu’il n’est ni arabe ni français depuis bien longtemps’.²⁷ While Begag’s protagonists’ unsuccessful attempts to identify with a pre-conceived notion of what it means to be French are made more explicit in the texts, the impossibility faced by Madjid of escaping his marginalisation from French society, culture, and identity will also be examined. Indeed, Hargreaves observes that the ‘sons and daughters of Algerian migrants confounded the expectations of those on both sides of the colonial divide who for diverse reasons had hoped that the end of empire would make a clean break with the legacy of the past’,²⁸ pointing towards French society’s hesitation in confronting the memory of Algeria, which has contributed to the marginalisation of those who embody this memory: the children of Algerian migrants represented by Begag’s and Charef’s protagonists.

To a large degree, Sebbar’s *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, her first novel, is preoccupied with the same themes that we encounter in *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, and *Béni ou le paradis privé*. Indeed, as the young protagonist, Dalila, is female in this instance, the conflicts are more pronounced as she suffers from the obligation to adhere to her family’s Islamic traditions when also exposed to the relative freedom afforded to her by secular French society. Going against the expectation that her mobility should be restricted to the family home and school, Dalila incurs the wrath of her father and suffers his physical aggression. Her response is to lock herself in her room, avoiding all contact with her parents, and eventually leaving home, at which point the novel ends. Such an open-ended conclusion, refraining from informing the reader of Dalila’s eventual fate, reflects the uncertain future that characterises the conclusions of the majority of the primary corpus which, moreover, points towards the difficulty of escaping the marginalisation in which children of Algerian migrants in France are trapped.

²⁷ Mehdi Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1983), p. 17.

²⁸ Hargreaves, ‘Generating Migrant Memories’, pp. 221-22.

The way in which *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (hereafter referred to as *Fatima*) accentuates the conflicts invariably faced by all of the protagonists of the primary corpus due to its own protagonist's gender draws attention to Sebbar's role as the sole female author studied in this thesis. While the subject of gender does not constitute one of the major axes of the thesis, it is not altogether ignored. My choice to include works by Sebbar in the primary corpus does not rest on her engagement with questions of gender, though this is undoubtedly a rich line of enquiry,²⁹ but on the way in which her novels bring to light and confront the legacy of French colonialism and war. However, the relative success of Sebbar's female characters in negotiating a divisive identity and escaping marginalisation as opposed to the other, male characters in the primary corpus should not go unnoticed, and this is a theme that will be highlighted over the course of the ensuing discussion. As such, Sebbar's inclusion in the primary corpus acts as a counterpoint to the three male authors whose work is considered in this thesis, and the role of gender in this distinction will be analysed to the extent that the overarching concerns of the thesis demand. Thus, the way in which *Fatima*, for instance, subverts items that typically represent patriarchal oppression, such as the veil, will be discussed in order to highlight the role of this subversion in opening up a route to escape from marginalisation and entrapment. In this way, female North African characters succeed in at least putting forward the possibility of transcending what is a dual oppression: being excluded from dominant French society due to their ethnicity, and being confined to the domestic milieu by their family due to their gender. On the contrary, the male characters who we encounter in the novels of Begag, Charef, and Mounsi, rarely achieve this possibility of escape, if at all. A more detailed examination of the theme of gender in the novels analysed in this thesis, and the role it plays in enabling the escape from entrapment, would constitute a rich avenue for further

²⁹ See for example Rafika Merini, *Two Major Francophone Women Writers, Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar: A Thematic Study of their Works* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), and Anne Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing between Worlds* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001).

study, but it is not the major preoccupation of this thesis. Rather, it is my intention to highlight the way in which Sebbar's texts confront history and signal the importance of engaging with the past in order to create a present and future in which the children of Algerian migrants can negotiate a space for themselves within dominant French society. In their explicit awareness of the significance of the past, Sebbar's texts are set apart from those of the other three writers analysed in this thesis.

While Sebbar distances herself from the Beur movement, her first novel displays characteristics of other Beur texts. The similarities between *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* and Begag's and Charef's novels underline the preoccupation over the course of the 1980s with articulating the increased visibility of the children of migrants in France, and the difficulties they face in establishing a legitimate place for themselves. Indeed, these difficulties are not only a result of French society's hesitation in confronting its colonial past, but also due to a refusal on the part of Algerian migrants to renounce their identity and culture, as exemplified by Dalila's parents in *Fatima*: the first generation of immigration that wishes to maintain its strict Islamic values. In a sociological work on the status of North African migrants in France, Begag and Abdellatif Chaouite make a note of the differences between first and second generations in their position towards the host country, arguing that the first-generation migrant is 'socio-économiquement d'ici et psychobiographiquement d'ailleurs', while their children are subject to 'une double aimantation identificatoire: celle de leur famille et celle des institutions sociales (école, télévision...), deux foyers de référence emboîtés l'un dans l'autre mais qui ne parlent pas les mêmes langages, qui sont souvent problématiques'.³⁰ Thus, for the children of migrants, France does not represent the host country at all, but a place with which they strongly identify, and which competes with the degree to which they identify with the culture and identity of their family. On the

³⁰ Azouz Begag and Abdellatif Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), p. 47.

other hand, the first generation considers itself very much *from Algeria*, and its place in France continues to be dictated by the socio-economic factors, themselves a result of colonisation, which brought them to France in search of employment in the first place.³¹

As intimated above, the inclusion of *Fatima* in the primary corpus comes as a result of the focus on history that is at the heart of this thesis, for where *Fatima* diverges from the Beur novels by Begag and Charef is in its more explicit attentiveness to the past. In this way, I address Stora's observation that Algerian immigration to France is never understood 'dans la profondeur du champ historique',³² by highlighting the inextricable link between immigration and the colonial past shared by France and Algeria. While there is very little reference to the history of colonisation and war in Begag's and Charef's early works, the narrator of *Fatima* confronts the past at regular intervals over the course of the text.³³ Furthermore, the main narrative thread of Sebbar's novel is interspersed with other various stories of the difficulties faced by North African migrants, inscribing the story of Dalila and her family within a collective experience of North African migration to France. This multiplicity of narratives is made possible through the retrospective recounting of how, as a child, Dalila inconspicuously overhears the various stories retold by her mother, Fatima, and her female North African friends when they meet in their regular spot in the public square. These tales are not restricted to recounting the experiences of North Africans in France, but transcend the Hexagon to include tales from the Maghreb.³⁴ This attentiveness to the past and to its legacy in the present, in which the children of North African migrants must negotiate a dual and, in many ways, conflicting identity, reflects the main axes of study in this

³¹ See John Talbott, *The War Without A Name: France in Algeria, 1954-1962*, 2nd edn (London: Faber And Faber, 1981), p. 15.

³² Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie*, 2nd edn (Paris: La Découverte/Poche, 1998), p. 298.

³³ See for example Leïla Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (Paris: Stock, 1981), p. 55, pp. 88-89.

³⁴ See for example the story of Dalila's Moroccan friend who is forced to move to Morocco and get married. However, we learn that she eventually leaves her husband and Morocco to return to France. Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, pp. 182-89.

thesis and, furthermore, inscribes the Beur novels of Begag and Charef into a framework that takes into consideration the history shared by France and Algeria. By incorporating the 1980s texts of Begag and Charef in a study of the legacy of the Algerian War, this thesis seeks to move beyond the study of literature by authors of Algerian origin as solely a means of constructing and negotiating an identity that encapsulates their Franco-Algerian specificity. Both the similarities and the differences between Sebbar's *Fatima* and Begag's and Charef's early novels allow for such an exploration of the legacy of the past shared by France and Algeria as manifested in Franco-Algerian literature. By comprising the same major preoccupations of Begag's and Charef's novels (conflict between the inner world of the 'Algerian' family and the outer 'French' world and attempting to breach this dichotomy), but at the same time exemplifying a far greater consideration of the past, *Fatima* relates the major themes of some of the most successful examples of Beur literature to the history of colonisation, war, and immigration which France and Algeria share. Thus, the study of Begag's and Charef's early texts become relevant to a study of the legacy of this history, as evidenced also by Penny Brown's inclusion of *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni ou le paradis privé* in her article examining the aftermath of war.³⁵ These novels, which include hardly any reference to the Algerian War, nonetheless bear its significance and legacy.³⁶

These 1980s novels by Sebbar, Charef, and Begag are, therefore, included in the primary corpus because they articulate the greater visibility of the children of Algerian immigration in France, and the consequent dilemmas they face as they attempt to carve a legitimate place for themselves in French society. It is argued that this presence that

³⁵ See Penny Brown, "Is This My War?" Identity Crises in French Children's Literature after World War Two', in *Une et Divisible? Plural Identities in Modern France*, ed. by Barbara Lebrun and Jill Lovecy (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 179-96.

³⁶ This is not to say that a lack of explicit reference to the past is a defining characteristic of Beur literature. Nacer Kettane's *Le Sourire de Brahim* (1985), for example, openly confronts the events of 17 October 1961.

comes to light in the 1980s, and the complexities it foregrounds, is itself a legacy of the colonial history that France and Algeria share. Moving beyond literature published in the 1980s, the analysis then takes three novels published in the 1990s – two by Mounsi, *La Noce des fous* (1990) and *Le Voyage des âmes* (1997), and one by Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge* (1999) – in order to examine the way in which, after the affirmation in the 1980s of the presence of a significant Algerian population in France, these later novels initiate a reconsideration of dominant French attitudes to ethnic Algerian minorities, the colonial past, and the Algerian War.

Rewriting the History of Colonisation

The 1990s texts included in the primary corpus develop the concerns expressed by the 1980s texts and relate them more explicitly to the history of colonisation and war shared by France and Algeria. This development is reflected by Mounsi's *La Noce des fous* which, published in 1990, bears the hallmarks of the texts which preceded it, and points towards the greater confrontation with history of the texts which follow it. The content of *La Noce des fous* is in many ways similar to that of Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (hereafter referred to as *Le Thé au harem*). In both novels, the protagonists are of Algerian origin and participate in various kinds of law-breaking and delinquency, at times avoiding arrest by the police, at others succumbing to the forces of order. Furthermore, as in *Le Thé au harem* and Begag's first two novels, there is hardly any reference in *La Noce des fous* to the colonial past shared by France and Algeria. However, there is no doubt that Mounsi's first text constitutes a departure from the Beur literature of the 1980s included in the primary corpus. This departure is

signalled on a stylistic level in the formality of Mounsi's writing,³⁷ which is in sharp contrast to the colloquial style we encounter in Charef's and Begag's texts.

Furthermore, and more pertinent to the overall aims of this thesis, Mounsi's texts move beyond an articulation of the increased visibility of the children of Algerian migrants in France and, like Sebbar's, inscribe the experience of the children of immigration within a historical legacy that comprises colonisation and the Algerian War.

The idea that *La Noce des fous* confronts the history shared by France and Algeria may seem incongruous with the earlier observation that the novel makes hardly any reference to this past. However, while Mounsi refers very little to this particular history, a wider concept of History permeates the text, whether this be in the narrator's acknowledgement that his life is imbricated in 'une sale histoire'³⁸ – a story or history which may be that of colonisation and war, but is not made explicit – or through the novel's recurrent allusions to ancient history.³⁹ Such a distinct preoccupation with History in a novel which insists on articulating 'la désintégration de ceux qui [sont] exclus [de la société]',⁴⁰ an experience of immigration with which North African culture in France is closely associated,⁴¹ inscribes this experience within a wider history, that of colonisation and war, without which the experience of Algerian migrants in France cannot be understood.⁴² In this way, parallels can be drawn between *La Noce des fous* and Sebbar's *Fatima*, whose attentiveness to the past also has the effect of relating the experience of immigration to the history shared by France and Algeria.

³⁷ The 'disbelief' of being confronted with this formal register in *La Noce des fous* has also been observed by Kathryn Lay-Chenchabi and Bernadette Dejean de la Batie in their 2000 article on Mounsi's literary oeuvre. See Kathryn Lay-Chenchabi and Bernadette Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance of the Self through Writing', *French Cultural Studies*, 11 (2000), 249-68 (p. 252).

³⁸ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, 2nd edn (La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 2003), p. 14.

³⁹ The narrator's description of the deprived area in which he lives, for example, depicts a location 'si loin des Grecs, des chevaux, des chariots, de la terre où sont apparus des dieux parmi des colonnes à demi brisées qui gardent la beauté d'une ruine immortelle'. Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 11.

⁴¹ See Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 5.

⁴² See Richard L. Derderian, 'Confronting the Past: The Memory Work of Second-Generation Algerians in France', in Lorcin, *Algeria & France 1800 – 2000*, pp. 247-57 (pp. 250-51).

Where *La Noce des fous* and Mounsi's writing in general differ from the rest of the primary corpus is in their defiant insistence on keeping their protagonists on the margins of French society. As such, *La Noce des fous* points towards another of the main axes of this study: the rewriting and re-interpretation of a history which has been predominantly written by the coloniser and, in the aftermath of colonisation, maintained by the hegemonic discourses of formerly colonising nations. By refusing to conform to the pre-requisites of being accepted into French society and, to an extent, choosing to remain excluded from dominant French identity, Mounsi prevents his protagonists from falling into the trap of losing references to their ethnic origins. In parallel, the history of Algerian immigration to France, brought to light through the experiences of Mounsi's protagonists, is not engulfed and overwhelmed by dominant French historical narratives. Thus, *La Noce des fous* moves beyond representing the experience of the children of migration and brings to light the wider history of the colonised subject, from whom, in the Franco-Algerian context, migrants and the children of migrants are descended.⁴³ Furthermore, this history stands as a challenge to dominant historical narratives, in which the history of the colonised subject and his/her descendants is marginalised.

This challenge to the coloniser's version of history is taken further and becomes more explicit in Mounsi's most recent novel, *Le Voyage des âmes* (1997),⁴⁴ which makes direct reference to the Algerian War as the narrative alternates between the protagonist's childhood in Algeria and his later experience of life as an immigrant adolescent in Paris. However, amongst the primary corpus, the notion of rewriting the

⁴³ This legacy of oppression that is passed from colonised subjects to their descendants is highlighted in Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel's work, *De l'indigène à l'immigré*. See Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel, *De l'indigène à l'immigré*, 2nd edn ([Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

⁴⁴ Strictly speaking, Mounsi's most recent novel is *Les Jours Infinis* (2000), but this is in fact a re-editing of *Le Voyage des âmes* which restructures the original text into a more linear narrative in an attempt to make it more accessible. See Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, pp. 7-8. As the constant shifts in time and place, between Algerian childhood and French adolescence, are an essential aspect in our understanding of the text and in the axes of study of this thesis, the original text (*Le Voyage des âmes*) is the novel which will be analysed here.

history of colonisation is illustrated most effectively by Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999), which also refers explicitly to the Algerian War and, more specifically, to the events of 17 October 1961, when a peaceful Algerian demonstration in the centre of Paris was brutally suppressed by the Parisian police. By focusing on and reconstructing a specific moment of violence enacted during the Algerian War, *La Seine était rouge* exemplifies the role of postcolonial literature in providing 'une ré-écriture, une ré-évaluation et une ré-interprétation de l'histoire', and in challenging the distorted, violated version of history put forward by the (former) coloniser.⁴⁵ By directly confronting the Algerian War and recounting memories of the war at length, *Le Voyage des âmes* and *La Seine était rouge* are set apart from the other novels studied in this thesis and allow us to reconsider the hegemonic version of the history shared by France and Algeria. In this way, the analysis of the 1980s novels, which reflect the emergence of the descendants of colonised subjects in French society, is developed through the analysis of novels published in the 1990s. Moving beyond representations of the experience of Algerian immigration in France, these later texts use that experience to bring to light alternative historical narratives and rewrite and re-evaluate dominant, 'official' French history.

Before outlining the prevailing hesitation with which the French government has remembered the Algerian past, an overview of the Algerian War and Algerian immigration around the time of the war is essential to understanding the backgrounds of the authors studied in this thesis, as well as the key concerns with which the analysis engages.

⁴⁵ See Anne Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire: *La Seine était rouge* de Leïla Sebbar', in Laronde, *Leïla Sebbar*, pp. 187-98 (p. 187). This task of putting forward a 'new colonial history' can also be seen in the work of the ACHAC group of French historians, which includes Bancel, Blanchard and Françoise Vergès, who, amongst other lines of research, analyse the extension of colonial representations in contemporary French society, and the effects of colonial ideologies and practices on both the métropole and former colonies. For further details on the work of this group of researchers, see their website <<http://www.achac.com>>

The Algerian War and Algerian Immigration to France

Three of the authors with whose work this study engages (Charef, Begag, and Mounsi) came to be brought up in France because of the migration of their parents from Algeria to France: Charef and Mounsi moved to France at a young age, and Begag was born in France to immigrant parents. Furthermore, the protagonist of each of the texts included in the primary corpus inhabits the peripheral suburbs (of almost exclusively Paris, though the *banlieues* of Lyon are the setting of Begag's novels) with which Algerian immigration to France has come to be so closely associated. Immigration from Algeria to France was a common phenomenon before the outbreak of the Algerian War, and Hargreaves pinpoints 1947 as the year after which Algerians began to emigrate to France on a large scale, when a new statute granted Algerians more freedom to move in and out of France.⁴⁶ Even before this statute was passed, though, Algerians were forced to seek work in France when an accelerated population growth resulted in the country 'outstripping its material resources'.⁴⁷ Those who went to France in search of employment were mainly men from rural areas who would send money back to their families, with the intention of eventually returning to Algeria, and John Talbott notes that 'by the 1950s more than three hundred thousand Algerians worked in French factories, fields, and construction sites and huddled together in French slums'.⁴⁸ Restricted to the poorest means of accommodation in France, Algerian migrants found that their new living conditions were not a great improvement on what they were used to in Algeria. Leaving behind 'the circumstances of rural derelicts' in their own country,⁴⁹ Algerians emigrating to France in the 1950s and 1960s found themselves living in *bidonvilles*, shantytowns made up of 'ramshackle buildings thrown up on spare

⁴⁶ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur fiction*, p. 10.

⁴⁷ John Talbott, *The War Without A Name*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

land around the edges of major cities' and lacking standard facilities such as gas, electricity and sewerage.⁵⁰

These *bidonvilles* make frequent appearances amongst the novels included in the primary corpus, in which their portrayal matches Hargreaves's description. Indeed, in *Le Gone du Chaâba*, the *bidonville* appears in the title of the novel itself, the 'Chaâba' being the name of the shantytown which constitutes the domestic setting in Begag's novel.⁵¹ Descriptions of *bidonvilles* make more fleeting appearances elsewhere in the primary corpus. At an early point in *La Noce des fous*, Mounsi depicts an area characterised by 'boue, pluie, poussier, giclures de goudron, arbres rabougris au ras du sol',⁵² which conforms to the 'desolate, muddy landscape' of *bidonvilles*,⁵³ and in *Le Voyage des âmes* the protagonist visits his uncle with his father in a *bidonville*.⁵⁴ However, in *Le Voyage des âmes*, the protagonist and his father do not live in a *bidonville* themselves, but in a hostel for migrant workers where, like in the *bidonvilles*, the inhabitants live huddled together in unhygienic conditions and lacking standard facilities.⁵⁵ While a *bidonville* is not a current mode of accommodation in Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, references are nonetheless made to the *bidonville* where the mother and grandmother of the protagonist, Amel, lived at the time of the Algerian War. Indeed, in *La Seine était rouge*, the *bidonville* takes on a further significance as a site of organising the contribution of Algerian migrants to the liberation movement and, in Sebbar's novel, Amel's mother recounts her father's involvement in organising the 17 October 1961 demonstration and her own mother's secret distribution of pamphlets by sewing them into fabrics and dresses.⁵⁶ Thus, the *bidonvilles* which, for a period,

⁵⁰ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 15.

⁵¹ For further discussion of the connotations of the word 'Chaâba' and its use in the title of Begag's novel, see Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 39.

⁵² Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 16.

⁵³ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 253.

⁵⁴ See Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes* (Paris: Stock, 1997), p. 58.

⁵⁵ See Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, pp. 52-55.

⁵⁶ See Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge: Paris, octobre 1961*, 2nd edn (France: Éditions Thierry Magnier, 2003), p. 27, p. 32.

Algerian migrants continued to inhabit after the end of the Algerian War, bear the memory of both immigration and war, and their frequent appearance in the primary corpus is significant in representing the legacy of this particular past in contemporary French society.

The outbreak of war did not stop Algerian migration to France and, according to Hargreaves, the wave of Algerian families that settled in France during the war took the total from six thousand in 1954 to thirty thousand in 1962 when the war ended.⁵⁷ With this in mind, it is perhaps inevitable that violence broke out in the imperial centre. Indeed, the Franco-Algerian conflict was unique when set in relation to other wars of independence in that it ‘spilt over directly into the metropolitan heartland’.⁵⁸ Jim House and Neil MacMaster confirm that ‘the most crucial factor in the imbrication of colonial warfare with the daily life of metropolitan France arose from the presence of 350,000 Algerian migrant workers, at the time the biggest “colonial” presence inside Europe’.⁵⁹ The event which perhaps reflects more than any other this importation of the Franco-Algerian conflict into the metropolitan centre is the suppression of the 17 October 1961 demonstration, during which the Parisian police unleashed murderous violence on peaceful, unarmed Algerian demonstrators, leading House and MacMaster to term the event as ‘the bloodiest act of state repression of street protest in Western Europe in modern history’.⁶⁰ Stora estimates that around thirty thousand Algerian protestors descended on central Paris from the outskirts of the capital,⁶¹ to which Algerian migrants were confined, and the repression that followed saw demonstrators violently beaten, clubbed, and strangled. Many were thrown into the Seine, left to drown if they

⁵⁷ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 12.

⁵⁸ Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 25.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶¹ Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, p. 95.

had not already been killed, while others were left by the side of the road.⁶² Though the total number of Algerian deaths during the repression of 17 October 1961⁶³ continues to be contested, House and MacMaster note that the figure of two hundred victims ‘became an established fact in much of the French press’ in the 1990s.⁶⁴ The events of 17 October 1961 are at the heart of one of the novels included in the primary corpus, Sebbar’s *La Seine était rouge*. Otherwise, this particularly event is largely absent from the primary corpus, although reference is made to it in Mounsi’s *Le Voyage des âmes*.⁶⁵ Thus, the repression of 17 October 1961 appears in the two most recent novels included in the primary corpus, reflecting the greater attentiveness to the Franco-Algerian past in the 1990s texts of the corpus, which this thesis seeks to bring to the fore.

The events of 17 October 1961 provide an indication of the extent of the violence enacted during the Algerian War, and of the ‘military repression that embroiled France in one of the most protracted and bloodiest wars of decolonization’.⁶⁶ When the war came to an end, with France recognising Algerian independence on 3 July 1962, Algerian families continued to emigrate to France and, in fact, Hargreaves notes that the number of North African families emigrating increased after 1962.⁶⁷ Despite this growing Algerian presence, the post-war years have been characterised by a reluctance on France’s part to remember the events of 1954 to 1962. Stora observes that this reluctance is out of keeping with France’s remembrance of wars that occurred sometimes centuries before the conflict with Algeria, stating that ‘dans ce pays, où les guerres de Vendée sont encore des discordes contemporaines, on cache ce passé tout récent’.⁶⁸ The extent of forgetting that has characterised the Algerian War is reflected in

⁶² Details of witness accounts can be found in Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, pp. 94-97.

⁶³ I am referring to the events of that specific date rather than to any other of the different meanings that ‘17 October 1961’ can denote. For a discussion of these, see House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁴ House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 7.

⁶⁵ See Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 59.

⁶⁶ House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, p. 8.

Stora's labelling of the war as 'une "guerre sans nom"',⁶⁹ a term also seen in Talbott's earlier work on the conflict, *The War Without A Name: France in Algeria, 1954-1962*, first published in 1980. Officially, this forgetting lasted until 1999, when the French government finally recognised the Algerian War as a war for the first time.⁷⁰ The year which marked this official acknowledgment coincides with the publication of the most recent novel included in the primary corpus, Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. As such, the primary corpus of this thesis spans a period in time when a minority group embodying the past shared by France and Algeria came to prominence in France, up until the official recognition of the Algerian War in 1999. While I am not in any way suggesting that this official acknowledgement led to a clean break with regard to the way in which French society comes to terms with its colonial past, the period studied is significant in that it traces the increased visibility of the children of Algerian migrants in France who, in the 1980s, began to articulate the marginalisation suffered by themselves and their parents. A key concern of this thesis will be to argue that this marginalisation is a result of France's hesitation in confronting its Algerian past, and the thesis will go on to outline how a desire for visibility amongst France's Algerian population in the 1980s gives way to a more explicit confrontation with the Algerian War in the 1990s, prefiguring the French government's official recognition of the war in 1999. The ways in which the fluctuation of this memorial process over the 1980s and 1990s manifests itself in the primary corpus constitutes a major preoccupation of the thesis, and informs the analysis throughout.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See Lorcin, *Algeria & France 1800 – 2000*, p. xxv.

A War Without A Name

Denial of the Algerian War was apparent at the time of the outbreak of the conflict, as the French government bypassed a declaration of war, preferring instead to refer to the ‘events’ and to ‘police operations’ in Algeria.⁷¹ This hesitation to admit that a war was fought in Algeria continued well beyond the attainment of Algerian independence, as indicated by Jo McCormack’s observation that ‘until 1999 the French government defended the myth that there had been no war, using euphemisms like “peacekeeping operations”’.⁷² Thus, the novels included in the primary corpus were published during a period when the Algerian War was not officially recognised, but subject instead to a memorial process fluctuating between remembrance and forgetting as the official silence is contested.⁷³ Indeed, the lack of extensive reference to the Algerian War in all but two of the novels in the primary corpus testifies to this silence, and the way in which the narratives of the two texts which do refer to the war indicate the difficulty of reconstructing the past reflects the fluctuating memorial process. Furthermore, according to Stora, avoiding the depiction of the Franco-Algerian conflict as a war was an attempt by the French government to uphold France’s republican unity, since “‘dire la guerre’, pour la France, ce serait déjà admettre la possible séparation de corps, la dislocation de la “République une et indivisible”’.⁷⁴ The French Republic’s continued adherence to a definition of the nation as one and indivisible will be explored over the course of the thesis, which will examine the extent to which the long-lasting official silence with regard to the Algerian War affects the position within France’s definition of nationhood of those who bear the legacy of this past, such as the protagonists of the

⁷¹ For an outline of the various euphemisms used by the French government, see Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, p. 13.

⁷² Jo McCormack, *Collective Memory: France and the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 2.

⁷³ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, p. 16.

primary texts. As French citizens of Algerian origin, the children of Algerian migrants embody the separation or dislocation brought about by the Franco-Algerian conflict, and this rupture manifests itself in the ‘in-between’ status exemplified by the protagonists of the primary texts. It will be argued that, by hesitating to acknowledge the Algerian War, this ‘in-between’ status and rupture is ignored, upholding a singular conception of French nationhood which excludes those who embody the Franco-Algerian conflict.

Ultimately of course, the dislocation of the indivisible French nation came to pass, with Algeria breaking away from the metropolitan heartland and gaining recognition as an independent nation on 3 July 1962. However, despite Algerian independence being ‘the first dramatic failure of French state institutions on French territory to convince people to identify themselves as French’,⁷⁵ thus indicating the fallibility of French republican unity, the French state ignored this reality and continued to uphold republican values. Indeed, as Todd Shepard charts in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*, by claiming that decolonisation was ‘an all but inevitable stage in the tide of History’, Algerian independence was deemed ‘wholly consistent with a narrative of progress – the ongoing extension of national self-determination and its corollary values: liberty, equality, fraternity, and the Rights of Man’.⁷⁶ Therefore, rather than cause the French state to rethink republican values which, when exported, backfired,⁷⁷ it was claimed that Algerian independence in fact reinforced those values. However, as the end of the Algerian War did not signal a clean break from the colonial period, with immigration from Algeria to France continuing and even accelerating, the positive slant adopted by the French state towards its loss of Algeria was tested. Indeed, while the Republic

⁷⁵ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Stora argues that ‘le modèle républicain perd son universalisme, puisque exporté, il a été retourné contre la France’. Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, p. 318.

remained faithful to its founding principles, analysis of the primary texts suggests that this adherence operates to the detriment of the inclusion of those who bear the memory of Algeria within a definition of French nationality. Thus, by continuing to uphold republican values, France denies those same values to its sizeable ethnic Algerian population. This denial manifests itself in the primary corpus through the marginalisation suffered by the majority of the protagonists, but is perhaps best exemplified by Begag's *Béni ou le paradis privé*, in which the protagonist's exclusion from French society and identity is symbolically underlined at the end of the novel when he is refused entry into a nightclub due to his Arab appearance, despite his attempts to make himself look as 'French' as possible. Béni's rejection from French society, represented by the nightclub, comes as a result of his inability to conform to a republican conception of nationhood, according to which ethnic difference must be eradicated. As Shepard indicates, the failure to confront the unsuccessful exportation of republican values created tensions that have impinged on France ever since the end of the Algerian War:

In 1962, most French institutions and people chose to purge their past and present of signs that empire mattered, rather than either reinventing or repudiating the universal in defining themselves. The French invention of decolonization, that is, helped circumscribe what lessons could be drawn, in the West as in former colonies, about the role of colonization in state institutions and national pasts. This made it more difficult to address such tensions in the future.⁷⁸

One of the key legacies, and sources of tension, left by France's failure to draw lessons from the experience of colonisation and decolonisation was the construction of a 'wholly "European" republic that emerged in the process of excluding Algeria and

⁷⁸ Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, p. 272.

Algerians from France and French history'.⁷⁹ This exclusion, based at least in part on ethnicity, is one of the key aspects which will be examined in this thesis: through an analysis of the primary corpus, I will argue that the children of Algerians – French citizens of ethnic Algerian origin who inherit the memory of the Franco-Algerian conflict from their parents – reflect the exclusion of Algerians and Algeria from French society and history as a result of the continued hesitation of French institutions to remember and confront the nation's colonial Algerian past. This argument is underlined by the work of historians such as Bancel and Blanchard, who state that this 'volonté d'oubli' and the absence of collective reflection on colonisation leads to ex-colonial populations being stigmatised by colonial archetypes and 'les images qui, durant près d'un siècle, ont dessiné l'imaginaire sur l'Autre'.⁸⁰ The negative perception of ex-colonial populations is reflected by Béni's exclusion from the nightclub in Begag's novel, as well as by the wider exclusion of the protagonists we encounter in the primary corpus, and points towards a continuing division between coloniser and colonised subject (or former coloniser and formerly colonised subject) due to the failure to deconstruct the image of the Other.⁸¹

The perceived clean break from the colonial period signalled in 1962, as discussed above with reference to Shepard, and the lack of collective reflection on the experience of colonisation that ensued, as outlined by Blanchard and Bancel, recalls the ideas put forward by Kristin Ross in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (1995) on the linking of the narratives of decolonisation and social modernisation. According to Ross, the separation of these two narratives, as suggested by the forgetting of the colonial experience at a time when French society was in the post-World War Two process of transforming from a 'rural, empire-oriented

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸⁰ Blanchard and Bancel, *De l'indigène à l'immigré*, p. 73.

⁸¹ See Blanchard and Bancel, *De l'indigène à l'immigré*, p. 73.

Catholic country into a fully industrialized, decolonized, and urban one',⁸² is problematic. Ross herself refers to the forgetting of France's colonial history, which was 'nothing more than an "exterior" experience that somehow came to an abrupt end, cleanly, in 1962',⁸³ as French society then accelerated into the age of modernisation. However, for Ross, the narratives of decolonisation and modernisation are intricately linked, as illustrated by the essential role played by France's ex-colonial immigrants in its modernisation. In this way, France 'made use of the colonies "one last time" in order to resurrect and maintain its national superiority over them – a superiority made all the more urgent by the ex-colonies' own newly acquired nationhood'.⁸⁴ Thus, linking the two narratives together helps to explain some of the contradictions at the heart of French society, such as the way in which, at the same time as being dominated by American capitalism, France itself exploits and excludes its ex-colonial populations⁸⁵ – a topic that constitutes a major concern of this thesis. Of further relevance to the overarching concerns of the thesis is Ross's notion that modernisation requires a broad middle class that becomes 'coterminous with the nation itself', which means that 'once modernization has run its course, then one is, quite simply, either French or not [...] exclusion becomes racial or national in nature'.⁸⁶ These observations are highly relevant to much of the analysis in this thesis, which discusses at length the exclusion of populations of ethnic Algerian origin in France, due precisely to their ethnicity. This racial exclusion has its origins in the intricate link between modernisation and decolonisation, from the end of the Algerian War onwards.

⁸² Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, rev. edn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ See Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 7.

⁸⁶ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 12.

From Historical Silence to Conflicting Memories

Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, an evolution with regard to the memory of the Algerian War can be noted, with historians and literary critics signalling a marked increase in remembrance of the Algerian War in the 1990s. This development is reflected in the primary corpus, with the two most recent texts (*Le Voyage des âmes* and *La Seine était rouge*) containing extended reference to the Algerian War, something which is largely missing from the rest of the primary corpus. This increase in remembrance can only be fully understood when compared to the previous forms that the memory of the Algerian War has taken, and the 1980s provide a pertinent foil with which to set the acceleration in remembrance of the 1990s in context. By taking into consideration a primary corpus that spans the 1980s and 1990s, this thesis seeks to examine the evolution of the memory of the Algerian War in France over the course of these two decades, which ultimately leads to the French government's official recognition of the war in 1999. This is not to say that there is a clear distinction between the remembrance of the 1980s and that of the 1990s. On the contrary, Stora claims in 1994 that 'pour ce qui concerne la société française, il est évident que la mémoire de guerre a réinvesti l'espace public depuis une dizaine d'années maintenant',⁸⁷ indicating the significance of the two decades studied in this thesis as a renewed interest in the memory of the Algerian War is seen to overlap from one decade to the next. However, Stora also points to a specific development in this memory in the 1990s, suggesting that the historical silence has, in this decade, come to a definitive end, as follows: 'Cette mémoire est revenue et le temps du silence est fini dans l'espace public, définitivement'.⁸⁸ Officially of course, the silence came to an end five years later, at the

⁸⁷ Benjamin Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après: Connaissances et reconnaissance', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 2.2 (1994), 131-39 (p. 133).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

end of a decade in which a greater willingness to confront the Algerian War posed its own problems.

Over the course of the 1980s and into the 1990s, the official forgetting of Algeria, reflected by the French state's refusal immediately after the war to confront what lessons could be learned from this particular experience of (de)colonisation, is challenged. One of the ways in which this challenge has been led is through the emergence of a second generation of Algerians living in France who, in the 1980s, began to demand recognition of the legitimate place they occupy in French society. This proclamation of visibility can be seen in the 'Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme' of 1983 which, according to Hargreaves, 'typified in many ways the desire of second-generation Maghrebis to secure a legitimate place for themselves in French society'.⁸⁹ Furthermore, this desire to affirm a legitimate presence in French society is, to varying degrees, reflected in the primary corpus. The emergence of the children of Algerian migrants in the public sphere, as reflected by the 'Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme' and the incipient body of Franco-Algerian literature, provided French society with a reminder of its colonial past, including the Algerian War, and with an indication that the forgetting which ensued in the immediate aftermath of the war was about to be challenged. The 1980s novels included in the primary corpus reflect this greater focus on attempting to establish one's place in French society, while references to the Algerian War remain scarce. Nonetheless, these texts are significant in bringing to light the link between immigration and the colonial past, allowing for a greater willingness to confront the past in the 1990s, which prefigures the eventual official recognition of the Algerian War in 1999.

One of the most significant events in instigating the acceleration of remembrance with regard to the Algerian War in the 1990s relates to 17 October 1961,

⁸⁹ Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Generating Migrant Memories', p. 224.

the memory of which, House and MacMaster point out, belongs to the field of ‘the politics of memory of the Algerian War more generally’.⁹⁰ The trial of Maurice Papon, chief of police in October 1961, provoked a wave of interest in the demonstration and its ferocious repression, leading to the opening of state archives.⁹¹ According to House and MacMaster, the Papon trial, which took place from October 1997 to April 1998, ‘marked a watershed’,⁹² and this can be seen in the way in which they distinguish between the ‘virtual public silence’ regarding the Algerian War in the period from 1961 to 1979, a ‘slow emergence’ of memory in the period from 1980 to 1997, and ‘higher visibility’ of the Algerian War from 1997 onwards.⁹³ The trial and subsequent opening of archives thus facilitated the gradual re-emergence of the memory of the Algerian War which was already under way. Indeed, House’s and MacMaster’s categorisation can be detected in the primary corpus and, over the course of this thesis, the ways in which the novels reflect this ‘slow emergence’ of memory from 1980, giving way to a greater confrontation with the past from 1997, will be highlighted. The Papon trial provides the most high profile example, in the Franco-Algerian context, of the memory conflicts that remembering traumatic events of the past can engender, however this remembrance may take place, as Mireille Rosello notes:

L'émersion de paroles multiples et souvent passionnées ne donne pas lieu à une sorte de calme plat de la mémoire. Les récits, films, autobiographies ou romans, parfois même des cérémonies officielles ou de nouvelles dispositions légales tantôt apaisent et tantôt ravivent des blessures des uns ou des autres en exacerbant le souvenir des conflits entre la France et ses anciennes colonies ou protectorats. Dans ce flot turbulent [...] coexiste toute une gamme de représentations contradictoires, souvent hostiles les uns aux autres.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 192.

⁹¹ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 8.

⁹² House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁹⁴ Mireille Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes: littératures et cultures France-Maghreb* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006), p. 12.

Resonating with Stora's assertion that the memory of the Algerian War has entered the public sphere 'de manière très difficile, complexe, contradictoire',⁹⁵ Rosello argues that remembering historically silenced events does not necessarily lead to a calm levelling of memory, but may on the contrary initiate a turbulent wave of memories which come into conflict with each other. Therefore, the greater willingness to confront the past is itself complex and polemical and, in the analysis of the more recent novels included in the primary corpus, the difficulties of remembering a past that only came to the fore of wider public awareness in the 1990s will be brought to light. In this examination, Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* takes a prominent role as it reflects more than any other text in the primary corpus the complexities of bringing to light a history that has been characterised by both remembrance and forgetting. Furthermore, its focus on the events of 17 October 1961, brought to the fore of public attention by the Papon trial, is significant as this date has become a 'contested site as to the reality of state violence' and a 'potent symbol' of the wider debate surrounding the Algerian War and France's retreat from colonisation.⁹⁶ Thus, the difficulty of representing 17 October 1961 is indicative of the difficulty of representing the Algerian War more broadly, a phenomenon which will be analysed further with reference to Mounsi's *Le Voyage des âmes*.

Over the course of this thesis, the various ways in which the primary corpus traces the development in remembering the Algerian War from 1981, which saw the emergence of Franco-Algerian writers on the French literary scene, to 1999, when the

⁹⁵ Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après', pp. 132-33.

⁹⁶ House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 10. The remark that 17 October 1961 constitutes a contested 'site' recalls Pierre Nora's extensive work on sites of French historical memory, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984-92) which, as is often observed, contains only one entry on France's colonial past, Charles-Robert Ageron's chapter on 'L'Exposition Coloniale de 1931'. See Charles-Robert Ageron, 'L'Exposition Coloniale de 1931', in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. by Pierre Nora, rev. edn, 3 vols ([Paris]: Éditions Gallimard, 1997), I, 493-515. The public debate regarding 17 October 1961 initiated by the Papon trial, and the consideration of France's colonial past to which it gives rise, would suggest that this date has a legitimate place amongst France's sites of historical memory.

French government officially recognised the war,⁹⁷ will be examined, taking into consideration the different means by which the four authors present and tackle the diverse issues that the war and its changing memory have engendered. These issues include immigration, integration, and the often uncertain place occupied by migrants and their children and grandchildren within French society and identity. As evidence of France's uneasy break with its colonial past continues to emerge to the surface on a regular basis, even after the state recognition of the Algerian War,⁹⁸ an understanding of the multiple conflicts at work which preceded this official recognition merits consideration. Through a close textual analysis of the work of four authors who, at times in parallel, at times divergently, shed light on the complex encounter between France and its former colonies, this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing body of work on francophone postcolonial literature by elucidating the many ways in which the primary texts reflect and challenge oppositions inherited from the colonial past.

As touched upon at the beginning of this introduction, Alec Hargreaves's work on Beur fiction has been crucial to launching critical work in this area of study. In *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction* (1991), Hargreaves analyses a broad corpus of fictional work by writers of North African origin, bringing a new generation of authors to the attention of researchers working in the field of francophone postcolonial studies. Indeed, this thesis itself draws upon the corpus of writers put together by Hargreaves, in what was the first full-length study to be devoted to this branch of literature. Thus,

⁹⁷ A discussion of the literary output of the four authors whose work is studied in this thesis to have appeared in the decade or so since the government's official acknowledgement of the Algerian War is provided in the Conclusion.

⁹⁸ See for example the cancellation of the football match between France and Algeria in 2001 due to the invasion of the pitch by French youths of Algerian origin; the riots in 2005 initiated by residents of the deprived, marginalised inner city suburbs of France's major cities which are largely populated by migrants from France's former colonies and their children; also in 2005, the much-criticised passing of the law obliging French schools to promote the positive role of colonisation; more recently, the plans unveiled in 2010 to inaugurate a museum dedicated to a unified history of France, a 'Maison de l'histoire de la France', which reflects a desire on the part of the French state to reinforce a singular, majority-ethnic-centred conception of national identity. On the 'Maison de l'histoire de la France', see Pierre Nora, 'Lettre ouverte à Frédéric Mitterrand sur la Maison de l'histoire de France', *Le Monde*, 11 November 2010 <http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2010/11/10/lettre-ouverte-a-frederic-mitterrand-sur-la-maison-de-l-histoire-de-france_1438123_3232.html> [accessed 11 November 2010]

Hargreaves's groundbreaking and wide-ranging work paved the way for further research into the literary output of the children of North African migrants, and it is in this vein that I analyse three novels to have been included in Hargreaves's corpus: *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni ou le paradis privé* by Begag, and *Le Thé au harem* by Charef. While Hargreaves focuses on the articulation of a sense of personal identity in these works, my analysis of the same texts is informed throughout by a preoccupation with history and the legacy of colonisation, war, and immigration. Nonetheless, the engagement with questions of identity is, to an extent, inevitable when analysing the work of Beur writers – Hargreaves states that identity constitutes the key problematic of this body of literature⁹⁹ – and my discussion of such issues includes substantial reference to and analysis of Hargreaves's own observations. In this way, I hope to make a contribution to the field of study opened up by scholars such as Hargreaves by relating questions of identity in Franco-Algerian literature to the specific history to which this thesis refers. At the same time, I am not in any way claiming that my analysis of fictional works in the context of the Algerian War constitutes an entirely fresh line of enquiry. Scholars have examined the link between literature and the Algerian War previously, as illustrated perhaps most notably by Philip Dine's study, *Images of the Algerian War: French Fiction and Film, 1954-1992*, published in 1994. In this work, Dine conducts an analysis of a broad corpus of texts that contributes significantly to the 'continuing elucidation of a historic occultation'.¹⁰⁰ The ensuing analysis over the course of this thesis intends to place itself within the framework that Dine outlines, in examining the relationship between fiction, the Algerian War, and the subsequent effects and legacy of the memory of silence with regard to the war in contemporary French society. Where my study differs crucially from Dine's is in its primary corpus. While I take the work of authors who, though having been brought up in France, retain an Algerian origin, Dine

⁹⁹ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Philip Dine, *Images of the Algerian War: French Fiction and Film, 1954-1992* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 8.

examines the ‘properly French literature of the Algerian conflict’,¹⁰¹ that is to say, texts written by authors of French ethnic origin. Dine also acknowledges the ‘undoubted and undeniable importance’ of Algerian literature of French expression, which has been ‘clearly catalogued and extensively analysed’.¹⁰² Indeed, he refers to the ‘virtually total preoccupation with the 1954-62 conflict on the part of Algerian producers of fiction and film’,¹⁰³ a claim upheld by Anne Donadey.¹⁰⁴ The writers included in my primary corpus are difficult to place in either of the above categories. Though holders of French nationality, their experience of the war and its legacy is different to that of the writers included in Dine’s corpus; and though of Algerian origin, their work cannot be categorised as strictly francophone *Algerian* literature (in the same way that the work of authors such as Mohammed Dib, Assia Djebar, and Kateb Yacine is for example) given that they have been brought up in France and spent the majority of their lives there. Thus, we return to the notion of ‘Franco-Algerian’ literature, which intends to highlight the in-between status of the authors included in my primary corpus. Accordingly, this study places itself in between the work of scholars such as Hargreaves and Dine, analysing the literary output of authors who embody a dual identity and the divisive history inherited from such an identity, and contributing to our understanding of how these works of fiction confront and elucidate the history in question.

As well as drawing on literary criticism that engages with the texts included in the primary corpus and Franco-Algerian literature more broadly, the thesis will consider theories of historical memory in order to frame the analysis of the primary texts in the context of the legacy of the Algerian War. In his introduction to the seminal and sizeable work, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora signals a rift between the hitherto

¹⁰¹ Dine, *Images of the Algerian War*, p. 12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁴ See Anne Donadey, “‘Une certaine idée de la France’: The Algeria Syndrome and Struggles over ‘French’ Identity”, in *Identity Papers: Contested Nationhood in Twentieth-Century France*, ed. by Steven Ungar and Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 215-32 (p. 215).

closely tied concepts of history and memory.¹⁰⁵ Due to an ‘acceleration of history’, which is linked to the way in which globalisation, democratisation, mass culture and the media have re-ordered the world,¹⁰⁶ memory has been substituted by ‘la pellicule éphémère de l’actualité’.¹⁰⁷ This transition is behind the need for what Nora terms ‘lieux de mémoire’, which make up for our loss of memories by embodying them. Furthermore, the transition from memory to history ‘a fait à chaque groupe l’obligation de redéfinir son identité par la revitalisation de sa propre histoire’.¹⁰⁸ Even though Nora argues that this need to recover history has touched all sectors of society, he suggests that ‘les anciens marginalisés de l’histoire officielle’, such as members of ethnic minorities, were amongst the first to become obsessed with recovering their ‘passé englouti’.¹⁰⁹ This preoccupation with the past is evident in the primary corpus analysed here, especially in the work of Mounsi and Sebbar. The project of recovering history for those who inherit the legacy of colonisation and the Algerian War is all the more significant given the historical silence to which the memory of this past has been subjected. As Nora argues, ‘quand la mémoire n’est plus partout, elle ne serait nulle part si ne décidait de la reprendre en charge, d’une décision solitaire, une conscience individuelle’.¹¹⁰ In order for the Algerian War to enter the French collective memory, its own memory needs to be recovered, and literature constitutes one of the vehicles by which this recovery can take place. To refer to ‘collective memory’ automatically recalls the work of Maurice Halbwachs, who developed the concept. For Halbwachs, collective memory reconstructs ‘an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch,

¹⁰⁵ See Pierre Nora, ‘Entre mémoire et histoire: la problématique des lieux’, in Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, I, 23-42 (p. 24).

¹⁰⁶ See Nora, ‘Entre mémoire et histoire’, p. 23. This notion of re-ordering also recalls Ross’s work in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, referenced earlier.

¹⁰⁷ Nora, ‘Entre mémoire et histoire’, p. 24.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Nora, ‘Entre mémoire et histoire’, p. 34.

with the predominant thoughts of society'.¹¹¹ However, taking into consideration Nora's notion that, in the French context, memory has become a private affair, imposing 'l'obligation de se souvenir' on each individual',¹¹² I find it more appropriate to draw on James E Young's theory of 'collected memory'. This concept of memory is defined as 'the many discrete memories that are gathered into common memorial spaces and assigned common meaning'.¹¹³ Thus, Young's concept recognises the distinct memory of each individual, and the way in which a plurality of individual memories may constitute a common meaning, and this notion will be revisited in the ensuing discussion. In the context of recovering of a history that has been subjected to silence, and given the burden on the individual to perform this task of recovery, as Nora illustrates, it becomes more appropriate to speak of a collected memory formed by the discrete memories of those who inherit the legacy of colonisation and the Algerian War, several of whom have looked to writing to recover this past.

The act of writing on the part of those who embody the Franco-Algerian relationship becomes even more significant when we take into account the historical silence to which the Algerian past has been subjected in French society. Indeed, Dine observes that the products of this recovery of the past through writing can be seen as a 'physical substitute for the physical *lieux de mémoire* [...] inevitably lost together with French sovereignty over Algeria'.¹¹⁴ Thus, the books themselves become *lieux de mémoire*, or to use Young's terms, they become the 'memorial spaces' into which a plurality of memories can be collected. The role of the text as a memorial space reinforces the link between literature and history that constitutes one of the overarching preoccupations of this thesis. At this point, I should make clear that in no way do I seek

¹¹¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 40.

¹¹² Nora, 'Entre mémoire et histoire', pp. 33-34.

¹¹³ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. xi.

¹¹⁴ Dine, *Images of the Algerian War*, p. 7.

to use literature as a mirror through which history can be fully understood. Rather, taking the example of scholars such as Nicholas Harrison who, in *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction* (2003), acknowledges the limits of postcolonial literary criticism,¹¹⁵ I seek to demonstrate how literature represents what is a complex, multifaceted history, and how this representation contributes to our overall understanding of this history. The relationship between literature and history is examined over the course of the thesis through close attention to the language used by the authors included in the primary corpus. Underlining the significance of language, in their introduction to *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (2003), a key work in launching this field of study, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy observe that ‘the language issue is especially important in relation to the colonial and post-colonial history of France, as a French-language education was seen as the key to France’s “civilizing mission” in the colonies’.¹¹⁶ The theme of language appears, whether implicitly or explicitly, at regular intervals in the primary texts, highlighting the crucial role it continues to play in the postcolonial period. For example, the ability of language to ‘civilise’ is made clear in Mounsi’s *Le Voyage des âmes*, in the young protagonist’s grandmother’s final words to him before he leaves Algeria for France: ‘Tu vas apprendre à lire et à écrire, c’est l’essentiel’.¹¹⁷ Indeed, with regard to the primary corpus, language and education are always close at hand, whether in the texts themselves or in the authors’ own upbringing. Sebbar’s parents, for instance, both taught at French language schools in Algeria, and Sebbar herself, despite remaining in Algeria for her entire childhood and most of her teenage years, never learned Arabic. This loss of her father’s language is at the heart of her autobiographical text, *Je ne parle*

¹¹⁵ See Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp. 9-10.

¹¹⁶ Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, ‘Introduction: The Case for Francophone Postcolonial Studies’, in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

¹¹⁷ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 83.

pas la langue de mon père (2003) – not included in the primary corpus, but discussed in the conclusion – and this loss translates to her (French) writing, as she herself states: ‘Le silence de la langue de mon père m’a contrainte à écrire de la fiction dans la langue de ma mère. La langue de ma mère m’a exilée de la langue de mon père. Cet exil et cette absence s’expriment dans mes livres’.¹¹⁸ Sebbar goes on to explain that this exile and absence is represented in her texts by gaps and blanks, a theme that will be discussed in detail in relation to *La Seine était rouge*. Thus, for Sebbar, the French language is used to express her sense of exile from Algerian language and culture, a rupture that is all the more noteworthy given the weight of history behind it. This link between language and history will be revisited throughout the thesis: from the gaps and blanks in Sebbar’s texts, to the formality of Mounsi’s style, which contrasts sharply to the ‘informality’ of the setting of his novels (invariably the volatile and deprived margins of Paris). Though the setting remains the same, Charef’s style diverges greatly from Mounsi’s, as slang and an informal register prevails. The school milieu makes appearances in both these writers’ texts, but plays a particularly significant role in Begag’s novels, in which school success and the ‘mastery’ of the French language by the young protagonists is a source of great pride for himself and his family. In these autobiographical texts, Begag’s younger incarnations triumph at their ability to use the French language better than their majority ethnic French classmates. Indeed, this success on the part of Begag’s protagonists prefigures his own career as a successful researcher, academic, and commercially the most successful author studied in this thesis. For each of the authors’ texts included in the primary corpus, a close and detailed analysis of language and the various styles used will be conducted in order to shed light on the link between literature and history, and on how literature contributes to our understanding of the history in question.

¹¹⁸ Hiddleston, ‘Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l’oubli’, p. 16.

From Invisibility to the Never-Ending Journey

The thesis begins by arguing that the lives of the protagonists of the novels are dictated by history, which leads to their inescapable physical and figurative exclusion from French society, identity, and history, before going on to examine methods of escaping this marginalisation offered by a selection of the texts. Taking these various methods at making themselves visible in French society into account, I argue that the protagonists are largely, though not exclusively, unsuccessful in achieving their goal. However, while certain texts signal the failure of their characters to affirm their legitimate presence in French society, other texts are successful in bringing to light the history of the (descendant of the) colonised subject, rewriting dominant historical narratives in the process. While such initiatives appear to point towards a phase of acceptance with regard to the colonial past, as indeed suggested by the official recognition of the Algerian War in 1999, I move on to argue that such a phase of acceptance is still in its early stages, as conflicts continue to emerge in the confrontation with the past. As Bancel, Blanchard, and Vergès observe, the compartmentalisation of the colonial world has given way to a postcolonial world in which ‘existent des zones de contact et de conflit’.¹¹⁹ Thus, while the end of colonialism has opened up new spaces of contact between populations that used to be kept apart, forms of exploitation and inequality persist.¹²⁰ Consequently, the children of Algerian migrants remain entrapped by oppositions inherited from the past, and this lack of escape is discussed with reference to the link between migration and delinquency which, it will be argued, keeps the protagonists of a selection of the primary corpus on a never-ending journey in search of an elusive legitimate place in French society, identity, and history.

¹¹⁹ Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Françoise Vergès, *La Colonisation Française* (Toulouse: Éditions Milan, 2007), p. 49.

¹²⁰ See Bancel, Blanchard, Vergès, *La Colonisation Française*, p. 49.

In the first chapter, the way in which History permeates the primary corpus will be analysed, as well as the extent to which and the manner in which it is confronted in the narratives. It will be argued that, in the texts, there is a strong indication that characters are embedded in a history from which they cannot escape, and the ways in which the novels demonstrate this notion from their very outset will be examined. Thus, I will illustrate the extent to which the lives of these characters are dictated by history and, more specifically, the history shared by France and Algeria. The legacy of the past and its effect on the present is reflected in a repetition of colonial oppositions, a repetition which is perpetuated by the lack of recognition of this past in French society. This idea draws upon Stora's notion of 'la répétition du refoulé', upon which he concludes his major work on the Algerian War, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (1991).¹²¹ According to Stora, the hesitation on the part of the French state to confront the Algerian War and France's wider colonial past creates a vindication of colonialism, and this can be seen in the 'volonté de rejouer, répéter, faire revivre les années de la guerre'.¹²² One example of the repetition of colonial or wartime oppositions can be seen in the division between a dominant, majority ethnic city centre and the peripheries of France's big cities which are seemingly reserved for migrants and their children, many of whom moved to France from its former colonies. This division is apparent in each text included in the primary corpus, and the ways in which characters attempt to breach it, as well as other oppositions inherited from colonialism, will be explored over the course of this thesis.

As the forgetting of the Algerian War is seen as a crucial factor in the repetition of conflicts inherited from colonialism, the first chapter will go on to examine the extent to which the primary corpus confronts this past. Taking into consideration each of the texts included in the primary corpus, it is demonstrated that not only awareness of the

¹²¹ See Stora, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, pp. 320-21.

¹²² Stora, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, p. 320.

past, but also of the way in which it can have a positive impact on the present – for instance, in aiding a greater understanding of one’s place in French society – is crucial in breaking down divisions and oppositions inherited from colonialism. However, close examination of the majority of the primary texts, and their conclusions in particular, suggests that resolution of the repetition of colonial conflicts is far from being successfully achieved. The silence regarding the Algerian War, maintained by the French government but also by first-generation Algerian migrants, is then imposed on the children of migrants, and this silence is reflected in the lack of any reference to the war in the majority of the primary corpus. Thus, it will be argued that the protagonists of the primary texts, already victims of history, marginalisation, and deprivation, are subsequently denied the means of escaping this fate due to the historical silence with regard to the Algerian War. This vicious circle, created by the impression that the lives of characters are dictated by history and perpetuated by the inability to escape this fate, is underlined by the uncertain future to which the primary texts largely point.

In this way, the first chapter introduces some of the major overall concerns of the thesis – marginalisation, historical silence, and the vicious circle – to be analysed in further detail in the subsequent chapters, each of which focuses on the primary texts which highlight most effectively the specific line of enquiry of each chapter.

Having established the marginalisation and entrapment suffered by the children of Algerian migrants in the first chapter, the second chapter takes a selection of the primary texts to examine the ways in which their protagonists attempt to negotiate this unwanted and objectionable condition. In doing so, the concepts of ‘visibilisation’ and ‘invisibilisation’, coined by Begag and Chaouite in *Écarts d’identité* (1990) to denote opposing ways in which migrants react to their new migrant status, will be taken into consideration. According to Begag and Chaouite, ‘visibilisation’ comprises the desire to ‘se montrer un peu plus en affirmant sa présence et en recherchant la confrontation’,

while ‘invisibilisation’ comprises the desire to ‘se cacher un peu plus’.¹²³ Thus, a migrant may choose to ‘se détacher de sa communauté d’appartenance’ by remaining separated from French society, or to ‘renforcer ses liens avec elle’ by seeking to affirm his/her presence in French society.¹²⁴ What in fact emerges in the primary corpus is that the protagonists all demonstrate the desire to affirm their presence in French society and, in the second chapter, I will examine the various ways in which they attempt to do so. Nonetheless, the definition of ‘invisibilisation’ remains pertinent as, for the most part, it will be illustrated that these attempts to make themselves visible only result in further invisibility for the protagonists.

Incorporating republican definitions of nationhood, it will be illustrated in the second chapter how the Republic’s hostility to ethnic difference causes France’s ethnic Algerian population to have to choose between acceptance in French society and their culture of origin, as entering French society often requires the eradication of references to one’s ethnic origin. The nature of this dilemma is encapsulated by Frantz Fanon’s argument in *Peau Noire Masques Blancs* (1952) that the person of colour is faced with the impossible choice to ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’,¹²⁵ and Fanon’s work will be used over the course of the second chapter in conjunction with more recent critical work to illustrate the contemporary relevance of Fanon’s seminal text. Specifically, the protagonists of Begag’s *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni ou le paradis privé* are shown to fall into the republican trap of eradicating references to their ethnic origin which, according to Hargreaves, is indicative of a wider temptation on the part of the children of Algerian migrants to ‘bury or efface references to their Algerian ancestry’ as they seek to establish a place for themselves in contemporary French society.¹²⁶ Thus,

¹²³ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, pp. 58-59.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹²⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire Masques Blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), p. 100. Although Fanon refers to a specific racial context, his juxtaposition of ‘le Noir’ and ‘le Blanc’ can be usefully mapped onto ‘l’Arabe’ and ‘le Français’ for the purpose of this study.

¹²⁶ Hargreaves, ‘Generating Migrant Memories’, p. 218.

Begag's protagonists seek 'visibilisation', but only through making invisible any reference to their ethnic origin. Ultimately, this attempt at 'visibilisation' is unsuccessful in strengthening the protagonists' attachment to the dominant conception of French identity and, in fact, strips them to a certain extent of their Algerian ethnicity, leading to a dissolution of their identity altogether.

Supplementing the analysis of Begag's two novels in the second chapter, Sebbar's *Fatima* will also be examined in order to compare the strategies of 'visibilisation' that we encounter in this novel to those brought to light by Begag's. Unlike Begag's protagonists, Dalila does not attempt to eradicate references to her ethnic origin but, nonetheless, suffers from the clash of cultures between secular French society and the strict Islamic values that prevail in her Algerian family, exemplified by the physical violence inflicted on her by her father when she defies those Islamic values. Significantly, *Fatima* ends on Dalila leaving home, an act which confounds the opposition of 'visibilisation' and 'invisibilisation' proposed by Begag and Chaouite. Her flight is not dictated by a desire to reinforce her links with French society, nor a renunciation of her ethnic origin: what Dalila seeks is the opportunity to affirm her presence on her own terms, retaining her ethnic difference but also escaping the oppression she faces at home. Thus, while not pointing towards definitive resolution of the dilemma to 'se blanchir ou disparaître', as we do not find out whether Dalila is able to affirm her presence in French society while retaining her ethnic difference, *Fatima* nonetheless indicates a potential escape from such dichotomies, upholding the need to retain references to one's ethnic origin.

The second chapter then turns to the strategies of 'visibilisation' we encounter in Charef's *Le Thé au harem* and Mounsi's *La Noce des fous*, taking the definition of 'visibilisation' into further consideration by examining the idea of affirming one's presence 'en recherchant la confrontation'. It is argued here that the protagonists of

these two novels attempt to affirm their presence in French society through violence, which is incited and facilitated by their life of criminality. The analysis will refer to another of Fanon's major works, *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), which argues that the coloniser has ingrained violence in the colonised subject,¹²⁷ and that this violence will be re-enacted on the coloniser when the colonised subject surges into the forbidden quarters.¹²⁸ Demonstrating how this re-enactment of violence occurs in the postcolonial context, it will be demonstrated how, ultimately, such an attempt at affirming one's presence only results in the invisibility of incarceration and further marginalisation. However, Fanon's notion that the forbidden quarters are breached when (the descendant of) the colonised subject becomes 'l'histoire en actes'¹²⁹ leads into the third chapter, which discusses the role of a selection of the primary corpus in bringing to light the history of the colonised subject, thus challenging hegemonic historical discourses. While the protagonists of *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* are unsuccessful in affirming their own presence in French society, the novels themselves are successful in making visible the experience of Algerian immigration to France, with which the history of colonisation and the Algerian War are inextricably entwined.

In this way, the third chapter reprises the line of enquiry at the end of the second chapter, analysing Charef's *Le Thé au harem* and Mounsi's *La Noce des fous*, but in their capacity to foreground the history of the colonised subject, from whom the migrant and his/her children are descended. Over the course of the discussion, the concept of 'entanglement' will be propounded, denoting the way in which the texts entwine dominant and minority histories, and underlining Pap Ndiaye's observation that 'le "national" et le "colonial" sont historiquement encastrés'.¹³⁰ The analysis of the primary texts in this chapter will illustrate the inextricable link between France and Algeria, a

¹²⁷ See Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, rev. edn (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1987), p. 27.

¹²⁸ See Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 29.

¹²⁹ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 29.

¹³⁰ Pap Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire: essai sur une minorité française* (Paris: Éditions Calmann-Lévy, 2008), p. 32.

link which the hesitation to confront the Franco-Algerian past denies, and this notion is advanced through the examination of two more novels which reflect this entanglement more explicitly than the other texts included in the primary corpus: Mounsi's *Le Voyage des âmes* and Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. However, it will also be argued that this entwining, though to some extent pointing towards a more optimistic coexistence of dominant and minority cultures and histories, constitutes an uneasy process, as indeed is reflected by the term 'entanglement', which evokes complication as well as entwining. This uneasy entanglement is exemplified by *La Seine était rouge* which, by uncovering sites of historical memory in central Paris that are significant to both dominant French historical narratives (such as sites referring to the Second World War) and to the Algerian War, entwines dominant and subaltern histories, but all the while insists on representing the silence and forgetting which has characterised the memory of the Algerian War. In this way, the notion of 'entanglement' works in the same manner as the vision of entangled memories depicted by Rosello with reference to francophone Algerian writer Boualem Sansal's literary text *Le Village de L'Allemand* (2008). While entangled memories may be presented as 'le versant positif du phénomène des mémoires concurrentes',¹³¹ Rosello goes on to observe that, in Sansal's text, 'il n'y a pas naissance d'un nouveau grand récit que l'on peut faire circuler, enseigner, transmettre'.¹³² Similarly, *La Seine était rouge* and *Le Voyage des âmes* do not challenge dominant historical discourses which deny the history of the colonised subject by offering an alternative, definitive version of history. Instead, they both represent the difficulty of bringing to light a history that has been misappropriated and violated.¹³³

¹³¹ Mireille Rosello, 'Guerre des mémoires ou "parallèles dangereux" dans *Le Village de L'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 18.2 (2010) 193-211 (pp. 195-96).

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹³³ See Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire', p. 187.

Therefore, rather than suggest that the emergence of alternative historical narratives leads to ‘une sorte de calme plat de la mémoire’,¹³⁴ the third chapter reiterates the complexities of reconstructing and reclaiming a memory that has been characterised by silence. While a welcome phase of accelerated remembrance was initiated in the 1990s, this phase was very much (and continues to be) in its early stages, and this persisting lack of resolution leads us to the fourth and final chapter, which underlines the vicious circle in which the protagonists of the primary corpus are trapped.

This final chapter explores the link between the journey (of migration), restless wandering, and delinquency, a link epitomised by several characters in the primary texts, who spend their lives wandering with no apparent regularity or purpose and committing immoral acts. To underline the analysis of the primary texts, theories of the sociology of delinquency will be used in conjunction with René Girard’s work on the scapegoat, *Le Bouc Émissaire* (1982), in order to underline the way in which the migrant is deemed to be delinquent regardless of whether or not he/she has committed an act of delinquency. Furthermore, I will refer to another of the concepts put forward by Begag and Chaouite, that of the ‘passager de toujours’, in order to underline the link between the migrant and delinquency. Both these labels are imposed on the children of migrants and work together to initiate a self-fulfilling prophecy which entraps them in a vicious circle of delinquency and a permanent state of transience. According to Begag and Chaouite, the experience of migration ‘fait du voyageur un passager de toujours’, as the migrant continues to carry with him/her the ‘souvenir du temps de sa migration’.¹³⁵ It will be argued that this memory of migration is transmitted to the children of migrants, even though they are brought up in France, who are consequently unable to find stability due to their status as perpetual migrants. This never-ending instability manifests itself in restless wandering, and leads to a life of crime and delinquency,

¹³⁴ Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 12.

¹³⁵ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d’identité*, p. 43.

which itself engenders further instability and maintains the vicious circle in which the children of migrants are trapped. This notion is particularly evident in Charef's *Le Thé au harem*, and Mounsi's *La Noce des fous* and *Le Voyage des âmes*. In these three texts, we regularly find the protagonists both wandering aimlessly and committing various crimes, never finding a semblance of stability to bring an end to this cycle. Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* is also examined in this chapter, as it also involves a journey undertaken by the protagonist, Amel, but Amel's journey is set up as an alternative to the directionless wandering and delinquency of Charef's and Mounsi's protagonists. The crucial aspect of Amel's journey that is lacking from the others' is its fixed attention to the history that it is uncovering, which guides Amel through her journey.

Thus, the fourth chapter returns to one of the main aspects of this thesis, introduced in the first chapter: the confrontation with history. Having examined the various complexities and problems which arise in the attempt to confront the history shared by France and Algeria over the course of the thesis, conclusions will then be drawn indicating the extent to which this history has been successfully brought to light, and how this has affected the place occupied by the children of Algerian migrants within dominant French society, culture, and identity. Though the Algerian War was officially recognised by the French government in 1999, consideration of certain events following the state's official recognition suggests that the full resonance of the Algerian War, and France's colonial past more widely, is only just beginning to permeate French society. As the wave of commemoration of the 1990s culminated in the state recognition of the Algerian War at the turn of the century, subsequent initiatives which went against this apparent desire to confront the past suggest that this wave of memory has found resistance. However, literature has a role to play in rewriting history and uncovering forgotten histories, and it is through the repetition and amplification of such narratives that silenced events of the past become embedded more and more firmly into

national discourses.¹³⁶ The novels with which this thesis engages constitute a diverse collection of Franco-Algerian texts which both prefigured and contributed to this rewriting of dominant historical narratives and uncovering of silenced histories, and the analysis now turns to the way in which the primary corpus represents the inextricable link between the lives of the protagonists and the history shared by France and Algeria.

¹³⁶ See Michel Laronde, “‘Effets d’histoire’. Représenter l’Histoire coloniale forclosée’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 10.1+2 (2007), 139-55 (p. 152).

Chapter 1

History and Future: The Vicious Circle of Ill-fated Beginnings and Dystopian Endings

A dominant feature of the novels that this study analyses is the characters' depiction as victims of the unfolding of history. Without exception, the protagonists in the primary corpus did not choose to migrate to France from Algeria: they were either too young to make such a choice, or they were born in France. In either instance, there was no choice for them to make as the decision had already been taken by their parents, and even this decision to migrate was itself dictated by socio-economic factors as a growth in population in Algeria meant that Algerians, in particular those living in rural areas, were compelled to seek employment in the metropolitan centre.¹³⁷ For all the good intentions behind this decision and the advantages it undoubtedly provides the children of migrants (for example, Hargreaves notes that being brought up in France meant that they learned to read and write which, in turn, has led to the emergence of a new generation of writers),¹³⁸ the unresolved clash between former colony and coloniser resulting from the legacy left by the Algerian War leads to a future of uncertainty, in which the children of migrants clash with French society, history, and identity. In this chapter, the reflection of such a future and its inevitability will be underlined through specific reference to the beginnings and endings of the texts included in the primary corpus. The inevitability of an uncertain future signalled from the outset of the novels, and the confirmation of this uncertainty indicated at their conclusions, evokes the vicious circle in which the protagonists are trapped.

¹³⁷ See Talbott, *The War Without A Name*, p. 15.

¹³⁸ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur fiction*, p. 10.

The Weight of History

Taking into consideration all the novels included in the primary corpus, the beginning of Mounsi's *La Noce des fous* is most explicit in signalling a pessimistic conclusion, telling the reader directly as early as the first paragraph of the novel that 'la vie est aux vainqueurs et j'étais vaincu. Avant de naître. Avant même que la vie existât'.¹³⁹ Thus, the narrator-protagonist is depicted as being condemned – irrevocably and from the outset – to a life of failure. Significantly though, he is condemned not simply from the point in time that sees the beginning of the novel, nor before he is born, but long before that, before life even existed. History and, more specifically, the history shared by France and Algeria, has dictated his circumstances.¹⁴⁰ Though explicit reference to this past is largely absent from *La Noce des fous*, consideration of Mounsi's overall oeuvre reveals that colonisation and the Algerian War do constitute major preoccupations of his,¹⁴¹ and Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie maintain that a reading of Mounsi's later works sheds light on the themes that are only alluded to in his earlier texts.¹⁴² Therefore, by taking into account Mounsi's literary output as a whole, we can ascertain that the sense of History with which *La Noce des fous* is imbued comprises to a large extent, if not completely, the history shared by France and Algeria.

The pessimism expressed at the outset of *La Noce des fous* is heightened by the ensuing depiction of the protagonist's marginalised existence on the physical periphery of French society in the deprived *banlieues* of Paris.¹⁴³ Indeed, his confinement to inhabiting the poorest areas of France is itself a result of history, as Algerian migrants

¹³⁹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁰ This aspect of Mounsi's work is also observed by Derderian with reference to Mounsi's musical output. Derderian notes that 'in songs such as "Bâtard" from his album *Seconde génération* (1984), Mounsi reminds listeners that North African youths are products of an older history inextricably intertwined with that of France'. Derderian, 'Confronting the Past', p. 250.

¹⁴¹ See Mounsi, *Territoire d'outre-ville* (Paris: Stock, 1995), and Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*.

¹⁴² See Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 251.

¹⁴³ See for example Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, pp. 16-17.

were historically ‘forced [...] into the lower end of the housing market’.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, we can see how Mounsi’s protagonist’s declaration that he was ‘vaincu’ before the beginning of time is a consequence of the legacy left by colonisation and subsequent immigration from former colony to metropolitan capital. Furthermore, the way in which the divisions inherited from the colonial period are repeated in contemporary France keeps Mounsi’s protagonist defeated, marginalised, and oppressed. This idea will be developed and revisited throughout this chapter, as the impact of Algeria’s break from French rule, manifested in the War of Independence, is analysed in the context of the period in which the primary texts appeared in publication, as well as in the context of more contemporary events, the significance of which can be traced back to the colonial period. In this way, the analysis of the primary texts contributes to broadening our understanding of the history in question and, in turn, consideration of this history allows us to better comprehend its impact on contemporary French society.

Madjid, the protagonist of Charef’s *Le Thé au harem*, lives in circumstances similar to those presented to the reader at the outset of *La Noce des fous*, as evidenced by certain information provided in the opening paragraphs of the novel. For example, Madjid’s poverty is revealed when he is depicted repairing his motorbike and we are told that ‘pour la réparer, fallait des sous, et Madjid n’en avait pas’.¹⁴⁵ In addition to Madjid’s poor financial situation, we learn that ‘le couloir humide et mal éclairé’ of the building in which he is repairing his motorbike ‘sentait l’urine et la merde’,¹⁴⁶ indicating the underprivileged living conditions typical of the accommodation reserved for North African migrants. Like in *La Noce des fous*, Madjid’s living conditions, and the marginalisation which they imply, are a catalyst for expressing the despair which lies ahead of Madjid, as follows: ‘Tout est devant lui, le désespoir, ça fout les jetons, ça

¹⁴⁴ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁵ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

fourmille au creux de l'échine, et ça refroidit dans le dos'.¹⁴⁷ While this pessimistic expression of Madjid's future is formulated in a style which diverges significantly from the formal register used by Mounsi at the beginning of *La Noce des fous*, as the use of the imperfect subjunctive ('Avant même que la vie existât') gives way to more informal expressions such as 'ça fout les jetons', these differing styles articulate similar preoccupations: the imbrication in a life of desperation and marginalisation of characters who share an Algerian origin and a legacy of colonisation and war. Thus, the differing standpoints to the French language of these two writers illustrated here do not change the shared purpose of language to represent the lasting consequences of history on France's ethnic Algerian population.

Though neither *La Noce des fous* nor *Le Thé au harem* refers explicitly to the history shared by France and Algeria, the marginalisation expressed in the opening pages of both these novels provides an example of Stora's idea that there is a certain repetition of colonial oppositions in contemporary France, which he terms 'la répétition du refoulé'.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the divisions between coloniser and colonised existing before Algerian independence are played out in the metropolitan centre, as the peripheral *banlieues* take the place of the Algerian countryside where most Algerians lived under French occupation,¹⁴⁹ separated from the colonial centre in Algiers. Significantly, Stora attributes this repetition of colonial oppositions to a 'mauvaise mémoire [qui] ne veut jamais finir la guerre [...] qui vise à continuer, à l'intérieur de la société française, une guerre perdue'.¹⁵⁰ In this way, France's problematic confrontation with the Algerian War keeps those who inherit the legacy of the war, such as Madjid and the protagonist of *La Noce des fous*, entrapped, physically and figuratively, on the periphery of French society.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁴⁸ Stora, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, p. 320.

¹⁴⁹ Talbott states that 'in the 1950s, 80 percent [of Algerians] continued to live in the countryside'.

Talbott, *The War Without A Name*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après', p. 133.

Stora also acknowledges the existence of ‘la bonne mémoire’ with regard to confronting the memory of the Algerian War, which seeks to reconcile one’s belonging within French society and citizenship with the transmitted memory of the war. This positive confrontation with the past takes place through the memory work of those groups that inherit the memory of the war, and Algerian migrants and their children constitute one of these groups.¹⁵¹ These two opposing ways of confronting the past – ‘la mauvaise mémoire’ and ‘la bonne mémoire’ – clash and, as Stora also points out, are themselves indicative of the way in which wartime and colonial oppositions are replayed in contemporary France.¹⁵² Thus, it is not enough that a positive confrontation with the past exists as, in addition to attempting to reconcile one’s belonging in French society with the transmitted memory of the Algerian War, itself a complex task, ‘la bonne mémoire’ also comes into conflict with a desire to repeat the oppositions of that war. The difficult, apparently insurmountable task of confronting the past in a manner which allows for overcoming these oppositions is reflected in the pessimistic outlooks depicted in both *La Noce des fous* and *Le Thé au harem*.

At the outsets of these two novels, an uncertain, bleak future for the protagonists is indicated in distinct manners, Mounsi using a formal register and Charef using a more colloquial style. Conversely, in Begag’s first two novels, *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni ou le paradis privé* (hereafter referred to as *Béni*), comedy prevails in the opening scenes, though even this use of humour does not entirely disguise deeper issues. Thus, again, differing styles do not alter the common purpose of language in these texts to depict the legacy of the history shared by France and Algeria. The opening scene of *Le Gone du Chaâba* depicts a tussle at the sole source of running water in the *bidonville* between two female inhabitants, one of whom confronts the other due to the excessive time she is taking over doing her laundry. The confrontation and subsequent reaction

¹⁵¹ See Stora, ‘La Guerre d’Algérie quarante ans après’, p. 133.

¹⁵² ‘Ces deux mémoires s’affrontent et elles existent, circulent, correspondant aussi, à ce que nous avons vécu dans le temps de cette guerre elle-même’. Stora, ‘La Guerre d’Algérie quarante ans après’, p. 133.

from the rest of the inhabitants is recounted in a comical style, Begag describing the way in which the woman at the pump deliberately takes her time over her laundry, while her assailant's patience cracks as she eventually confronts her.¹⁵³ The transcription of certain words in the dialect used in the *bidonville*, such as 'l'bomba' for 'la pompe' and 'saboune de Marseille' for 'savon de Marseille',¹⁵⁴ adds to the comical style, as Begag pokes fun at the older generation's use of French, an aspect of Begag's writing that is prevalent in both *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni*.¹⁵⁵ While the comedy of this opening scene is the predominant effect created at the outset of the novel, behind it lies the reality, widespread amongst those who migrated to France from North Africa during the 1950s and 1960s,¹⁵⁶ of the severe inadequacy of the living conditions available to Algerian migrants in France. Thus, while Begag introduces us to life in the 'Chaâba' in a comical manner, his protagonist experiences similar, if not worse, living conditions to those depicted at the beginning of *La Noce des fous* and *Le Thé au harem*. Though the protagonist in fact enjoys the liveliness and camaraderie of the *bidonville*, over the course of the novel his place of residence becomes a source of shame for him, and indicates his marginalisation from dominant French society and identity, which is again both a physical and figurative marginalisation.

A humorous opening that disguises deeper issues also characterises Begag's second novel, *Béni*, as the narrator-protagonist explains that the reason his family does not celebrate Christmas is because 'notre chef à nous c'est Mohamed. Dans son bouquin, il n'avait pas prévu le coup du sapin et des cadeaux du 25 décembre'.¹⁵⁷ This oversight prompts the narrator to exclaim that 'on aurait presque envie de changer de

¹⁵³ See Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ In itself, the way in which Begag plays with language, illustrating the linguistic difference between generations, is of note not only because of its comedic effect. Begag's linguistic competence, as opposed to that of the older generation, to an extent reflects the role of the French language in the 'civilising mission' of colonisation. By mastering French, Begag has gone on to become a successful researcher, writer, and has delved into politics as well, suggesting that linguistic competence opens up the possibility of becoming a fully integrated French citizen.

¹⁵⁶ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁷ Azouz Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), p. 7.

chef, du coup, pour faute professionnelle!’¹⁵⁸ Behind these comical remarks, there lies the opposition between a predominantly Islamic Algerian culture and French secularity which, in turn, indicates the opposition of the Algerian family milieu and dominant French society, between which, as Hargreaves notes, the children of Algerian migrants ‘have been compelled to migrate constantly’.¹⁵⁹ Hargreaves’s observation, which is evident particularly in the two novels by Begag included in the primary corpus as well as in Sebbar’s *Fatima*,¹⁶⁰ points towards the idea that these two worlds, French society and Algerian home, are very much in conflict, and one of the challenges put forward by such texts is the reconciliation of this conflict. However, over the course of *Béni*, the protagonist finds it impossible to bring about this reconciliation and, though largely disguised by comedy, such an eventuality is indicated at the very outset of Begag’s novel. Thus, *Béni* does not point towards the divisions that keep the eponymous protagonist separated from dominant French society, culture, and identity by depicting the physical marginalisation of its protagonist or the deprivation of his living conditions. Instead, Begag evokes the cultural and, more specifically, religious differences which also play a part in the marginalisation of ethnic Algerian minorities.

Indeed, Algerian Muslim identity plays a crucial role in the potential assimilation of North African migrants in France. According to Stora, Islam sets migrants of Maghrebi origin apart from other migrants to France, and suggests that this is a factor which in fact makes North African migrants ‘inassimilables à la société française’,¹⁶¹ due to their strict adherence to Islamic values and the French Republic’s own strict adherence to secularity. In this conflict, we find another example of ‘la répétition du refoulé’ as, under French rule, Algerians had to renounce their religion if

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ This constant migration between the Algerian family and dominant French society (and potential breaking of the limitations of this two-way path) is summarised in *Fatima* by the claim that the father of the protagonist, Dalila, ‘pensait qu’elle ne connaissait que le trajet de la maison au collège’, the school constituting a setting where the children of migrants come into contact with the majority ethnic population. Sebbar, *Fatima ou le Algériennes au square*, p. 23.

¹⁶¹ Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, pp. 286-87.

they wished to become French citizens, a renunciation that is replayed to an extent in contemporary France, especially considering the recent law passed in April 2011 which forbids the covering of one's face in public, a law which largely affects the way Muslim women choose to dress. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail the religious differences between French and Algerian society, though it is nonetheless significant to acknowledge these differences and how they reflect the wider oppositions inherited from the colonial past and their repetition in contemporary France. The conflict between Algerian Islamic culture and French secular values, evident at the beginning of *Béni*, is indicative of the conflict which the eponymous protagonist embodies, having been brought up in France by Algerian parents, and it is this wider conflict evoked in the opening of the novel, rather than a specifically religious one, which is of significance to the overall aims of this chapter and the thesis as a whole. In particular, Begag's work engages with questions of assimilation by presenting the lengths to which his young protagonists will resort in order to conform to dominant French society's prerequisites of acceptance. Rather than perpetuate the notion that North Africans are 'inassimilables',¹⁶² the ultimate failure of the characters to conform reflects the Republic's own failure in acknowledging its multicultural character,¹⁶³ and prefigures the continuing difficulty faced by people of North African origin in being accepted as French citizens. The recent Loi sur l'interdiction du voile intégral testifies to the French government's persistence in upholding a monolithic conception of nationality, forcing assimilation rather than broadening its capacity 'to acknowledge and comprehend ethnic [...] difference'.¹⁶⁴

Like in *Béni*, Sebbar alludes to the 'incompatibility' of immigrant Algerian family life with dominant French society at the beginning of *Fatima*. The protagonist,

¹⁶² For further discussion of the common view in French society that North Africans are unable to assimilate, see Vinay Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic: Marginalization and Belonging in Contemporary French Novels and Films* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), pp. 2-3.

¹⁶³ See Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. xviii.

¹⁶⁴ Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. xviii.

Dalila, has locked herself away from her parents and is planning to leave home as a reaction to the physical aggression inflicted on her by her father. Sebbar does not divulge the reason for Dalila's self-imposed isolation at the very beginning of the novel, though the fact that she has locked herself away in her own home already suggests a certain conflict with her family. The first indication that her father's violence towards her is the reason for the situation presented at the outset of the novel comes three pages into the narrative, when we are told that Dalila 'comprendait mal sa violence lorsqu'elle rentrait tard à la cité'.¹⁶⁵ It is this lack of understanding on the part of Dalila that exemplifies the clash between her family life and the society that she encounters outside her home. Dalila's exposure to a society in which it is not prohibited for young women to return home late means that she is prepared to do exactly that. However, the relocation of her Algerian family to France, and consequent relocation of culturally specific Algerian values to secular French culture, imposes those values on Dalila. As Marnia Lazreg explains, Algerian fathers 'are unable to conceive of the freedom of movement [their daughters] require, even when they become of age',¹⁶⁶ an observation which can be readily applied to Dalila's plight in *Fatima*. Furthermore, Lazreg states that any Algerian woman 'who steps out of [the roles of mother and housewife] or questions their primacy is perceived as threatening the integrity of the family, and by extension, that of the culture at large'.¹⁶⁷ As a teenager, Dalila has still not reached the role of mother or housewife, but she nonetheless displays no desire to fulfil such roles, as evidenced by her lack of interest in learning how to cook traditional Arab food.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, her mother's lack of inclination to teach her about traditional Arab cuisine

¹⁶⁵ Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, p. 11.

¹⁶⁶ Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 173. The idea of movement will be developed in more detail in Chapter 4, which examines the theme of restless wandering in the primary corpus. While for the majority of the protagonists this perpetual movement reflects their entrapment in a figurative 'no man's land' between France and Algeria, in Sebbar's texts, especially *La Seine était rouge*, wandering becomes a means of achieving reconciliation with the past and with a divided identity.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ See Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, p. 23.

points towards a certain inevitable loss of Algerian cultural values as a result of the move to France, despite the attempted strict adherence to these values. As a result, Dalila suffers due to ‘the cultural demand for the preservation of family-based solidarity and hierarchical relations’¹⁶⁹ that exists in Algeria, but which is not culturally imposed to the same extent in France.

Therefore, Dalila is the victim of a situation that has been dictated by the shared history that entangles these two cultures, which includes the history of immigration from Algeria to France that has caused Dalila to be caught between the two cultures in this way. This idea brings us back to the first novel mentioned in this chapter, Mounsi’s *La Noce des fous*, which states that the protagonist was ‘vaincu [...] Avant même que la vie existât’.¹⁷⁰ The beginning of *Fatima* may not express the inevitable condemnation of its protagonist in such an ominous manner, nor do the other novels to which this chapter has referred so far, but nonetheless close analysis of the introductions to these novels reveals the implication that conflicts and divisions, inherited from a divisive past, will inescapably pervade the lives of the respective protagonists.

Confronting the Past

Although eighteen years separate the publication of *Fatima* and the other text by Sebbar included in the primary corpus, *La Seine était rouge*, their beginnings are not dissimilar. Like the earlier novel, *La Seine était rouge* begins by signalling an intended departure, as the first chapter ends by indicating the aspects that the protagonist, Amel, will miss if she does leave home, as follows: ‘Elle n’entendra plus le rire de sa mère et de Lalla, et

¹⁶⁹ Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence*, p. 172.

¹⁷⁰ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 11.

leurs mots secrets, étrangers'.¹⁷¹ However, the reason for which Amel does eventually leave home is very different from Dalila's, as Amel goes in search of events of the past which are kept from her by her mother and grandmother, the events of 17 October 1961. In this explicit attention to specific events of the past shared by France and Algeria, *La Seine était rouge* is set apart from the other novels included in the primary corpus. Amel's lack of knowledge of the events of October 1961 is indicative of the wider lack of recognition of the Algerian War in France, reflected by the French government's much-belated acknowledgement thirty-seven years after the end of the war in 1962 that a war did in fact take place over Algerian independence.¹⁷² Few of the protagonists of the novels included in the primary corpus react to this effacement of the past by making a determined effort to bring it to light. Amel constitutes one of these few, and exemplifies McCormack's observation that 'faced with family silence children whose parents come from Algeria [...] may well try outside of the family to discover their past',¹⁷³ as she resolves to discover what her mother and grandmother refuse to tell her.

The preoccupations presented at the outset of *La Seine était rouge* appear to differ greatly from those of the novels referred to thus far in this chapter. Rather than articulating marginalisation, deprivation, or cultural conflict, Sebbar is overtly concerned with specific historical events. This is not to say that the beginning of *La Seine était rouge* does not indicate a pessimistic outcome, as Amel deliberately goes in search of something that she is told from the outset of the novel will bring her unhappiness. Indeed, Amel's persistent, conscious desire to seek 'ce jour [qui] ne sera pas bienheureux pour [elle]',¹⁷⁴ 'ce jour' potentially referring to 17 October 1961 as well as to the day when Amel finds out about the events of that date, suggests that the act of uncovering the past is always going to be shrouded in unhappiness and that the

¹⁷¹ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 11.

¹⁷² See Lorcin, *Algeria & France 1800 – 2000*, p. xxv.

¹⁷³ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 122

¹⁷⁴ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 15.

exposure of a possibly traumatic history, though painful, is a necessary aspect of Amel's quest. Taking another contested aspect of the Algerian War, the use of torture by French forces, McCormack argues that the initiation of public debate on the use of torture in France 'needs to be seen as but one step in a long and arduous process of coming to terms with the past'.¹⁷⁵ Like the debate on torture, the events of 17 October 1961 were the subject of 'bitter public debates' in France,¹⁷⁶ especially in the 1990s when the trial of Maurice Papon brought the police suppression to wide public attention.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, the wave of interest in 17 October 1961 sparked by the Papon trial marked the beginning of a phase of coming to terms with the truth about France's colonial past,¹⁷⁸ and this desire is reflected in Amel's quest in *La Seine était rouge* to uncover the events of 17 October 1961. However, the opening of the novel, in its forewarning of an unhappy discovery, also suggests that the quest on which Amel embarks is part of the 'long and arduous process' that coming to terms with the past constitutes.

Nevertheless, the very fact that Amel is willing to initiate this potentially traumatic process for herself demonstrates a determination to overcome any indications of a pessimistic outcome presented at the outset of the novel, an aspect of *La Seine était rouge* that is lacking from the rest of the primary corpus. Rather than point towards a future of division and conflict, *La Seine était rouge* underlines Richard L. Derderian's argument that 'only by shedding light on past events is it possible to build a meaningful present and future'.¹⁷⁹ Thus, the real dystopia towards which the opening of Sebbar's novel points is a future which continues to be characterised by the effacement of history, rather than the revelation of shocking events of the past which will, in fact, aid Amel in reinforcing her sense of legitimate belonging within French society. As

¹⁷⁵ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 156.

¹⁷⁶ Joshua Cole, 'Massacres and their Historians: Recent Histories of State Violence in France and Algeria in the Twentieth Century', *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 28.1 (2010), 106-26 (pp. 108-09).

¹⁷⁷ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 8-10.

¹⁷⁸ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁹ Derderian, 'Confronting the Past', p. 252.

McCormack argues, ‘recognition of one’s history in French history and an integration of individual, family, and group histories into the wider dominant French history is crucial to a sense of feeling French and being accepted as such’,¹⁸⁰ and Amel’s desire to seek this recognition, despite both her family’s silence and the official French silence, allows her to avoid the dichotomies which entrap the other protagonists in the primary corpus in their exclusion from French society and identity.

As the most recent text to be included in the primary corpus, *La Seine était rouge* underlines the growing attention to history discerned in the later primary texts. Published in 1999, *La Seine était rouge* confronts the past more readily than any other text included in the primary corpus by taking a specific event of the Algerian War as its focus. Mounsi’s *Le Voyage des âmes* (1996) also refers explicitly to the Algerian War, although not to the same extent as Sebbar’s text. These two novels differ from those included in the primary corpus that were published in the 1980s, which lack this overt confrontation with the past. Even Sebbar’s *Fatima* (1981), in which extensive knowledge of the past shared by France and Algeria is demonstrated, places a greater focus on depicting the conflicts and difficulties faced by Algerian migrants in France. In this way, *Fatima* resembles Charef’s *Le Thé au harem* (1983) and Begag’s *Le Gone du Chaâba* (1986) and *Béni* (1989), which present the physical and figurative exclusion from French society and identity suffered by their respective protagonists. This shift in emphasis amongst the primary corpus from the 1980s to the 1990s can be detected in Mounsi’s *La Noce des fous* (1990). The narrator-protagonist’s description in the early chapters of the novel of his marginalised existence in the rundown *banlieues* of Paris is especially reminiscent of Charef’s *Le Thé au harem*, but *La Noce des fous* diverges from the 1980s novels in its persistent preoccupation with History. However, this is a wider concept of History, and no specific reference is made to the history shared by

¹⁸⁰ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 115.

Algeria and France.¹⁸¹ Thus, while the novel shows an inclination to depart from the issues dealt with by the literature of the 1980s, its tackling of the specific history with which this study is concerned is only tentative, and Mounsi does not engage in this novel with the effects of the past on the present to the same extent that he does in *Le Voyage des âmes*, as we shall see.

A parallel can be made here between the gradual focus on history discerned over the course of the primary corpus, and the way in which the wider memory of the Algerian War has evolved in France. As House and MacMaster note, the period from 1980 to 1997 was characterised by a ‘slow emergence’ of memory, which then gave way to a ‘higher visibility’ of the Algerian War from 1997 onwards,¹⁸² the Papon trial playing a key role in this evolution. Similarly, the 1980s texts included in the primary corpus typify the ‘slow emergence’ of memory observed by House and MacMaster as, by attempting to establish the presence of the children of Algerian migrants in French society, they signal that the end of empire did not constitute a clean break with the legacy of the past.¹⁸³ The greater attention to History detected in *La Noce des fous* exemplifies a development in the ‘slow emergence’ of memory, as the novel brings to light the imbrication of its protagonist within a certain history, although that history is not overtly divulged. However, Mounsi’s *Le Voyage des âmes* (1997), published at the end of this period of slow emergence, exemplifies the ‘higher visibility’ of the Algerian War which House and MacMaster indicate. This greater attention to the Algerian War is then underlined by *La Seine était rouge*, the publication of which coincides, furthermore, with the year in which the French government officially recognised the war (1999), testifying to the significance of Sebbar’s text in reflecting the need for the

¹⁸¹ One allusion is made to colonisation in *La Noce des fous*, when the narrator evokes the ‘temps où le vent des Aurès faisait claquer des drapeaux bleu, blanc, rouge, au sommet du Djurdjura’. Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 19. This allusion requires a certain knowledge of Algerian geography to fully comprehend, Aurès being a mountainous region in the east of Algeria, and the Djurdjura being an Algerian mountain range.

¹⁸² House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 192.

¹⁸³ See Hargreaves, ‘Generating Migrant Memories’, pp. 221-22.

recovery of memory and for the rewriting of dominant historical narratives which this official recognition addressed. In this way, Sebbar reveals herself to be at the forefront of French collective consciousness, as Donadey observes,¹⁸⁴ and underlines the potential of fiction to broaden our understanding of the past.

Taking this selection of Franco-Algerian texts as its primary corpus, the thesis traces the development of the ways in which the children of Algerian immigrants have sought to underline their legitimate place within French society, history, and identity. What can be ascertained through an analysis of novels published between 1981 and 1999 is that, while the children of Algerian migrants may have been successful in demonstrating their presence in French society over the course of the 1980s, this presence cannot become fully legitimised unless the implications of the past shared by Algeria and France are also acknowledged in their entirety. In other words, the work of the 1980s, which signalled the presence of a sizeable population of Algerian origin in France, is incomplete without the ‘memory-charged cultural productions’ of the 1990s, which underline that ‘working through the past is essential to the success of the integration process’.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, confronting the past plays a significant role in securing a sense of legitimate belonging for the children of Algerian migrants in French society.

So far, we have seen how, in different ways, the lives of the characters in the primary corpus are embedded in and dictated by a history over which they have had no control. The protagonists’ imbrication in this history largely points towards a dystopian future which can be detected from the very outset of the majority of the novels, with Sebbar’s *La Seine était rouge* set apart to an extent due its clear desire to confront the past and thus overcome the repetition of oppositions inherited from colonialism and war. This influence of History on the present and future is made particularly evident by

¹⁸⁴ See Donadey, ‘Retour sur mémoire’, p. 197.

¹⁸⁵ Derderian, ‘Confronting the Past’, p. 248.

the way in which Mounsi structures the opening chapter of *Le Voyage des âmes*, which also confronts the past from its very outset. For all but the final three paragraphs of the opening chapter to the novel, the narration unfolds exclusively in the past tense (in either the imperfect or the passé composé), as the narrator reveals to his childhood sweetheart, Leïla, that he is going to move away from Algeria to live in France. However, having recounted this memory, the narrator then addresses Leïla directly in the present moment three paragraphs from the end of the chapter, and the narration moves to the present tense as the narrator tells Leïla that ‘celui que je suis devenu [...] Il est moins qu’une ombre, moins qu’une trace, moins qu’un fantôme’.¹⁸⁶ Thus, rather than confront the Algerian War and specific events of the war in the way that *La Seine était rouge* does, *Le Voyage des âmes* confronts the narrator’s childhood and his displacement from Algeria to France, although the language Mounsi uses invites a parallel to be drawn between the protagonist and the memory of the war. The depiction of the protagonist as ‘une ombre [...] une trace [...] un fantôme’ recalls Stora’s description of the Algerian War as a ‘moment des fantasmes enfouis’ and an ‘époque des illusions’,¹⁸⁷ underlining the link made by McCormack between the definition of one’s self and the inclusion of one’s personal history in dominant national history.¹⁸⁸ As the memory of the war has been buried in France, becoming only an illusion, so the protagonist detects in himself a mere shadow or trace of his being.

The transition made between past and present in the opening chapter of *Le Voyage des âmes* (reflected by the change in tense as well as the sudden shift in setting from the narrator’s Algerian childhood to his present position in which he is looking retrospectively on his childhood) underlines the significant effect of the narrator’s displacement from Algeria on his present condition and, reflecting the majority of the texts discussed, this effect of the past on the present is a negative one. Indeed, a

¹⁸⁶ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 11.

¹⁸⁷ Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, p. 321.

¹⁸⁸ See McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 115.

pessimistic future is not merely implied but stated quite firmly as, by turning from recalling his childhood to his current sense of non-existence, the narrator indicates to the reader that the subsequent account will not conclude on a positive note. This evocation of the narrator's displacement as a child and sudden transition to his present condition at the very outset of the narrative attributes his sense of non-existence to his move from Algeria to France. The narrator is, thus, a victim of the history of Algerian immigration to France, which follows on from the history of colonisation and war.¹⁸⁹

Therefore, while *Le Voyage des âmes* does not confront the Algerian War explicitly at its outset, it does confront the history of immigration which constitutes a strand of the wider history shared by France and Algeria. However, this confrontation with the past does not indicate the same potential resolution of conflicts inherited from this past to which *La Seine était rouge* points, highlighting that this process of resolution is a complex one and requires more than the recognition of a silenced history on the part of the children of Algerian migrants.¹⁹⁰ As Shepard argues, the way in which French institutions sought a clean break with the colonial project after the Algerian War 'helped circumscribe what lessons could be drawn [...] about the role of colonialism in state institutions and national pasts [which] made it more difficult to address such tensions in the future'.¹⁹¹ Thus, in addition to recognising the Algerian War, it is necessary to use this recognition in order to consider the wider role of colonialism and its effects on contemporary French society and dominant French historical discourses. Indeed, this observation calls into question the official acknowledgement of the Algerian War by the French government as a means of confronting the wider role of the French colonial project. While undoubtedly constituting a welcome and necessary move

¹⁸⁹ For example, Shepard states that 'within Europe [...] debates concentrate on decolonization as the moment when the "question of colonialism" ends and the "immigrant question" begins'. Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Indeed, over the course of the thesis, the analysis of *La Seine était rouge* does not suggest that Sebbar's text provides definitive resolution to these conflicts, but that it reflects the complexities of confronting the past.

¹⁹¹ Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, p. 272.

on the part of the government, ensuing state-sponsored initiatives – the passing of the law of 23 February 2005 promoting the positive role of France's overseas presence for instance – suggest that the official recognition of the Algerian War in 1999 did not signal an end to the French state's problematic confrontation with its colonial past.¹⁹² Though none of the primary texts were published after 1999, thus precluding an analysis of the extent to which they reflect a greater consideration of the colonial past after the official recognition of the Algerian War, the pessimism to which the majority of the texts point at their conclusions, as we shall see in the remaining sections of this chapter, indicate problems which are deeply embedded in French society, and which will require more than the state acknowledgment of the Algerian War to be resolved.

By conceiving of the end of the Algerian War as a clean break with the colonial past, the French government overlooked the potential consequences of this past on the present and future of French society. This disconnection is reflected in *Le Voyage des âmes* by the abruptness of the transition from past to present in the opening chapter. Mounsi evokes the negative effect which the past has on the present, but the lack of a substantial explanation for this outcome, other than the implicit reference to the dislocation from Algeria to France, creates a void disconnecting the past from the present, a void which is then filled in by the ensuing narrative as it articulates and elucidates the narrator's sense of exile, engendered by his migration. Indeed, as Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie observe, a defining feature of *Le Voyage des âmes* is the impression that the narrator has lived two separate lives, 'the life before taking the boat and departing from Algeria, and the life afterwards'.¹⁹³ Thus, the disconnection discerned at the beginning of the narrative between the narrator's past, Algerian

¹⁹² For a discussion of the criticisms directed against the passing of the 23 February 2005 law, see Laetitia Van Eeckhout, 'Des historiens fustigent une loi prônant un enseignement positif de la colonisation', *Le Monde*, 15 April 2005

< <http://www.ldh-toulon.net/spip.php?article579#conf> > [accessed 19 July 2011]

¹⁹³ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 264.

childhood and his French present continues throughout as the narrator attempts to make the connection between these two existences.

While the opening chapter of *Le Voyage des âmes* points towards a pessimistic conclusion, underlined by the narrator's statement that he has become 'moins qu'une ombre, moins qu'une trace, moins qu'un fantôme',¹⁹⁴ the ensuing use of the act of writing to attempt to reconcile the narrator's sense of exile¹⁹⁵ is similar to Sebbar's project in *La Seine était rouge*, which also comprises an attempt to reconcile the past with the present. In their confrontation with the past, these two novels offer, if not definitive resolution of conflicts inherited from a divisive past, then at least a point of departure from which the wider implications of the history of colonisation, war, and immigration can be considered in their entirety. However, both these texts also point towards the difficulty and complexity of such a process, which consistently encounters 'the sheer weight of forgetting and occlusion [which] acts as a significant break on the potential of this kind of memory work'.¹⁹⁶ This weight of forgetting and historical silence is reflected in the primary corpus by the pessimistic conclusions to which the majority of the texts point at their outset, and the analysis will now turn to these conclusions to examine the extent to which they match this initial pessimism.

Lack of Resolution in *La Noce des Fous* and *Béni*

Almost exclusively, the conclusions of the texts included in the primary corpus do not resolve the concerns raised in the preceding narrative, and this lack of resolution is encapsulated by the endings of Mounsi's *La Noce des fous* and Begag's *Béni*. In this

¹⁹⁴ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the wider importance of the act of writing in Mounsi's work is noted by Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, who argue that, for Mounsi, writing is 'a means of salvation and a source of life'. Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 250.

¹⁹⁶ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 161.

section, I will illustrate this lack of resolution, and propose that such indeterminate endings reflect a vicious circle in which the protagonists are trapped, as the imbrication of their lives in a particular history, indicated at the outset of the texts, allows them no escape from the type of existence that is imposed on them. Such conflicts are perpetuated in contemporary French society by the Republic's continuing hostility to ethnic difference, as Philip Dine argues:

Neither the rhetoric of Nicolas Sarkozy in the face of the recalcitrant alienation of the younger inhabitants of the deprived suburbs, nor the recent legislation that he has championed, and which aims both to restrict immigration and to reinforce conventionally conceived integration, suggest that such characteristically post-colonial tensions will be resolved in the foreseeable future.¹⁹⁷

The 'conventionally conceived integration' to which Dine refers constitutes a reinforcement of a model of citizenship based on assimilation with the nation, which requires the eradication of ethnic difference.¹⁹⁸ Such conceptions of nationhood maintain the alienation of the largely ethnic, of ex-colonial origin younger inhabitants of France's *banlieues*. The protagonists of the primary corpus are not the same marginalised youths to which Dine refers, as Dine is discussing contemporary French society, but the physical and figurative exclusion in which we find the protagonists is very much the same as that endured by France's present-day marginalised youths of ethnic, ex-colonial origin. Thus, the lack of resolution of such conflicts discerned in the primary corpus is an aspect which has remained present in French society beyond the period studied in this thesis.

The protagonist's death at the end of Mounsi's *La Noce des fous* is indicative of the lack of resolution discerned in the conclusions of the majority of texts in the primary

¹⁹⁷ Philip Dine, 'Decolonizing the Republic', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 12:2 (2008) 173–81 (p. 179).

¹⁹⁸ See Dine, 'Decolonizing the Republic', p. 177.

corpus. Of course, to end a novel with a death appears to be a conclusive way to bring it to a close, but it is Mounsi's portrayal of the death, rather than the death itself, which indicates a pessimistic conclusion. Indeed, the novel does not end on the narrator-protagonist's death, but with the narrator continuing to address the reader after his death. In this way, the text ends not on the finality of death, but an impression of continuity is created by the protagonist's narration from the beyond. Rather than signify a certain immortality of the narrator-protagonist, this posthumous narration has the opposite effect of emphasising the insignificance of the narrator-protagonist's life, underlined by the revelation in the last sentence of the novel that, in Arabic, his name means 'l'oublié déjà'.¹⁹⁹ Thus, there is a certain tension at work between the impression of continuity created by the narrator addressing the reader after his death and the impression of insignificance and oblivion to which he is condemned in death. The notion that he lives on comes into conflict with the idea that he is already forgotten, but this conflict is indicative of the lack of resolution with which *La Noce des fous* ends. Ultimately, the narrator-protagonist occupies an uncertain place in death: he is forgotten, but continues to exist beyond death, as reflected by the following depiction of seeing himself (his soul perhaps) leave his own body: 'Par le nez, les oreilles, la bouche, les yeux, je l'ai sentie la vie, sortir de mes trous [...] j'ai vu mon corps flotter au-dessus de mes yeux'.²⁰⁰ The impression of a 'pre-destined fate',²⁰¹ so evident at the beginning of the novel, is complemented by a posthumous narration at the end of the novel. As a result, the idea that the narrator-protagonist was 'vaincu [...] Avant même que la vie

¹⁹⁹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 246. In fact, it is the author's name which means 'l'oublié déjà' and not the narrator-protagonist's, which is Tarik Hadjaj. Furthermore, Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie suggest that the meaning of 'mounsi' is why the author signs his work using just his surname and not his full name, Mohand Mounsi. See Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', pp. 258-59. This overlap between the writer's personal (hi)story and his fictional protagonist ascribes the condition of being already forgotten to the wider Franco-Algerian population, as well as to Mounsi and his fictional persona.

²⁰⁰ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 246.

²⁰¹ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 259.

existât'²⁰² continues after his death, so that he is 'vaincu' after life existed as well as before. In this way, the novel comes full circle at its conclusion, reflecting the vicious circle in which its protagonist is trapped as a result of the history that dictated his lack of existence (in life and death) before it had even begun, as indicated by the notion that he is 'l'oublié déjà'.

The narrator's self-depiction as 'l'oublié déjà' brings to mind the forgetting associated with the Algerian War, recalling the 'war without a name' as well as the title of Stora's book on the war and how it has been remembered, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*. Taking this association further, the idea that the narrator occupies an uncertain place in death, forgotten but continuing to exist beyond death, may be related to Stora's notion that, with regard to the Algerian War in French society, 'l'oubli obsède, le feu couve toujours sous les vieilles cendres'.²⁰³ According to Stora, the memory of the war is like fire smouldering beneath the ashes due precisely to the lack of resolution which characterises the confrontation with this aspect of French history, and he argues that 'cette faculté d'oubli serait assez saine [...] si les "secrets" de cette guerre avaient été avoués, assumés'.²⁰⁴ Stora makes particular reference to the use of torture on the part of the French forces, but the contested events of 17 October 1961, with which this thesis engages, could also be included amongst the 'secrets' to which Stora refers. The historical hesitation to confront such events contributes to the impression of a lack of resolution with regard to the Algerian War, and results in the memory of the war being disregarded but ever-present at the same time, acting as a gangrene on French society to use Stora's own simile. Similarly, at the end of *La Noce des fous*, Mounsi creates the impression that his narrator-protagonist is forgotten in death, but at the same time lives

²⁰² Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 11.

²⁰³ Stora, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, p. 318.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

on, mirroring the lack of resolution with regard to the Algerian War.²⁰⁵ While Mounsi does not explicitly refer to the Algerian War in *La Noce des fous*, Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie suggest that one of the writer's aims in this text is to 'show the reality of violence on the periphery but also to lay the blame on the former colonial power',²⁰⁶ reinforcing the notion that *La Noce des fous*, despite comprising very little reference to the colonial past, is still very much a novel that shapes our considerations of this past. By evoking the 'sacrificed, wasted life' led by the narrator-protagonist at the end of the novel,²⁰⁷ and the uncertain place he occupies even in death, Mounsi indicates the negative impact that French society's hesitation to confront the Algerian War can have on its marginalised, ethnic Algerian population. Indeed, the uncertain place occupied by the protagonist becomes a collective place of uncertainty when, on his death, he states that 'j'ai revu des générations et des siècles qui ne se comptent plus que dans un coin inconnu du ciel'.²⁰⁸ Thus, on his death, the narrator-protagonist joins the generations who came before him who were also the non-existent victims of a history from which they could not escape, further underlining the notion that the conclusion of *La Noce des fous* creates a link with the beginning, shaping the vicious circle in which the protagonist and the generations who came before him (as well as those who will come after him) are trapped.

The departing of the protagonist from the mortal world marks the end of Begag's *Béni* as well.²⁰⁹ An unexpected shift to the supernatural in a novel which is

²⁰⁵ Incidentally, Mounsi concludes *La Noce des fous* on an image of ash, 'le vent couvrait la mer de la cendre légère'. See Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 246. However, the serenity of this image is in contrast to Stora's use of ash-related imagery in his discussion of the forgetting of the Algerian War.

²⁰⁶ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 259.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 246.

²⁰⁹ Begag's first novel, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, also ends on a departure which, according to Hargreaves, is a striking feature of Beur narratives. This departure consists of the relocation of the protagonist and his family to a new home. While concluding in such a way underlines the overall lack of resolution characteristic of the primary corpus, the ending of *Le Gone du Chaâba* does not represent the exclusion of the protagonist to the extent that the conclusion of *Béni* does, although representing the exclusion of the protagonist from conceptions of French identity is a prevailing aspect of *Le Gone du Chaâba* on the whole. For this reason, I focus on the conclusion of *Béni* in this chapter and not that of *Le Gone du*

based on Begag's real-life experience,²¹⁰ the protagonist, Béni, is taken 'vers les étoiles' by an unidentified shadow after being refused entry into a nightclub due to his Arab origin.²¹¹ As Hargreaves observes, the significance of this final scene is the escape it provides Béni from 'the two-dimensional problem [...] of his dual cultural heritage',²¹² which he has been unable to reconcile. This inability is highlighted at the end of the novel by Béni's rejection from the nightclub on racial grounds, despite his earlier attempt to erase references to his origins by straightening his curly (and distinctly Arab) hair, thus giving him more chance to gain entry into the nightclub.²¹³ As he leaves the entrance to the nightclub, Béni attempts to 'retrouver les bouclettes de [son] cuir véritable',²¹⁴ but is taken away by the apparition at this point, leaving him in an uncertain, 'in-between' space of identity having been rejected from the nightclub, representative of dominant French society, and unable to fully reclaim references to his ethnic origin. Though his levitation into the heavens enables Béni to escape this uncertain identity, Hargreaves argues that Begag does not regard such 'fantasies [...] as anything more than a parenthetical diversion' from the dilemmas that Béni faces,²¹⁵ indicating that the apparent escape provided at the end of the novel should not cover over the conflicts that such a conclusion brings to light. Indeed, the idea that Béni can only achieve a spiritual or celestial acceptance by 'dying', rather than a terrestrial one, would constitute a facile and ultimately unsatisfactory resolution to the issues brought up over the course of the novel.

Chaâba. For a discussion of the conclusion to *Le Gone du Chaâba*, see Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 164.

²¹⁰ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 61.

²¹¹ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 173.

²¹² Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 56.

²¹³ Béni's attempt to make himself look more 'white' recalls Fanon's assertion that 'pour le Noir, il n'y a qu'un destin. Et il est blanc'. Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire Masques Blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), p. 28. Fanon's discussion of the eradication of 'blackness' in *Peau Noire Masques Blancs* in relation to Béni and other primary texts is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

²¹⁴ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 173.

²¹⁵ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 56.

While *La Noce des fous* and *Béni* may appear to offer divergent narratives, Mounsi's tracing the life of delinquency and depravity on the margins of French society of his protagonist, Begag's representing the conflicts experienced by his protagonist as he attempts to identify with a conception of dominant French identity, their endings reveal similarities. Both protagonists depart the mortal world and, although Béni's 'death' allows him to escape from the conflicts of his dual cultural heritage, an aspect absent from the end of *La Noce des fous*, both conclusions express the uncertain place occupied by the respective protagonists, offering no resolution to the conflicts they face. Moreover, like *La Noce des fous*, the ending of *Béni* marks a return to the conflicts expressed at its outset, underlining the lack of any resolution offered and the perpetuation of these conflicts. Expressing the clash of secular French and Islamic cultures at the beginning of the novel, its conclusion illustrates that Béni has been unable to reconcile the implications of this clash over the course of the narrative. Therefore, like the protagonist of *La Noce des fous*, Béni is caught in a vicious circle, represented by the mirroring of the novel's beginning and end, which perpetually denies him the possibility of defining a legitimate space of identity for himself within French society.

Contributing to the perpetuation of this vicious circle is France's republican definition of nationality, which remains 'inimical to the recognition of ethnic differences'.²¹⁶ According to such a definition, Béni needs to eradicate references to his ethnic origin in order to gain acceptance in French society. However, as Begag's novel illustrates, this eradication of ethnic difference is often not enough, pointing towards the failings of this model of citizenship as it entraps people of non-European ethnic origin in a situation which obliges them to continually seek to fulfil an unattainable definition of 'Frenchness' in order to be legitimate members of French society. A more detailed

²¹⁶ Hargreaves, 'Generating Migrant Memories', p. 220.

discussion of France's continued adherence to such a definition of nationhood in relation to the primary texts will be provided in Chapter 2 but, at this point, it is worth noting the link between this conception of nationality and the Algerian War in order to highlight the repetition of oppositions inherited from the war in contemporary French society. As Shepard argues, the circumvention on the part of French institutions to fully engage with the demise of colonialism 'allowed the foundation [...] of the now wholly "European" republic that emerged in the process of excluding Algeria and Algerians from France and French history'.²¹⁷ Thus, the exclusion of people of Algerian origin from definitions of French nationality in contemporary France can be seen to stem from the failure to confront the implications of the Algerian War and the subsequent loss of Algeria, and the eponymous protagonist's rejection from French society at the end of *Béni* illustrates this continued exclusion of Algerians from the republican definition of nationality. Moreover, the lack of resolution with regard to the Algerian War, illustrated by the failure to confront the full implications of the end of colonialism and the subsequent exclusion of Algerians from French nationality, is reflected by the lack of resolution at the end of Begag's novel, which presents the inescapable and perpetual exclusion of its protagonist from definitions of dominant French identity. In this way, *Béni* reflects the way in which the fiction analysed in this thesis broadens our understanding of the history in question: a history which, in turn, is revealed to impact significantly on contemporary French society, as illustrated by events that revive this divisive past.

²¹⁷ Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, p. 15.

‘Une histoire mal assumée’

Before analysing the conclusions of the remainder of the primary corpus, I now turn to an examination of the enduring exclusion from dominant French society and history suffered by the children of Algerian migrants. I will argue that this exclusion occurs first and foremost as a result of the wider hesitation in French society to confront the past shared by France and Algeria, and is reflected by the absence of this past in the majority of the primary corpus.

A frequently evoked episode that goes some way to reflecting the uncertain space in between identities that youths of Algerian origin continue to occupy is the football match that took place between France and Algeria on 6 October 2001, during which the French national anthem was booed by ethnic Algerian youths and the match abandoned after those same youths invaded the pitch.²¹⁸ Writing in *Le Monde* after the match, the ambassador of Algeria to France at the time, Mohamed Ghoulmi, states that the jeers emanating from these youths were directed at that racist section of the French population ‘qu’ils rencontrent lorsqu’ils cherchent un emploi, un logement, lorsqu’ils se voient refuser l’entrée d’une discothèque. Ils ont sifflé les 30 % du chômage qui les affectent’.²¹⁹ Ghoulmi goes on to add:

Ils ont exprimé implicitement leur désir de reconnaissance et d’intégration sans être préalablement désintégrés. Ils ont répondu à l’image fracassée que donnent de l’Algérie les

²¹⁸ See Hargreaves, ‘Generating Migrant Memories’, p. 226. For further reaction to this match, see Azouz Begag and Christian Delorme, ‘Energumènes ou energ-humaines?’, *Le Monde*, 13 October 2001 and Mohamed Ghoulmi, ‘France-Algérie: match révélateur’, *Le Monde*, 13 October 2001.

²¹⁹ Mohamed Ghoulmi, ‘France-Algérie: match révélateur’, *Le Monde*, 13 October 2001 <<http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis/docview/getDocForCuiReq?lni=4BM8-JW60-TWK5-82J4&csi=299258&oc=00240&perma=true>> [accessed 19 October 2011] (para. 6 of 18).

médias lourds français et dont on ne mesure pas ici les conséquences désastreuses sur la structuration de leur personnalité.²²⁰

The uncertain space in between cultures and identities occupied by Franco-Algerian youths can be detected in Ghoualmi's idea that they desire integration even though they are not non-integrated in the first place. A need to integrate suggests that one does not belong to a particular society: however, the children of Algerian migrants find themselves in the problematic, paradoxical situation of wanting to integrate into a society in which should already have a legitimate place, since they were born or brought up in France, exemplifying the uncertain, in-between space occupied by characters such as Béni.

Indeed, several of Ghoualmi's observations, such as the difficulty in finding accommodation and employment, are reflected in the primary corpus, indicating the persistence of such conflicts, which is illustrated in turn by the lack of resolution at the conclusions of several of the primary texts. Even Ghoualmi's allusion to the refusal of entry into nightclubs is demonstrated at the end of *Béni*, when the eponymous protagonist is rejected from a nightclub on racial grounds. Furthermore, the protagonists of Mounsi's two novels included in the primary corpus never hold a permanent form of accommodation nor a permanent job and, in *Le Thé au harem*, Charef illustrates the 'racist stereotyping and old animosities inherited from the past'²²¹ when the protagonist, Madjid, is greeted at an employment agency by an immediate snub, the agency employee having 'à peine ouvert le dossier de Madjid'.²²²

In addition to problems concerning accommodation and employment, these novels evoke a world in which the protagonists inhabit a concrete 'no man's land', in the form of HLM (habitation à loyer modéré) estate blocks, which eventually succeeded

²²⁰ Ibid., para. 10 of 18.

²²¹ Hargreaves, 'Generating Migrant Memories', p. 227.

²²² Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 149.

the *bidonvilles* but are still located on the outskirts of France's big cities.²²³ Thus, several of the characters we encounter in the primary texts occupy a space that is physically, as well as figuratively, excluded from French society. At the same time, this physical space of exclusion represented by the peripheral HLM blocks remains a part of France, underlining that while those who reside there may be physically on the margins of dominant French society, they have no other society or culture to which to belong. Therefore, if they are not accepted as belonging to French society and culture, they are condemned to inhabit a no man's land in between an unattainable acceptance in French society and a distant culture of origin with which they cannot identify. This notion that the peripheral HLM blocks constitute a no man's land to which its residents are condemned is reflected by the depiction of the protagonist's *cit * in Mounsi's *La Noce des fous*, as follows: 'Chez moi, l'entr e des Enfers se situe du c t  ouest du p riph rique'.²²⁴ Such a depiction emphasises that the narrator-protagonist lives on the periphery, both physically and figuratively, of French society, as 'p riph rique' is used to signify both the ring road encircling Paris, to the west of which is located the protagonist's *cit * in Nanterre, as well as the figurative marginalisation of the protagonist from central French society. Furthermore, the image of Hell ascribed to the protagonist's *cit *, as well as evoking a representation of violence to which I will return in subsequent chapters, reinforces the notion that the periphery is a site of eternal damnation, whose residents are trapped in between cultures while belonging to none.

Returning to the subject of the abandoned France-Algeria football match, Ghoualmi relates the frustration vented by the ethnic Algerian youths in the crowd back to the history shared by these two nations, stating that 'plus que quiconque et sans qu'ils en aient pleinement conscience ils portent dans leur chair et subissent les cons quences

²²³ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 15.

²²⁴ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 17.

d'une histoire commune mal assumée'.²²⁵ Thus, Ghoualmi echoes historians such as Stora, who have previously observed and analysed in depth the hesitation with which the Franco-Algerian past has been confronted, suggesting that this hesitation plays a significant role in the exclusion suffered by the children of Algerian migrants, who carry the burden of this past but without being fully conscious of doing so. In the primary corpus, the embodiment of the past without being fully aware of its significance is reflected by the stark absence of reference to this past, and this aspect of the texts is discussed in detail in the next section, in which it will be illustrated that this absence of history contributes to the protagonists' exclusion from dominant French society. In this way, the legacy of the Algerian War is revealed to impact upon the primary corpus as well as upon more contemporary events, the relevance of which can be traced back to colonisation and its violent end, elucidating the link between history, fiction, and present-day issues with which this thesis engages. What emerges in the analysis is that the Algerian War and its memory act as the common denominator which permits this link, reflecting Hargreaves's observation that 'although the third generation now emerging among the Algerian minority is far removed in time from the colonial era, its future in France clearly remains heavily conditioned by the legacy of that period',²²⁶ and underlining the continuing relevance of the legacy of colonisation and the Algerian War. However, the result of the ineffective confrontation with the past may be that younger generations of Algerian origin are unaware of its significance and impact on the present, as Ghoualmi suggests by stating that the children of Algerian migrants embody their inherited past and suffer the consequences of it without being fully aware of doing so.

The lack of confrontation with the past shared by France and Algeria on the part of French state institutions was reflected by a deficiency in education with regard to the

²²⁵ Ghoualmi, 'France-Algérie: match révélateur', para. 13 of 18.

²²⁶ Hargreaves, 'Generating Migrant Memories', p. 227.

war over the course of the 1980s, and McCormack notes the ‘limited state of knowledge on the war when it began to be taught in *terminale* classes in 1983’.²²⁷ Therefore, having been born in or migrated to France well before the 1980s, the characters that we encounter in the primary texts would not have received a sufficient knowledge of the Algerian War, if any knowledge at all, leaving the memory of the war to be transmitted by other means, such as within the family. However, as McCormack also observes, a lack of transmission has endured amongst families of Algerian origin as well, leading to younger generations remaining ‘ignorant of the experiences of their elders’.²²⁸ Thus, the children of Algerian migrants have, over the preceding decades, been denied knowledge and understanding of their inherited past, and this absence is reflected in the marked infrequency of reference to the war in the primary texts (as well as in Ghoualmi’s comment that the children of migrants are not aware that they embody such a history), especially those published in the 1980s. In the next section, it is argued that the protagonists’ exclusion from dominant French society and identity is symptomatic of this absence of history, underlining McCormack’s argument that ‘recognition of one’s history in French history and an integration of individual, family, and group histories into the wider dominant French history is crucial to a sense of feeling French and being accepted as such’.²²⁹ In this way, the lack of confrontation with the Franco-Algerian past is revealed to impact upon the characters in the primary corpus as well as on more recent events, such as the pitch invasion at the France-Algeria football match, in which France’s ethnic Algerian youths expressed their continuing frustration at being excluded from French history and identity.

²²⁷ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 33. Indeed, McCormack goes on to note that education on the Algerian War continues to be insufficient, and may in fact be deteriorating. See McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 94.

²²⁸ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 117.

²²⁹ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 115.

Absence of History

The historical lack of transmission of the Algerian past in France indicates that the protagonists in the primary corpus must try to come to terms with this history without the aid of French official remembrance or the French education system. However, as observed earlier, the protagonist of *La Seine était rouge*, Amel, is the only character who shows a keen desire to discover this ‘histoire commune mal assumée’,²³⁰ highlighted by her pleas to her grandmother in the first chapter of the novel to tell her about the Algerian War.²³¹ Her grandmother’s stubborn silence, though, reflects the notion that families of Algerian origin are also responsible for maintaining this lack of transmission. In contrast to Amel, close inspection of the primary corpus suggests that several other characters, above and beyond an apparent reluctance to learn about their inherited past, are not necessarily aware that there is such a past to discover, which is indicative of the wider withholding of information on the Algerian War from the generations that did not live through it.

Four novels in particular, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, *Béni*, *Le Thé au harem*, and *La Noce des fous*, show a distinct lack of reference to the Algerian War. Begag’s second novel, *Béni*, contains three noteworthy references to the war, the first of which occurs when Béni and his mother go shopping to a market at which many of the vendors, although white, speak Arabic. Béni finds this ‘anormal et dangereux, parce que pendant la guerre d’Algérie il y avait des militaires français qui parlaient l’arabe mieux que les Arabes, mais c’était pour leur tendre des pièges et les capturer’.²³² While this shows that Béni does possess some knowledge of the Algerian past, such a reference demonstrates that this knowledge is incomplete, reflecting that what Béni may have learnt lacks the

²³⁰ Ghoualmi, ‘France-Algérie: match révélateur’, para. 13 of 18.

²³¹ See Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, pp. 9-10.

²³² Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 47.

‘sufficient detail so that [it is] understood’.²³³ This allusion to the past shows both a naive and limited view of the war and colonial period on the part of the protagonist. He recognises the market vendors who speak Arabic as ‘juifs ou pieds-noirs’,²³⁴ but by doing so he erroneously places both Jewish people and the *pieds-noirs* (European settlers who lived in French Algeria) in the same category as the French soldiers against whom the Algerian revolutionaries fought during the war, as he associates all these groups with the dangerous image he has of white people speaking Arabic.

To explain this naive mistrust, Béni goes on to recount briefly a story that he read about ‘un capitaine qui se déguisait en Algérien, caché derrière une gandoura, un cheich et une djellaba, il faisait des ravages en espionnant les combattants qui voulaient que leur pays soit à eux’.²³⁵ Such references bring to mind certain strategies used by the French army during the Algerian War. Firstly, Béni’s allusion to French soldiers who spoke Arabic could relate to the SAS (Sections Administratives Spécialisées), an Arabic-speaking division of the French army. While the main duties of the SAS consisted of what Martin S. Alexander and J. F. V. Keiger call ‘welfare work’, they nonetheless make the point that it ‘also performed military and security functions’.²³⁶ Thus, SAS personnel were able to present themselves as allies to the Algerian population, all the while remaining the enemy and sometimes acting as such.²³⁷ Secondly, the French army used the tactic of ‘revers[ing] the loyalties of captured FLN militants, so that after being interrogated they worked for French intelligence’,²³⁸ exemplifying another way in which the French army was able to set Algerians against

²³³ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 85.

²³⁴ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p.47.

²³⁵ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 47.

²³⁶ Martin S. Alexander and J. F. V. Keiger, eds, *France and the Algerian War 1954-62* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 5-6.

²³⁷ For a more detailed explanation of the role of the SAS in the Algerian War, see Alexander and Keiger, *France and the Algerian War 1954-62*, pp. 4-6.

²³⁸ Alexander and Keiger, *France and the Algerian War 1954-1962*, p. 6. For a fuller explanation of the role played by agents formerly working for the Algerian National Liberation Front, the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale), in the Algerian War, see Alexander and Keiger, *France and the Algerian War 1964-62*, pp. 6-7.

other Algerians. Lastly, by depicting enemies of the struggle for independence in traditional Algerian clothing, Begag may be alluding to the role played by the *harkis* (Algerians who fought for the French) in the war. The innocence with which the war is alluded to in the above reference from *Béni*, depicted in a story through the eyes of a young boy, serves to reflect and accentuate Béni's naive and limited knowledge of the conflict. While Béni shows that he is aware of the Algerian War and can identify different participants in it (French soldiers, Algerian militants, *pieds-noirs*), references such as this reveal that the transmission that he has received of the war has been incomplete, reflecting McCormack's observations on the teaching of the war in schools. McCormack notes how pupils often recognise names of participants or groups that were involved in the war, but nothing further, citing the case of the *harkis* as an example. For instance, pupils learn to identify the *harkis*, but do not learn of their massacre after Algerian independence in March 1962.²³⁹ Such an approach to teaching the Algerian War 'leads to a general lack of detailed knowledge on the part of the pupils and no real understanding',²⁴⁰ and this lack of understanding is reflected in Béni's few references to the war over the course of the novel.

The most significant reference to the Algerian War in *Béni* appears towards the end of the novel when Béni and his group of friends are about to drive to the nightclub from which the protagonist is eventually rejected. Uneasy after having lied to his father about where he is going, a reflective Béni thinks about his 'passé déjà si lointain' which unexpectedly includes 'la guerre d'Algérie'.²⁴¹ Reference to the war appears out of place, as it follows references to one of Béni's neighbours and his life at school. Furthermore, Béni has not shown any great preoccupation with the war beforehand. Such a reference to the war suggests that Béni is aware that it forms a part of his personal history, but that it is as significant (or insignificant) to him as the mundane

²³⁹ See McCormack, *Collective Memory*, pp. 93-93.

²⁴⁰ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 89.

²⁴¹ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 161.

elements of his daily life. This idea is demonstrated by Béni's swift dismissal of the war, amongst other things, during a rare moment of contemplation, as follows:

J'ai pensé à mon passé déjà si lointain, à Nick le fils à papa, à l'école et toutes ses choses inutiles, à la guerre d'Algérie, et à plein d'autres choses aussi. Elles se mélangeaient toutes dans ma tête comme si c'étaient plusieurs personnes qui parlaient, m'avertissaient, me conseillaient. Tant pis, j'avais décidé d'aller vers France.²⁴²

Béni demonstrates awareness of the Algerian War and a tentative understanding of its impact on his identity, but he passes over it, showing no desire to explore its significance in any depth. This dismissal of the war is in stark contrast to Amel's attitude to the past in *La Seine était rouge*. In fact, before Amel embarks on her quest to uncover the events of October 1961, she does not show any more knowledge about the Algerian War than Béni does. However, it is this absence of knowledge that drives Amel to plead with her grandmother to tell her about the past in the first chapter of the novel, and which subsequently compels her to uncover for herself the events that are kept from her. In *Béni*, reference to the Algerian War becomes lost amongst references to the mundane elements of the protagonist's life, reflecting a lack of understanding of the continuing relevance of this past and how it is superficially assimilated within, and consequently eclipsed by, dominant French history. Conversely, in *La Seine était rouge* the war is mentioned in the very first chapter and the protagonist, understanding the impact that uncovering the past will have on her identity, actively seeks to confront this past.²⁴³

The aforementioned scene in which Béni refers fleetingly to the Algerian War represents his break with the past. Reference to the war appears as Béni begins to doubt

²⁴² Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 161.

²⁴³ The eclipsing of the Algerian War by dominant French historical narratives, and potential challenge to this, constitutes a key aspect of *La Seine était rouge* and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

his decision to lie to his father and go to the nightclub, as his thoughts ‘se mélangeaient toutes dans [sa] tête comme si c’étaient plusieurs personnes qui parlaient, [l]’avertissaient, [le] conseillaient’.²⁴⁴ Indeed, by lying to his father, who is representative of the first generation that lived through the war, Béni’s break with the past is underlined, and his consideration of the Algerian War is promptly cut short as he declares: ‘Tant pis, j’avais décidé d’aller vers France’.²⁴⁵ As well as being the name of the girl by whom he is infatuated and whom he has arranged to meet at the nightclub, France also ‘personifies the land of acceptance and integration dreamed of by Béni’,²⁴⁶ therefore acting to an extent as a contrast to Béni’s father. While Béni’s father represents the Algerian past, France represents the future in which the Algerian past is forgotten and disregarded. Thus, Béni renounces his ethnic origin and its corresponding history in favour of France (the character) and the search for acceptance in French society, deciding to go ‘vers France’ but also ‘vers *la* France’. However, as we know, this switch in allegiance ends unsuccessfully, with Béni refused entry into the nightclub due to his recognisably Arab features, pointing towards a need to overcome dichotomies such as those brought to light in Begag’s novel if the children of Algerian migrants are to escape the void in between cultures which they occupy and gain a legitimate place in French society. By referring unexpectedly to the Algerian War as Béni doubts his decision to go to the nightclub, Begag points very subtly to the need to gain a wide appreciation of the implications of the past shared by France and Algeria. On the other hand, his protagonist’s swift dismissal of this past and subsequent inability to be accepted in French society (as he fails to meet France in the nightclub) reflects the lack of resolution of such conflicts, as indicated also by the conclusion of *Béni* and the wider historical hesitation on the part of French society to confront the Franco-Algerian past.

²⁴⁴ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 161.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 61.

A further reference to the Algerian War in *Béni* occurs after the aforementioned reference and reinforces Béni's break with the past. On the way to the nightclub, in his anticipation of meeting France there, Béni dreams of a future life with her and wonders how his parents would react, concluding that 'avec le temps, ils finiront par comprendre. La guerre d'Algérie est finie. Faut sortir des abris'.²⁴⁷ Again, this reference to the Algerian War evokes a discontinuation with the past and a desire to forget about the war: only by doing so will Béni's dreams of being with France be fulfilled, and his wishes be accepted by his parents. Such an attitude plays into the hands of the dominant historical narrative that has sought to cover up the Algerian War, which adds a sense of irony to Béni's declaration that 'faut sortir des abris'. Taking into account McCormack's argument that 'recognition of one's history in [...] wider dominant French history is crucial to a sense of feeling French and being accepted as such',²⁴⁸ a reversal of Béni's declaration is required if he is to overcome the imposition of having to choose between his Algerian family and acceptance in French society. Rather than his parents needing to 'sortir des abris', it is French society that needs to bring the Algerian War out of the shadows in order for its ethnic Algerian population to gain a sense of legitimate belonging. Underlining this need, Béni's plans to renounce the past in order to achieve his fantasy life with France fail, as his rejection from the nightclub prevents him from meeting France there, and represents his rejection from French society. In this way, the idea that forgetting the past inhibits the integration of French citizens of Algerian origin is reinforced. At the very least, forgetting the Algerian War certainly does not facilitate the integration of ethnic Algerian minorities in French society, as this erasure keeps the war 'à l'abri' rather than engaging with its wider implications, and especially its significance in providing a sense of belonging to France's ethnic Algerian population in the decades following the end of the war.

²⁴⁷ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 164.

²⁴⁸ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 115.

Reference to the Algerian War is entirely absent from Charef's *Le Thé au harem*: the closest allusions to the colonial period appear in nostalgic reminiscences of life in Algeria before Madjid and his parents migrated to France, but even in these memories there is no explicit reference to French colonial rule. However, a significant difference between Madjid and Béni is that Madjid was born in Algeria. Therefore, we could assume that Madjid has lived through the war and so does not need to show any knowledge of it as it is implicit that he possesses this knowledge. Given the similarities between the protagonist's experience and that of the author himself,²⁴⁹ and that Charef emigrated to France in 1963,²⁵⁰ it is reasonable to assume that Madjid did indeed experience the war. In turn, it is also reasonable to expect at least some memory of the war in the novel, of which there is none.²⁵¹ This absence reflects the wider lack of transmission of the war within French society over the course of the 1980s and, in fact, any inclination to remember is quickly suppressed by Madjid, preventing the possibility of making a connection between his personal history and his present marginalisation.

As in *Béni*, reference to the past in *Le Thé au harem* is unexpected given Madjid's early declaration that he sees himself as 'ni arabe ni français depuis bien longtemps',²⁵² reflecting his in-between status and indicating a resignation that he has left behind his Arab culture. His estrangement from Algeria is underlined beforehand during an argument with his mother, brought about by their inability to understand each other, his mother using both broken French and Arabic, but Madjid not understanding either.²⁵³ As Hargreaves observes with reference to the same scene, Madjid has been 'robbed of [the sense of belonging fundamentally to Algeria] by the migration of [his]

²⁴⁹ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 48. Hargreaves also comments on the 'briefer portraits of Algeria' in *Le Thé au harem*, indicating that these also are 'based on personal experiences there'. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 49.

²⁵⁰ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 13.

²⁵¹ Charef does engage in detail with the Algerian War in his most recent novel, *À bras-le-cœur* (2006). The shift from no reference to the war in Charef's first novel to explicit reference in his latest reflects the greater confrontation with the war from the 1990s onwards which this thesis seeks to illustrate.

²⁵² Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 17.

²⁵³ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, pp. 16-17.

parents',²⁵⁴ emphasising the notion that Madjid has been cut off from Algeria and Arab culture (as we have already seen, Béni's break with his culture of origin is also signalled by a clash with a parent, his father). However, Madjid allows himself a degree of nostalgia later on in the novel, when he reflects on his initial migration to France and his family's first French home in a Nanterre *bidonville*.²⁵⁵ This reflection leads him to reminisce about his Algerian childhood, expressing a preference for life in Algeria than in the cold, rundown *bidonvilles* of the Paris suburbs.²⁵⁶ Going on to outline his trajectory from Algeria, to *bidonville*, to HLM block, Madjid triggers 'les images [qui] défilent à toute allure dans sa tête'.²⁵⁷ However, he discontinues the eliciting of these memories, stating that 'il n'a pas le cœur à fouiller dans sa mémoire',²⁵⁸ which indicates that remembering requires too much energy and underlines McCormack's argument that confronting the past constitutes a 'long and arduous process',²⁵⁹ one upon which Madjid is not willing to embark. This unexpected confrontation with the past and subsequent discontinuation of memory recalls Béni's moment of reflection on the way to the nightclub when he considers the Algerian War, only to cut his thoughts short and continue on his path 'vers France'.²⁶⁰ While it was posited that Béni's brief consideration of the Algerian War reflected the wider lack of transmission of the war in French society, Madjid's inhibition of memory suggests a desire to forget the painful rupture with Algeria brought about by migration, and may also point to reasons for the stark absence of the Algerian War from Charef's novel. As McCormack argues, sometimes 'memories have been repressed for so long that voicing them is

²⁵⁴ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 53.

²⁵⁵ Incidentally, Madjid's *bidonville* is located on rue de la Folie. La Folie is also the name of the *bidonville* in *La Seine était rouge* where Amel's mother grew up. See Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 25. A Nanterre suburb is also where the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* grew up. See Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 11. Thus, a shared history can be detected amongst the characters in the primary texts, underlining the common nature of the themes that emerge from the primary corpus and which this thesis explores.

²⁵⁶ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 115.

²⁵⁷ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 120.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 156.

²⁶⁰ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 161.

impossible',²⁶¹ underlining the way in which silence on the Algerian War may also be perpetuated by people of Algerian origin as well as French state institutions.

Reinforcing the notion that silence is also fostered by Algerian migrants, Laronde argues that it is the generation of immigration, of which Madjid is a part, which 'déclencherait le processus d'amnésie, de par sa nature silencieuse héritée d'un long passé colonial prolongé par la situation d'exil'.²⁶² Thus, Madjid's silence and desire to forget is the result of the colonial past that he inherits and embodies, the legacy of which manifests itself, furthermore, in his present exile as he is excluded from dominant society, underlining the impact of the past, and oppositions inherited from it, on the present.

Madjid's exile is evident in the in-between status which he occupies, belonging neither to French nor Algerian culture and finding it impossible to be 'unequivocally rooted in a single territorial base'.²⁶³ Furthermore, this exile is indicative of the repetition of colonial oppositions which can be discerned in Madjid's physical and figurative exclusion from dominant French society. Such exile and exclusion maintains the silence and desire to forget on the part of Algerian migrants and their children, reinforcing the vicious circle in which Madjid is trapped, as he inhibits his own memory due to the continuing exclusion that he suffers. This exclusion is twofold, comprising his exclusion from a legitimate place in French society and an exclusion of his history from dominant French history, both of which work in tandem to entrap Madjid in a vicious circle from which he can only escape when the far-reaching implications of the Franco-Algerian past are confronted by all levels of French society. Madjid's silence, perpetuated by his entrapment in a state of exile, colludes with the official state silence with regard to the Algerian War which, in turn, maintains Madjid's exile and silence, reflecting the vicious circle in which Madjid is trapped.

²⁶¹ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 121.

²⁶² Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 149.

²⁶³ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 53.

As in *Le Thé au harem*, the Algerian War is absent from *La Noce des fous*, although a clearer reference to the colonial past does appear in Mounsi's novel as the narrator introduces the grey, violent, marginalised world to which he belongs in the opening chapters. The reference to colonisation serves to emphasise the opposition between dominant, central French society and the immigrant periphery, an opposition inherited from the time when 'le vent des Aurès faisait claquer des drapeaux bleu, blanc, rouge, au sommet du Djurdjura'.²⁶⁴ The narrator evokes the neglected space occupied by the inhabitants of the periphery, and suggests that they are only remembered when 'des hommes au visage drapé de blanc, cachant leur haine sous l'uniforme d'une cagoule' pay them unwelcome visits, depicting in this way an image of the French authorities allowing themselves to revisit the colonial period.²⁶⁵ Not only is there an opposition in terms of two social groups being separated from each other, but also in terms of an antagonism directed towards the descendants of colonised subjects from the descendants of the colonisers. Furthermore, the author's explicit reference to places in Algeria transposes the formerly colonised land and the oppositions existing within it during the colonial period to the former metropolitan centre, enhancing the impression that a repetition of conflicts inherited from colonialism takes place in French society.

The reference to the colonial period in *La Noce des fous* suggests that the narrator-protagonist has a decent knowledge of the Algerian War, which is underlined by the narrator's allusion to military barracks ('la nostalgie des casernes').²⁶⁶ However, this apparent knowledge does not distract from the subsequent stark absence of references to the colonial past and the war in the remainder of the novel. Indeed, the early reference to Algeria and the colonial period makes the ensuing absence of this past even more striking. While the colonial past may be absent from the novel, History certainly is not. *La Noce des fous* is profoundly characterised by a preoccupation with a

²⁶⁴ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 19.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 19.

grander notion of History and antiquity, references to which recur throughout the novel, for example in the description of the protagonist's *cit *, which is 'si loin des Grecs, des chevaux, des chariots, de la terre o  sont apparus des dieux parmi des colonnes   demi bris es qui gardent la beaut  d'une ruine immortelle'.²⁶⁷ Rather than equate the *cit * to this grand image of ancient Greece, the narrator distances the world to which he belongs from the ancient world. His world is far from 'la beaut  d'une ruine immortelle', and such an antithesis recurs when the protagonist enters his cell in a young offenders' institution, as follows:

Les graffiti m'ouvraient aux traces des hommes *fig s* dans l'ombre des ruines, aux signes   peine *esquiss s* des cavernes, sous la glaise, dans la terre grise des si cles. *Gribouillages* de mains d'enfants tach es d'encre ou de craie, mots mal *taill s* qui forment l'azur au bout des murs. Infl chir son destin de l'envo tement des hi roglyphes profond ment *creus s* dans le pl tre, *entailler* sa chair de *sillons* comme en *tracent* les roues des chariots dans la boue. Plus d muni que les hommes des cavernes, *greffer* un signe avec un clou rouill  parmi les autres signes pour *laisser l'empreinte* d'un chagrin   l'inconnu qui viendra, un jour, moisir   son tour dans ce trou, afin qu'il sache qu'il n'est pas seul.²⁶⁸

In the above passage, images of carving and engraving (indicated in italics) are juxtaposed with references to history and antiquity, such as 'l'ombre des ruines', 'la terre grise des si cles' and 'l'envo tement des hi roglyphes'. Such a juxtaposition puts forward the notion that the marginalised have to try and carve their existence into History because they are excluded from History. Though this constitutes a wider conception of History, the early reference to the colonial period suggests that the history shared by France and Algeria, a history that is specific to the protagonist, lies subdued, but not completely extinguished, beneath the overriding preoccupation with ancient

²⁶⁷ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 17.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15. My italics.

history. Consequently, the novel's focus on ancient history, a history that is forever firmly set in the universal memory and that overwhelms the specific history of the protagonist, serves as a constant reminder that, in contrast, the protagonist's history is erased from dominant French history. The history of the protagonist lies in the shadow of History, 'l'ombre des ruines', as opposed to constituting 'la beauté d'une ruine immortelle', ancient history that has been immortalised in ruins. Furthermore, the preoccupation with History over the course of *La Noce des fous*, and the overwhelming of the protagonist's personal history in a wider conception of History, works in tandem with the expression of the protagonist's marginalisation, whether this be in the depiction of his peripheral *cit * or in his incarceration, emphasising the link between the exclusion of one's history from dominant history and one's own exclusion from dominant society.

The absence of a sustained confrontation with the Algerian War and the wider past shared by France and Algeria in *B ni*, *Le Th  au harem*, and *La Noce des fous* is indicative of the wider lack of transmission of the war in French society, especially over the course of the 1980s, two of the three novels (*B ni* and *Le Th  au harem*) having been published in this decade, and *La Noce des fous* having been published no more than a year after the end of the decade (so probably written within that decade). In each text, engagement, or lack of it, with Franco-Algerian history points towards the exclusion of the respective protagonists from dominant French society and identity, exemplifying the notion that 'recognition of one's history in French history and an integration of individual, family, and group histories into the wider dominant French history is crucial to a sense of feeling French and being accepted as such':²⁶⁹ the exclusion of Franco-Algerian history from dominant French history initiates and fosters the exclusion of those who embody and inherit the Franco-Algerian past. Conversely, reference to the past shared by France and Algeria in *Le Gone du Cha ba* has the effect

²⁶⁹ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 115.

of giving the protagonist ‘a new sense of respect for the cultural heritage of North Africa’,²⁷⁰ which in turn has the effect of elevating his sense of self-worth. Specifically, it is young Azouz’s encounter with a teacher at his new school, Monsieur Loubon, that has this effect on him, as M. Loubon is a *pied-noir* and so shares Azouz’s attachment to Algeria. Up to this point, there has been very little trace of the colonial past in the novel, and Azouz’s school experiences have often provoked a sense of shame in him,²⁷¹ as they highlight his difference from the majority ethnic population. However, Monsieur Loubon’s habit of engaging Azouz in discussions about himself, his family, and Algeria in class, though a little embarrassing, results in providing Azouz with a greater knowledge and appreciation of his culture of origin. The new sense of self-worth that Loubon confers upon Azouz is underlined by a scene in which the teacher reprimands another member of the class for associating Arabs with savages,²⁷² and culminates when Loubon provides the springboard for Azouz to write an essay about racism. This essay, on a topic that Azouz has wanted to tackle for a long time (given the concerns raised in *Le Gone du Chaâba*, the protagonist’s desire to write an essay about racism stems from his personal experience as a member of an ethnic minority, and indeed reflects Begag’s own project in writing the novel in the first place), is awarded the highest mark in the class by Monsieur Loubon, bestowing upon Azouz a sense of great pride which is in stark contrast to the sense of shame that he endures at previous points in the novel.

In this way, the greater appreciation and understanding of the past that Monsieur Loubon encourages in Azouz leads to the protagonist experiencing a sense of self-worth which has been largely unfamiliar to him over the course of the novel. Consequently, his ethnic difference is no longer perceived as a hindrance, as it had been previously. Indeed, writing about his ethnic difference has allowed him, ‘le seul Arabe de la

²⁷⁰ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 78.

²⁷¹ See for example Azouz’s reactions to the ‘leçons de morale’ at his old school. Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, pp. 56-57. This aspect of the novel will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

²⁷² See Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, pp. 210-11.

classe',²⁷³ to gain the highest mark in his class. Thus, for the first time, possessing ethnic difference is presented as an advantage, as it enables Azouz to succeed at school. This association between the appreciation of personal history and ethnic origin contrasts to the connection between a lack of engagement with the past and a perpetuation of exclusion that we encounter in *Béni*, *Le Thé au harem*, and *La Noce des fous*. In this way, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, though itself not engaging extensively with the Algerian War and colonialism, points to the significance of confronting the past if the children of Algerian migrants are to conceive of a legitimate place for themselves in French society.

Dystopian Endings

Despite occasional instances which confront history and, consequently, point towards the potential resolution of oppositions inherited from the past, analysis of the conclusions of the primary texts causes a sense of continuing uncertainty and pessimism to prevail over the primary corpus, reflecting McCormack's observation that 'the sheer weight of forgetting and occlusion acts as a significant break on the potential of [...] memory work'.²⁷⁴ The significance of confronting the past, to which novels such as *Le Gone du Chaâba* point, continues to be hindered and outweighed by the wider historical hesitation to confront the past shared by France and Algeria in French society. Examination of the conclusions of the remainder of the primary texts reinforces the notion that they are characterised by a lack of resolution of the concerns that they introduce at their outset, reflecting the uneasy engagement with the Algerian War and colonialism on the part of French society itself.

²⁷³ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 216.

²⁷⁴ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 161. McCormack also specifies that literature constitutes part of this 'memory work'.

Like *La Noce des fous*, *Béni*, and *Le Gone du Chaâba*, two more novels included in the primary corpus end with departures: *Le Thé au harem* and *Fatima*. Although the end of *Le Thé au harem* ends with a show of solidarity, as the police van driving Madjid away is stopped by his best friend, Pat, who joins him in the police van, the novel nevertheless concludes on a pessimistic note. Having had the opportunity to escape the police, which is precisely what the rest of his group of friends does, Madjid, ‘las, dégoûté, fatigué’,²⁷⁵ cannot bring himself to attempt to escape his fate any longer. He surrenders without putting up any resistance, and the novel ends on the inconclusive image of the police van departing into the night.²⁷⁶ Though we do not find out exactly what becomes of Madjid, the writer creates negative implications about his future beyond the novel’s end, as ‘prison [...] beckons forbiddingly’ at the text’s conclusion.²⁷⁷ Despite his evasion of the law throughout the novel, Madjid’s fate finally catches up with him and leads him towards a bleak, uncertain future. Furthermore, the depiction of Madjid at the end of the novel as ‘las, dégoûté, fatigué’, and his subsequent lack of resistance to his arrest, functions as a realisation of the hopelessness to which the novel points at its outset, illustrated by Charef’s ironic early observation that ‘tout est devant [Madjid], le désespoir’.²⁷⁸ This mirroring effect recalls the way in which the endings of both *La Noce des fous* and *Béni* hark back to the concerns presented in their opening pages and, coupled with the inconclusive ending of the novel, creates the impression that Madjid, like Mounsi’s and Begag’s protagonists, is trapped in a vicious circle. In other words, the conclusion we draw at the end of *Le Thé au harem* is that Madjid’s delinquency will continue, and that the end of the novel will become the beginning, and continue in the same vein.

²⁷⁵ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 184.

²⁷⁶ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 185.

²⁷⁷ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 50.

²⁷⁸ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 11. Unlike the common expression of ‘having one’s while life to look forward to’, it appears that for the marginalised children of Algerian migrants, all that is ahead is ‘le désespoir’.

The ending of *Fatima* is no more conclusive, as the reader is left with the image of Dalila's mother crying after her daughter has left home. The fact that Dalila has left home does not come as a surprise, as we are told of this decision at the very beginning of the novel. Therefore, it is not the departure itself that signals an uncertain and pessimistic conclusion (on the contrary, Dalila's decision to leave is a positive act since she does so to escape the physical aggression of her father), but rather the lack of any indication of what the future holds for Dalila after she leaves home, as the reader is not made aware of her fate. Thus, while the conclusion of *Fatima* may create an impression of uncertainty in that Dalila's fate is not made clear, it does not necessarily point towards a pessimistic future. Indeed, by leaving home, Dalila takes control of 'l'espace de [sa] propre mobilité',²⁷⁹ which she is denied by the adherence to culturally specific Algerian values in her family. In this way, *Fatima* points towards the possibility of surmounting conflicts imposed by a shared past, which contributes to the large presence of populations of ex-colonial origin in France, as Dalila allows herself the possibility to define a space of her own in French society on her own terms. Underlining Dalila's capacity to overcome such conflicts, Begag and Chaouite argue that women of North African origin are well-placed to do just that, stating that they 'deviennent celles par qui les changements arrivent avec force au sein de la famille comme au sein de la société'.²⁸⁰ Due to suffering a double oppression, that of being marginalised from French society and identity due to their ethnic origin and that of being 'contrôlées, immobilisées' by their culture at home,²⁸¹ women of North African origin forcefully emphasise the need to escape such oppression which, furthermore, points to the significance of *Fatima* in complementing and developing the concerns expressed by the primary corpus on the whole. By overcoming patriarchal oppression, the female figure also enables escape from marginalisation based on ethnicity, inherited from colonialism,

²⁷⁹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 117.

²⁸⁰ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 116.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

thus becoming the agent of her own subjectivity. By contrast, and somewhat ironically, the male characters we encounter in the primary corpus remain the object and victims of structures set in place in the colonial era, and are seemingly stripped of the power to act in any way so as to change this condition.²⁸² In this way, Sebbar's texts and their female protagonists act as counterpoints to the works of the three male authors studied in this thesis and their male protagonists, opening up the possibility to escape the oppression suffered by all these characters. Nevertheless, the lack of finality at the end of *Fatima* indicates that the potential resolution to which it points will not come to pass in the immediate future, and this lack of immediate resolution can be discerned amongst the majority of the remainder of the primary texts, all of which were published after *Fatima*.

The reluctance of the primary texts to present their protagonists successfully and definitively overcoming the conflicts that they face and attaining acceptance within dominant French society and identity is reflected by the enduring exclusion of youths of North African origin. According to Dine, this continuing exclusion is illustrated by the 'self-consciously multicultural *ouverture*' of Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency,²⁸³ which elevates appointments to government, such as that of Rachida Dati, Minister of Justice until 2009 and of North African origin, as examples to follow when, in fact, such appointments serve as 'the exception that proves the rule'.²⁸⁴ Indeed, the role of 'token Beur' in the French government was a position in which Begag found himself when he was appointed Minister for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity in 2005, a position from which he resigned in 2007 after realising the merely 'symbolic' nature of his appointment.²⁸⁵ Rather than prove that ethnic minorities have been successfully integrated, this kind of initiative on the part of the government is set up merely to

²⁸² This continuous entrapment suffered by male characters will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, in which it will be argued that Charef's and Mounsi's protagonists in particular are condemned to a never-ending journey, represented by their seemingly instinctive inclination to wander without an ultimate purpose or destination in sight.

²⁸³ Dine, 'Decolonizing the Republic', p. 177.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ See Reeck, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond*, pp. 25-26.

disguise the reality that the majority of people of North African origin remain non-integrated, as Dine argues by stating that such appointments serve only to highlight their own ‘miraculous’, and thus ‘highly exceptional’ nature.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, appointments to government such as those of Dati and Begag, as merely ‘symbolic’ appointments, do not help to address the non-integration of ethnic minorities since they are only superficial and do not fulfil the purpose of their appointment in the first place, as the example of Begag in particular illustrates. As Minister for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity, Begag’s ‘token’ appointment ultimately highlighted an apathetic attitude towards equal opportunity on the part of the French government, illustrating the continuing struggle against exclusion from French society faced by ethnic minorities, to which the lack of resolution of the primary texts also points.

The ‘antisocial’, non-integrated reality of the majority of France’s ethnic Algerian citizens, to which Dine refers,²⁸⁷ is also reflected in the primary corpus. In *Le Thé au harem*, for example, Madjid is given the opportunity to put an end to his delinquency, and even shows a desire to do so, by getting a job. Though at first apparently willing to do the job and proficient at it, he follows Pat in quitting on his first day,²⁸⁸ choosing to return to a life of delinquency, which is emphasised when Pat and Madjid break into and burgle the changing rooms of a tennis club immediately after quitting their jobs.²⁸⁹ Similarly emphasising the antisocial, non-integrated existence of its protagonist, *La Noce des fous* outlines his own trajectory from the peripheral *banlieues* of Paris, to imprisonment in a young offenders’ institution, to working as a gigolo, before he returns to a life of deprivation on the margins prior to his eventual death. The protagonist’s life of petty crime in *Le Voyage des âmes* also leads him to spend a period in a young offenders’ institution. Such examples provide contrasts to

²⁸⁶ Dine, ‘Decolonizing the Republic’, p. 177.

²⁸⁷ See Dine, ‘Decolonizing the Republic’, p. 177.

²⁸⁸ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, pp. 167-70.

²⁸⁹ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, pp. 171-72.

“spectacular” examples of North African integration²⁹⁰ (as well as referring to Rachida Dati, Dine also cites the examples of France’s 1998 football World Cup hero Zinedine Zidane and the comedian and actor Djamel Debbouze, who recently appeared in Rachid Bouchareb’s controversial 2010 film on the Algerian War, *Hors la loi*), and reflect Dine’s observation that the latter are exceptional and serve to highlight their own unique nature.

While the protagonists of *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* demonstrate the antisocial nature of France’s non-integrated Algerian population, the eponymous protagonist of *Béni* exemplifies that even those who show a ‘miraculous’ aptitude to do well in school are not able to integrate. For example, Béni’s good command of the French language is evident throughout the text as he regularly corrects his friends’ use of French, setting him apart from his peers.²⁹¹ Furthermore, the BEPC (Brevet d’études du premier cycle)²⁹² qualification that Béni receives is revealed to be the ‘premier diplôme de taille dans la famille’,²⁹³ accentuating the unique, ‘miraculous’ nature of his academic exploits as the son of a North African migrant. These observations are further emphasised by Béni’s reaction to his achievement, as follows: ‘Un génie, un gentil, un plein d’ambition, plein de promesses, protégé de Dieu, un exemplaire unique’.²⁹⁴ Béni is presented as a genius and given a divine aura, all of which confirms that he is ‘un exemplaire unique’. However, despite this academic promise and ambition, Béni is unable to surmount the restrictions imposed upon him due to his ethnic difference, as exemplified by the scene at the end of the novel in which he is refused entry into a nightclub due to his origins. In this way, Béni reflects the inability of the children of

²⁹⁰ Dine, ‘Decolonizing the Republic’, p. 177.

²⁹¹ See for example Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 73.

²⁹² An old French school certificate roughly equivalent to English GCSE and eventually succeeded by the DNB (Diplôme national du brevet).

²⁹³ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 35.

²⁹⁴ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 35.

North African migrants to perform the ‘miracle’ of transcending boundaries reinforced by racism and integrating into French society, as argued by Dine:

The overwhelming majority of France’s “Arabs” are clearly not able to perform miracles [...] including specifically that of being sufficiently visibly integrated to earn the grudging respect not only of “racists”, but also of those who express more subtly their doubts regarding the Republic’s capacity to assimilate non-European minorities.²⁹⁵

Thus, the notion that non-European minorities are incompatible with the very structure of the French Republic, inherited from the end of the Algerian War,²⁹⁶ continues to prove a critical factor in the enduring marginalisation of the children of Algerian migrants. The lack of any resolution offered regarding the uncertain, peripheral place occupied by the characters we encounter in the primary corpus points towards the failure of subsequent French governments to address the issues brought to light in these texts, which remain present in French society. In this way, the texts broaden our understanding of the past shared by France and Algeria and the impact of its legacy on contemporary France.

One of the more recent novels to be included in the primary corpus, Mounsi’s *Le Voyage des âmes*, shows no sign of going against the trend to avoid a sense of resolution, epitomised by the very fact that the novel ends on a question. Furthermore, the image upon which the narrative concludes is a pessimistic one, as follows: ‘Ma grand-mère me contait l’eau claire d’un jardin, une eau si fraîche que ceux qui en buvaient avaient en eux la jeunesse éternelle. Peut-être que la source de ce jardin s’est tarie?’²⁹⁷ As the narrator-protagonist lies feverish and delirious on his bed, he evokes the apparently hopeful image of eternal youth, but the subsequent final sentence

²⁹⁵ Dine, ‘Decolonizing the Republic’, p. 178.

²⁹⁶ See Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, p. 15.

²⁹⁷ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 163.

emphatically dispels any optimism, as the narrator despairingly implies that any source of hope has dried up. The juxtaposition of the final two sentences, sharply contrasting the image of hope with the final image of hopelessness, reinforces the pessimism on which the novel concludes.

The way in which Mounsi ends the novel on a question mark gives it an additional sense of negative continuity, as opposed to the finality which would have been indicated by a full stop: as such, the pessimism of the novel's end is conveyed beyond its conclusion. Just as the protagonist's narration from the beyond at the end of *La Noce des fous* emphasises the uncertain place he occupies in death, reflecting the impression of his non-existence when he was alive, the conclusion of *Le Voyage des âmes* on a question immortalises the hopelessness of the final image. That is not to say that the conclusion of *Le Voyage des âmes* bestows immortality on the protagonist: rather, it emphasises the perpetuation of the uncertain space that he occupies, and that he will continue to occupy beyond the novel's end. Again, such a conclusion takes us back to the beginning of the narrative, during which the narrator affirmed that 'celui que je suis devenu n'a plus de nom. Il est moins qu'une ombre, moins qu'une trace, moins qu'un fantôme'.²⁹⁸ As the narrator declares at the outset of the novel, he has, by the end of the novel, been engulfed by uncertainty and doubt: he has become merely a trace, shadow, or ghost of himself, and this mirroring effect evokes the vicious circle in which he is trapped. Significantly, a reason for the impression of non-existence that engulfs the narrator is his migration from Algeria to France, as he remembers his Algerian childhood at the beginning of the novel before going on to state that 'celui que je suis devenu n'a plus de nom',²⁹⁹ suggesting that he has lost himself in the process of his migration. Therefore, the uncertain space occupied by the narrator-protagonist becomes a result of the uneasy relationship between France and Algeria, which is shaped by a

²⁹⁸ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 11.

²⁹⁹ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 11.

history of colonisation, war, and immigration. As has been argued over the course of this chapter, the hesitation to confront the wider implications of such a past results in the confinement of those who embody this history of conflict in a figurative and physical no man's land, unable to overcome their marginalisation from French society, identity, and culture.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its greater attention to the past from its very outset and its indication of the protagonist's desire to avoid succumbing to the historical transmission of silence with regard to the Algerian War, *La Seine était rouge* is the only text included in the primary corpus that points towards a more optimistic future at its conclusion (although, again, it does not present a definitive resolution, but only indicates the potentiality of such a future). Having been made aware, over the course of the novel, of the events of 17 October 1961 (itself illustrating that Amel has been successful, at least to some extent, in confronting the past), Amel finds herself in Alexandria with Omer, who has accompanied her on her quest to uncover the past. There, they also meet Louis, another key character in fostering the memory of October 1961 over the course of the text. According to Michael Rothberg, the crucial point in this final scene is Omer's reference to, and adaptation of, Sophocles's *Antigone*.³⁰⁰ In Sophocles's tragedy, the eponymous heroine attempts to have her brother, Polynices, buried, despite him being declared a traitor and, thus, unworthy of burial in the kingdom, Thebes. Polynices had died in a battle with Eteocles, Polynices's and Antigone's other sibling, who also died in the fight. Omer adapts Sophocles's tragedy as follows:

³⁰⁰ See Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 305-06.

C'est l'histoire d'une fille qui creuse la tombe de ses frères la nuit, sur la colline, elle s'acharne, la terre est dure, des soldats surveillent les corps, des frères jumeaux, exécutés. L'armée a exposé les cadavres sur la place du village.³⁰¹

As Rothberg observes, rather than place the (now twin) brothers in opposition, one as the traitor, one as the son loyal to Thebes, Omer evokes the burial of both the executed brothers, suggesting 'the impossibility of clearly assigning sides to the just and unjust', and to good and evil: as far as the events of 17 October 1961 are concerned, 'there are too many dead and the dead are, in fact, too closely related to each other'.³⁰² In this way, Rothberg argues that *La Seine était rouge* puts forward the 'ethical imperative to cover over the dead, to reinstate the possibility of mourning',³⁰³ which signals not only confronting the past, but the possibility of finally providing resolution of the past. Underlining this notion, Rothberg goes on to note that, in *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar seeks 'not the endless uncovering of more and more layers of history, but an engagement with the fundamental situations that produce violence' which, ultimately, points towards 'the possibility of building new places of concord'.³⁰⁴ Thus, only by confronting the Algerian War in its entirety, including its darkest aspects (such as the police oppression of 17 October 1961), and engaging with the wider implications of the war will the conflicts inherited from it finally begin to be surmounted.

While by no means offering a definitive resolution to these inherited conflicts – indeed, events since the publication of *La Seine était rouge* (the abandonment of the France-Algeria football match in 2001, the 2005 riots, the passing of the controversial law obliging schools to teach the 'positive' aspects of colonialism) suggest that any resolution of the past is only in its early stages – Sebbar's novel indicates the possibility of coming to terms with the past to a greater extent than any of the other texts included

³⁰¹ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 102.

³⁰² Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 306.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

in the primary corpus. Rather than imply a failure on the part of those texts that do not engage with the past to this extent, such a comparison recalls Laronde's observation that each text which engages with such postcolonial issues constitutes a step in the lengthy process of coming to terms with the past.³⁰⁵ The primary texts published prior to *La Seine était rouge* exemplify this process, as they bring to light the history of Algerian migration to France, which is an inextricable aspect of the wider history of colonisation and the Algerian War, confronted subsequently by *La Seine était rouge*, which itself fosters the continued engagement with the Franco-Algerian past. Thus, taken together, the texts with which this thesis engages shed light on the ways in which the gradual process of coming to terms with the past has manifested itself over the course of the two decades in which the texts were published, and promote the need for greater confrontation with this past in the future.

Over the course of this chapter, it has been argued that the hesitation to confront history is a contributing factor to the non-integration of the children of Algerian migrants in dominant French society and identity. Indeed, events such as the pitch invasion by ethnic Algerian youths during the France-Algeria football match in 2001 and the 2005 riots suggest that questions of integration and identity have continued to represent a major concern in French society, as evidenced also by the government's more recent, and largely unsuccessful, initiation of a debate on national identity in 2010.³⁰⁶ In the following chapter, these questions of integration and assimilation will be examined in further detail, with reference to the French Republic's definition of nationhood and to the ways in which the primary corpus illustrates attempts by the protagonists to conform to such definitions and affirm their presence within dominant French society and identity.

³⁰⁵ See Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 152.

³⁰⁶ For a critique of the debate on national identity, see Sophie Landrin and Laetitia Van Eeckhout, 'Identité nationale: M. Fillon cherche une voie de sortie', *Le Monde*, 9 February 2010, p. 9.

Chapter 2

(In)Visibilisation: Affirming Ethnic Difference and Confronting Marginalisation

The previous chapter established that, due to their marginalisation, people of Algerian origin are already ‘invisible’ in France whether they choose to be or not. This invisibility is perpetuated by the repetition of oppositions inherited from the colonial past, which is itself engendered by the lack of confrontation with this past in French society and manifests itself in the vicious circles in which the majority of the protagonists of the primary texts are trapped. This chapter will analyse the ways in which characters from the primary texts attempt to escape this invisibility and, in so doing, the terms *invisibilisation* and *visibilisation* coined by Begag and Chaouite will be explored in order to reveal the complexities, and potential contradictions, that are inherent within them.

Begag and Chaouite put forward two opposing ways in which migrants may react to their new circumstances in a foreign country, as follows:

Se cacher un peu plus, ce que l’on pourra appeler l’“*invisibilisation*”; se montrer un peu plus en affirmant sa présence et en recherchant la confrontation: la “*visibilisation*”. Tel immigré pourra chercher à se détacher de sa communauté d’appartenance ou au contraire à renforcer ses liens avec elle.³⁰⁷

However, after having proposed such a clear dichotomy of these two options for migrants, Begag and Chaouite go on to clarify that every migrant perceives his/her new situation differently. Indeed, the notion that ‘un immigré n’est pas égal à un autre immigré’ is extended to reject altogether the idea that a North African community exists in France, since ‘un immigré plus un autre immigré ne constituent pas automatiquement

³⁰⁷ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d’identité*, pp. 58-59. My italics.

une communauté d'immigrés [...] les sociétés ne sauraient être réduites à des additions d'individus'.³⁰⁸ Thus, already, Begag and Chaouite suggest that the strategies which they outline with regard to migrants integrating into their new culture or remaining non-integrated are more complex than at first intimated, since the very notion of an immigrant community is problematic. Indeed, this notion can be extended to apply to the disparity that exists within literature by Franco-Algerian authors, a selection of which is examined in this thesis and underlines this disparity. Just as 'un immigré n'est pas égal à un autre immigré', one Franco-Algerian novel is not equal to another, and the accumulation of more than one of these novels does not comprise a homogeneous body of Franco-Algerian literature. As such, this thesis does not claim to make all-encompassing statements about Franco-Algerian literature, but rather offers a close analysis of key texts within a specific context – the manifestation of the memory of the Algerian War from the 1980s to the end of the 1990s, when the French government officially recognised the war.

Taking the notion that each migrant is different and will react to his/her new situation in his/her own way, it becomes perceivable that the opposition of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation* is insufficient when we consider the multiple ways in which migrants, and their children, may react to their foreignness and, over the course of this chapter, it will be highlighted that these two apparently opposing terms in fact overlap to a large degree. Therefore, it emerges that there is not a North African or Algerian community in France of which the people it comprises 'invisibilise' or 'visibilise' themselves: there are only people of North African or Algerian origin living in France who, depending on how they perceive 'la définition de [leurs] places dans la société française', try to establish their 'être-au-monde'.³⁰⁹ In this way, they seek to escape the 'non-existence' in which, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the majority of

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

³⁰⁹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 59.

protagonists in the primary texts are trapped. This chapter will examine the distinct ways in which characters we encounter in the primary corpus attempt to affirm their presence in French society, with reference to Begag's and Chaouite's *visibilisation/invisibilisation* dichotomy, and will analyse the extent to which the complexities, contradictions, and overlaps of this dichotomy affect the possibility of the children of Algerian migrants establishing their legitimate presence in a society in which they were brought up, and in which many of them were born.

The challenge posed by Begag and Chaouite to the concept that a North African community even exists in France is reflected in Charef's *Le Thé au harem*, a text in which the main character is of North African origin, but which is not necessarily about a North African community. Indeed, Madjid's ethnic origin is almost of secondary importance, as the novel takes as its main preoccupation the harshness of life on the margins of Paris (although the *banlieues* are, of course, closely and implicitly associated with French populations of ex-colonial origin). The marginalised community in Charef's text includes people of North African origin and non-North African immigrant origin, but also people belonging to the white, majority ethnic French population. This disparity can be seen in Madjid's own group of friends: Bengston is Antillean; James and Bibiche are both described as 'Algérien né en France'; Anita is 'née de père Algérien et de mère française'; and three members of the group, Pat, Thierry and Jean-Marc, are not defined at all by their ethnic origin, leading us to assume that they belong to the majority ethnic population.³¹⁰ While the ethnic backgrounds of the latter three characters are left out by Charef, we still learn that Thierry lives in a cellar, having been kicked out of his home by his father, and that Pat is a 'grande gueule de première et

³¹⁰ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, pp. 26-27. The description of Anita recalls Sebbar's cultural background, though Sebbar differs from Madjid and his group of friends in that she did not grow up in France, and did not experience the kind of physical marginalisation suffered by these characters thanks to a relatively privileged, bourgeois background, which is further testament to the complex, heterogeneous nature of France's Franco-Algerian population.

dernier de classe',³¹¹ ascribing the same 'antisocial' status usually reserved for people of immigrant origin to members of the group who we assume belong to the majority ethnic population. Thus, in Charef's text, the marginalised community does not equate to a North African (nor exclusively immigrant) community and, consequently, the novel eradicates notions of the 'invisible' periphery as a space reserved solely for people of migrant origin, who must then either choose to remain on the margins, or make themselves 'visible' by seeking to affirm their presence in dominant, central society. Indeed, such notions strengthen the division between the disadvantaged, 'immigrant' periphery and the privileged, white, majority ethnic centre, setting the latter up as a space to which to aspire but, as we shall see, ultimately unattainable for those who are figuratively, as well as literally, excluded from dominant French society and identity due to their ethnicity.

The disparity of France's Franco-Algerian population is further exemplified when we compare novels such as Charef's to Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. Though the protagonist, Amel, is similar to Madjid in that she is of Algerian origin and lives in the peripheral suburbs of Paris, Amel enjoys a relatively sheltered existence, as opposed to the deprivation and volatility depicted in *Le Thé au harem*, and does not occupy a marginalised space in society in the sense that Madjid does. The figurative barrier between centre and periphery which detaches Madjid from central, dominant French society is crossed without great constraint by Amel, who leaves the periphery to uncover the events of 17 October 1961 in the centre of Paris. Moreover, Amel's quest in Sebbar's text is not one that seeks identification with any existing community or individuals. In fact, she seeks identification with a past that has been denied to her, but which can help her discover 'la définition de ses places dans la société française' and, subsequently, her 'être-au-monde'.³¹² Thus, the concept of a homogeneous North

³¹¹ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, pp. 26-27.

³¹² Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 59.

African community is proven to be deceptive and elusive both within individual novels, as evidenced by the disparity in the cultural origins of the marginalised characters in *Le Thé au harem*, and across the spread of primary texts, taking into account the difference between Madjid's imprisonment on French society's periphery and Amel's relative ease of mobility from periphery to centre. It is therefore unsurprising that characters such as Amel and Madjid attempt to achieve what is a parallel goal – overcoming their foreignness and marginalisation and affirming their presence in French society (making themselves 'visible') – in different ways, with varying degrees of success, and it is to these attempts and their outcomes that the analysis will now turn.

Specifically, the ways in which the protagonists of Begag's first two novels, *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni*, seek to identify with a pre-conceived definition of French nationality will be examined in the first part of the chapter, in order to illustrate the way in which the Republic's conception of nationhood encourages the invisibilisation of ethnic difference as a prerequisite for successful integration. The analysis then turns to Sebbar's *Fatima*, which puts forward the possibility of retaining ethnic difference in order to affirm one's presence in French society and, thus, advocates the elimination of dichotomies which further entrap the children of migrants in a life of invisibility. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of *Le Thé au harem* and Mounsi's *La Noce des fous*, both of which present violence as a means of visibilisation. With reference to Fanon's discussion of violence in his seminal work, *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), it will be argued that the children of migrants embody an inherited violence from the colonial period, which was instilled in their parents and grandparents by the former coloniser in the first place. In the postcolonial context, the children of migrants then use this inherited violence to attempt to make themselves visible in the former metropolitan centre, with the ultimate outcome of perpetuating their invisibilisation. Thus, the lack of resolution of the colonial past which perpetuates oppositions inherited

from this past, as discussed in the previous chapter, combines with France's continued hostility to ethnic difference to reinforce the invisibilisation of the children of Algerian migrants. In this way, the texts analysed over the course of this chapter reveal conflicts which persist in contemporary French society.³¹³

The Invisibilisation of Ethnic Difference in *Béni*

Before taking into account the French Republic's adherence to the principle of unity by uniformity, which refuses to recognise ethnic difference, people who have suffered from oppression at the hands of white, Western domination (whether in the form of slavery or colonisation) already suffer from a historical imperative to eradicate references to their origins, as elucidated by Fanon in *Peau noire masques blancs* (1952):

La conscience morale implique une sorte de scission, une rupture de la conscience, avec une partie claire qui s'oppose à la partie sombre. Pour qu'il y ait morale, il faut que disparaisse de la conscience le noir, l'obscur, le nègre. Donc, un nègre à tout instant combat son image.³¹⁴

Although Fanon refers to a specific racial context, his reference to 'le Noir' can be usefully mapped onto 'l'Arabe' for the purpose of this study. Indeed, the imbrication of the history of slavery to which 'le Noir' has been subjected within a narrative that encapsulates the history of the colonised subject and immigrant is made clear by Laronde in his assertion that the immigrant is 'hérité du colonisé et, avant lui, de

³¹³ In particular, the riots of 2005, which were initiated by residents of inner-city suburbs in Paris and throughout France, suggest a desire to use violence in order to bring to light and attempt to escape the deprivation of life on the margins. For a detailed discussion of the 2005 riots, see *Quand les banlieues brûlent... Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005*, ed. by Véronique Le Goaziou, and Laurent Mucchielli (Paris: La Découverte, 2006). See also the website dedicated to the 2005 riots, <riotsfrance.ssrc.org>

³¹⁴ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 176.

l'esclave'.³¹⁵ The children of immigration constitute a further extension of this narrative of oppression and inferiority at the hands of white, Western power, underlining the relevance of Fanon's discussion of the black/white dichotomy to this study. Hargreaves further relates Fanon's arguments to a Franco-Algerian context, noting that 'in the face of the stigmatising gaze of the majority ethnic Other, inherited to a large extent from the colonial period, many second-generation Algerians have acknowledged that in seeking to find a place for themselves in contemporary French society, they have at times been tempted to bury or efface references to their Algerian ancestry'.³¹⁶ Thus, as the black person needs to eradicate 'le noir, l'obscur, le nègre' from his/her consciousness in order to achieve morality, people of Algerian origin must eradicate their Arab features, which are a hindrance to them in their quest to establish a legitimate place in dominant, majority ethnic French society. Indeed, as Fanon intimates, not only must they eradicate their ethnic difference but, moreover, perform a kind of 'purification' of their consciousness and reconfigure themselves as white. This idea of the disappearance of features that mark one out as 'other' and the recreation of one as not 'other' also recalls the notion of liquidation with which Andrew Asibong engages in his exploration of the 'sickening dissolution' of the white fantasy-subject,³¹⁷ an outcome made possible by 'the process of fantasy self-reinvention (or "self-improvement") whereby the protagonists of various narratives seek to transgress identity borders in order to assert their "whiteness" (and thus socio-cultural and "corporeal legitimacy)".³¹⁸ These observations are particularly relevant to Begag's novels, *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni*, in which both the protagonists attempt to eradicate aspects that mark them out as Arab, either corporeal or non-corporeal, replacing these Arab features with features that they

³¹⁵ Laronde, "'Effets d'histoire'", p. 147.

³¹⁶ Hargreaves, 'Generating Migrant Memories', p. 218.

³¹⁷ Andrew Asibong, 'Travel Sickness: Marie NDiaye, Hervé Guibert and the Liquidation of the White Fantasy-Subject', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 12: 1 (2009), 109-25 (p. 111).

³¹⁸ Nadia Kiwan, 'Alterity and Identity in Contemporary Francophone Cultures: From Organic Hybridity to Politicized Difference', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 12.1 (2009), 9-17 (p. 14).

perceive to belong to the majority ethnic population in doing so. The association between whiteness, morality, and human worth (‘socio-cultural and “corporeal legitimacy”’) put forward by Fanon and upheld by Asibong is, thus, very much present in Begag’s two novels, and the ways in which the protagonists deal with this association reflect the restrictive nature of the *visibilisation/invisibilisation* dichotomy, as visibilisation is sought by making Arab specificity invisible.

While the attempted self-reinvention on the part of the eponymous protagonist in Begag’s *Béni* is not a fantasy reinvention, Béni’s attempt to eradicate references to his origins does exemplify a desire to assert an impression of ‘whiteness’ which, as highlighted above by Fanon and reiterated by Kiwan in her comments on Asibong’s article, stands for morality and legitimacy. For example, seeing his older sister straightening her frizzy hair, a distinct Arab feature, Béni suddenly decides that he also wants his hair to be straightened. Significantly, he comes to this decision while he is imagining running his fingers through the ‘chevelure blonde et soyeuse’ of France, the girl with whom he is infatuated, and then imagines France running her fingers through his own ‘bouclettes’.³¹⁹ His sudden decision at this point to have his hair straightened suggests a certain horror at the thought of having thick curly hair as opposed to France’s silky blonde hair. The inability of ‘la partie claire’ and ‘la partie sombre’³²⁰ to co-exist is evident here and, furthermore, such a depiction of France’s hair and its comparison to Béni’s corresponds to Asibong’s interpretation of whiteness as ‘ready to melt and liquefy all the lesser, more fragile, vulnerable or somehow “impure” manifestations of humanity’.³²¹ Consequently, in this instance, France’s whiteness is elevated to a representation of morality, threatening the ‘other’, the immoral, the ‘impurity’ that Béni embodies as a result of his ethnicity. Accordingly, Béni resolves to eliminate ‘le noir,

³¹⁹ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 143.

³²⁰ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 176.

³²¹ Asibong, ‘Travel Sickness’, p. 118.

l'obscur, le nègre'³²² (*l'arabe*) which he sees as preventing him from attaining whiteness (which equates to morality and humanity), and thus Frenchness, the two linked by the description of the appearance of the girl by whom Béni is so infatuated and her name, which marks her as an unmistakable embodiment of the society into which Béni wishes to be accepted.³²³ Furthermore, Béni's decision to not only eradicate a physical feature that marks him out as Arab, but to replace this with what he perceives to be a physical feature that belongs to the majority ethnic population (straight hair), reflects his desire to recreate himself as white, and thus as someone who occupies a worthy, legitimate place in society. Therefore, what becomes apparent here is that Béni attempts to affirm his presence in French society, an act of visibilisation, by making invisible his otherness and replacing this with what he perceives to constitute whiteness – a prerequisite of existing in the society into which Béni strives to be accepted.

The correlation that emerges here between whiteness, Frenchness, and morality points towards a certain conception of nationhood that reflects French hostility towards ethnic difference, and sets up France as a kind of promised land, acceptance into which characters such as Béni must aspire to. The ongoing relevance of such definitions of French nationality can be seen in the law passed on 24 July 2006 on immigration and integration, which limits access to French citizenship by asking migrants to prove that they are well-integrated before being granted permanent residence, and incorporates 'une formation civique sur les "valeurs de la république"'.³²⁴ In this way, the values of the Republic are offered as values for which to strive, and as values which those 'lesser forms of humanity' must prove to have successfully adopted in order to be accepted as French. This imposed adoption of French republican values and concurrent eradication

³²² Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 176.

³²³ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 61.

³²⁴ Patrick Simon, 'La Stratégie de la discrimination positive: Sarkozy et le débat français sur l'égalité', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 17.4 (2009), 435-50 (p. 446). For more on the aims of the law of 24 July 2006 on immigration and integrations, see <<http://www.senat.fr/dossier-legislatif/pjl05-362.html>> For the complete text of the law of 24 July 2006 on immigration and integration, see <<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000266495>>

of otherness is not dissimilar to the Republic's policy of assimilation of the late 1980s (around the time when Begag's first two novels were published), as Patrick Simon's overview of integration during this period indicates:

L'idée centrale qui préside à cette politique est qu'il faut favoriser les convergences entre les "immigrés" et la société d'installation en demandant aux premiers de s'adapter aux normes culturelles majoritaires et en aménageant le cadre sociétal pour le rendre plus tolérant à la diversité. La pratique de la langue française, la diffusion dans l'espace résidentiel, l'affaiblissement progressif des liens communautaires au profit d'un rapport individualisé à l'Etat et surtout l'acquisition de la nationalité française sur deux générations constituent les moyens de l'intégration. Devenus Français, les immigrés, et surtout leurs enfants nés en France, ne devraient plus se singulariser dans le corps social et, en retour, obtiendraient en échange un égal accès à toutes les sphères de la vie sociale.³²⁵

On the surface, the policy of assimilation at the end of the 1980s appears to be an ostensibly reciprocal one, a policy that asks both majority and minority ethnic populations to make compromises. However, such a definition of integration, based on the convergence of majority and minority ethnic populations, asking people of migrant origin to adapt to the 'normes culturelles majoritaires' with the aim of creating 'un rapport individualisé à l'Etat' (indicating adherence to the Republic and republican values), ultimately offers Frenchness as something for which to strive, and something that can only be attained at the expense of ethnic difference, by merging into the majority ethnic population and making oneself unrecognisable within it ('les immigrés [...] ne devraient plus *se singulariser* dans le corps social').³²⁶ In this definition of assimilation, we can detect parallels with Asibong's concept of liquidation. If the

³²⁵ Simon, 'La Stratégie de la discrimination positive', p. 438.

³²⁶ These observations are also reflected in Michèle Tribalat's definition of assimilation. See Michèle Tribalat, *Faire France: une grande enquête sur les immigrés et leurs enfants* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1995), pp. 13-14.

merging of ‘les représentants de l’altérité’³²⁷ into the majority ethnic population does not amount to as extreme an outcome as liquidation or ‘sickening dissolution’,³²⁸ it nonetheless evokes a certain dissolving of otherness in the hegemonic definition of French nationhood. Subsequently, there is no equal convergence between majority and minority ethnic populations, but only the merging and dissolving of the latter into the former.

In addition to the eradication of ethnic difference proposed by such a model of integration, the suggested instillation of majority ethnic norms recalls the idea that people of minority ethnic origin need to recreate themselves as white in order to be accepted in French society, a process which is reflected by the way in which Béni replaces his Arab features with majority ethnic features. Thus, such a definition of integration acts as a process of invisibilisation by default, as it favours the concealment, albeit within French society, of minority ethnic populations, which is corroborated by Béni’s attempt to make himself visible in this way. Ultimately, Béni’s definition of visibilisation is shown to be untenable as, rather than allowing him to affirm his presence in French society, it only reinforces his invisibility by dissolving his (Arab) identity in the whiteness of the majority ethnic population.

Béni’s attitude towards his own name, Ben Abdallah, further illustrates his desire to eradicate references to his origins. As Hargreaves observes, Béni ‘feels that the name given to him by his parents reduces him to an ethnic stereotype at odds with his own sense of selfhood’,³²⁹ which recalls Fanon’s argument, with reference to black people, that ‘un nègre à tout instant combat son image’.³³⁰ Striving to attain the morality and humanity represented by whiteness and Frenchness, Béni rejects his full name as it exposes his Arab origins and prevents him from being accepted as anything other than

³²⁷ Simon, ‘La Stratégie de la discrimination positive’, p. 438.

³²⁸ Asibong, ‘Travel Sickness’, p. 111.

³²⁹ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 37.

³³⁰ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 176.

Arab, as his frizzy hair does. For this reason, he prefers the nickname Béni which, according to Hargreaves, ‘enables him to straddle two different worlds’, French and Arab.³³¹ As Béni himself indicates, the nickname signifies “‘mon fils’” dans la langue du Prophète, béni dans celle du Christ’,³³² thus bestowing the name with Christian French and Islamic Algerian connotations.³³³ However, while taking this nickname appears to conveniently allow him to assume a dual Franco-Algerian identity, the ‘partie sombre’ of this identity (the Arab) gradually becomes dissolved within the ‘partie claire’ (the white, the French) due to Béni’s overriding desire for identification and acceptance. He even suggests that he would like to change his name to one that is typically and recognisably French, André, when he is able to since, in his opinion, ‘ça sert strictement à rien de s’appeler Ben Abdallah quand on veut être comme tout le monde’.³³⁴ As a result, references to Béni’s origins are engulfed by his desire to conform to an impression of what majority ethnic French identity comprises. His idea of what constitutes being ‘comme tout le monde’ does not include any reference to Arabness, and exemplifies a desire for acceptance which consists of fitting in and eliminating references to his origins, rather than being accepted regardless of his ethnic difference.

The constraint that Béni perceives being placed on him by the name Ben Abdallah recalls contemporary Franco-Algerian author Nina Bouraoui’s observation that ‘les noms arabes sont des prisons familiales. On est toujours le fils de avec Ben ou le père de avec Bou’.³³⁵ Firstly, Bouraoui’s observation reveals that it is not ‘Béni’ that means ‘mon fils’ in Arabic, as Béni states, but ‘Ben’. Thus, by choosing to be identified by this nickname, Béni moves away from his real name’s Arab specificity, albeit by only adding a single letter to it, and even ascribes it with echoes of an Anglophone

³³¹ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 37.

³³² Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 35.

³³³ See also Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 37.

³³⁴ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, pp. 43-44.

³³⁵ Nina Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Stock, 2000), p. 124.

nature,³³⁶ reinforcing his identification with white, Western culture. Secondly, by rejecting Ben Abdallah,³³⁷ Béni rejects the familial transmission of Arab identity that takes place through his name (although the idea that he is, in fact, imprisoned in Arab identity by his name underlines his inability to escape this aspect of his selfhood, however much he would like to). Therefore, the ‘sense of selfhood’ that Béni seeks eventually amounts to identification with an impression of dominant, Western, moral Frenchness, which is underlined by the way in which the Arabic definition is overshadowed in the adaptation of his name. Moving away from the Arabic definition of ‘Ben’, Béni ascribes his name with notions of being blessed (‘béni dans [la langue] du Christ’) and being good (‘anagramme de bien dans [la langue] du Petit Robert’), which are reinforced by aspects of Frenchness, such as Christianity (the dominant religion of France despite its secular culture) and the French language. Thus, the French language is again seen to provide access to dominant society, reflecting its role in the ‘civilising mission’ of colonisation. Indeed, religion and language have both historically constituted crucial aspects in the perceived integration of Algerians into French society, before and after Algerian independence. As colonised subjects, Algerians had to renounce their religious affiliation in order to gain French citizenship,³³⁸ and the adaptation of religious practices, if not their outright renunciation, to suit the principles of the Republic (specifically, the restriction of demonstrations of religious affiliation to the private sphere) remains a condition of supposed successful integration.³³⁹ The notion of ‘un islam à la française’,³⁴⁰ to which Michèle Tribalat alludes in her definition of assimilation and which illustrates the suggested adaptation of Islam to republican principles, also recalls the idea that ethnic difference must be dissolved within the

³³⁶ See also Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 37.

³³⁷ This preference of a more ‘neutral’ name is also exemplified by Bouraoui, whose full first name is Yasmina, which she shortens to Nina.

³³⁸ See Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, pp. 286-87.

³³⁹ See Tribalat, *Faire France*, p. 13.

³⁴⁰ Tribalat, *Faire France*, p. 13.

hegemonic definition of republican nationhood. Furthermore, the aforementioned law of 24 July 2006 on immigration and integration imposes a basic command of the French language as a prerequisite for legal acceptance in French society.³⁴¹ Accordingly, in his pursuit of the morality (being blessed and being good) that he associates with dominant aspects of Frenchness, Béni seeks *indifference*, adapting his name so that it loses its Arabness, rather than affirm his difference and the Arab identity represented by Ben Abdallah, thus making himself invisible by becoming ‘comme tout le monde’.

Ultimately of course, Béni’s attempts to be accepted as French are unsuccessful: he is refused entry into the nightclub at the end of the novel precisely because, however hard he tries, he cannot hide his origins, recalling Fanon’s claim, with regard to the inability of ‘le Noir’ to escape his/her skin, that ‘*où qu’il aille, un nègre demeure un nègre*’.³⁴² If an Arab, like a black person, cannot escape his/her skin, then the visibilisation of people of Arab origin in France can only take place if references to this origin are recognised and accepted, by the person of Arab origin him or herself as much as by the majority ethnic population. In this way, the outcome of *Béni* undermines the adherence to a model of integration that remains, as Simon argues, ‘*fortement assimilationniste*’,³⁴³ demonstrating little fundamental change from the policy of assimilation of the late 1980s when *Béni* was published. The continued loyalty to such a model can be traced back to one of the central principles of the Republic, that of unity by uniformity, which is itself dependent on ‘l’invisibilité des distinctions “d’origine”’.³⁴⁴ Thus, by definition, the French Republic is hostile to ethnic difference, and conformity to the Republic requires the invisibilisation of this difference, or a dissolving of it in the mass of dominant, majority ethnic French identity. However, the reason that Frenchness is unattainable for Béni is that, for all his endeavours, he is

³⁴¹ See Simon, ‘La Stratégie de la discrimination positive’, p. 446.

³⁴² Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 160. Original’s italics.

³⁴³ Simon, ‘La Stratégie de la discrimination positive’, p. 447.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

unable to conceal references to his origins, and this inability to attain Frenchness due to his ever-conspicuous ethnicity is represented by his rejection from the nightclub where he has arranged to meet France at the end of the novel. Therefore, while the French Republic elevates its conception of nationality as something to be aspired to, *Béni* also demonstrates that this aspiration is unattainable for characters such as the eponymous protagonist due to the very definition of the indivisible Republic which is based on the ultimately impossible invisibility of ethnic difference. The impossibility of Béni being accepted as French is indicated by the name of the nightclub, ‘le Paradis de la Nuit’, which, as Vinay Swamy observes, epitomises the idea that central, majority ethnic French society is set up as a paradise, ‘[implying] that it is for a select few: only those who merit it accede to Paradise’.³⁴⁵ This exclusivity is further indicated by the ‘paradis’ of the novel’s title: ‘le paradis privé’ is a private paradise, but also one from which Béni is forbidden or deprived entry. Swamy goes on to note that the select few who merit accession to Paradise are privileged in this way ‘because they possess a specific inherited identity’,³⁴⁶ that of the majority ethnic population, which Béni does not possess. Thus, a certain definition of what it means to be French is set up as an ideal, but is simultaneously shown to be ever elusive for those who do not possess the ‘acceptable’ ethnic background, despite attempts at assimilation. In the meantime, Béni, confronted with an impression of whiteness as the equivalent to morality and humanity, has undergone a dissolving of his Arabness, his ‘partie sombre’, in order to conform to the hegemonic definition of Frenchness, a definition that he was never going to fulfil. As a result, he is stripped both of references to his ethnic origin and of identification with the culture in which he has been born and brought up.

A reading of *Béni* in conjunction with the concepts of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation* reveals the underlying complexities of the challenges that migrants and

³⁴⁵ Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. 19.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

their children face when attempting to negotiate their foreignness. In the case of Béni, an attempt to affirm his presence (an act of visibilisation) is complicated by the hostility to ethnic difference of the French republican conception of nationhood, which prevents him from fulfilling the legitimacy he seeks in French society. In contrast, he succumbs to an invisibilisation of his identity, exemplifying the potential overlaps between the concepts of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation*. Such overlaps and additional permutations brought to light by an application of Begag's and Chaouite's dichotomy to the primary corpus will be discussed in the next section, with reference to another of Begag's texts, *Le Gone du Chaâba*.

Shame and (In)Visibility

Begag's first novel, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, illustrates similar concerns to those we encounter in *Béni*, such as the quest for acceptance in conceptions of dominant French identity, which is unsurprising as, according to Hargreaves, *Béni* is the 'thinly disguised sequel' to *Le Gone du Chaâba*.³⁴⁷ In the earlier novel, we find the young protagonist, Azouz, gradually becoming aware of the difference that exists between himself and his schoolmates, most of whom belong to the majority ethnic population. Visits to the house of one of his schoolmates have led him to understand that 'dans un bidonville de baraques en planches et en tôles ondulées [...] ce sont les pauvres qui vivent de cette manière', and Azouz confesses that he is too ashamed to tell his friend where he lives.³⁴⁸ Thus, like Béni, young Azouz is situated, physically and figuratively, on the periphery of French society, and attaches negativity to the aspects which exemplify his difference and shows a desire to hide them from the majority ethnic population.

³⁴⁷ For a discussion of how *Béni* follows on from *Le Gone du Chaâba*, see Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 62.

³⁴⁸ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 57.

However, it should be noted that, overall, Azouz's *bidonville* is presented in a positive light. For example, Azouz dislikes staying behind after school to study, preferring to return to the Chaâba as soon as school finishes because 'au crépuscule, le Chaâba est merveilleux. Le bidonville reprend vie après une journée de travail'.³⁴⁹ Similarly, in *Béni*, the protagonist informs the reader that, in Arabic, his name means 'fils de serviteur d'Allah [...] fils élevé à la puissance deux d'Allah' and that 'ça devrait impressionner, normalement, mais voilà, comme on n'est pas au pays des djellabas et des mosquées, ça n'impressionne pas le Lyonnais des Terreaux ou de la Croix-Rousse. Au contraire, ça fait rire'.³⁵⁰ In both texts, it is when the protagonist's cultural origin is mentioned in the presence, real or imagined, of the majority ethnic population that a sense of shame arises in him, a sense which Béni makes clear when he states that 'il faut que je surmonte la honte quotidienne de Ben Abdallah',³⁵¹ after describing the amusement that his name triggers amongst his classmates. Similarly, Azouz is only ashamed of his living conditions when he imagines his majority ethnic schoolmate learning of where he lives. The shame experienced by the two protagonists can be explained by their peripheral status in relation to dominant French society, which is underlined by Begag's and Chaouite's observation that 'tout principe de seuil, de "réserve pour Indiens des temps modernes" pose la différence comme une erreur de la nature. Et celui qui se trouve placé à l'écart risque alors de vivre son être comme une honte'.³⁵² The marginalisation of a particular group sets up the difference specific to that group as a fault and a source of permanent shame. As Béni perceives his Arab name as setting him apart from the majority ethnic population, in the same way that Azouz sees his *bidonville*, both characters become ashamed of these characteristics which are representative of their marginalisation. Furthermore, given the history of Algerian

³⁴⁹ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 61.

³⁵⁰ Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 43.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁵² Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 56.

marginalisation at the hands of French colonialism and the repetition of such divisions in the contemporary period, the shame experienced by Béni and Azouz reflects a collective, long-standing Algerian shame as a cause of this historical marginalisation.

The preservation of the divide between the central, majority ethnic population and peripheral ethnic minorities reinforces the impression that those inhabiting the centre in some way epitomise morality, or a higher form of humanity than those who reside in the margins. The multifaceted division between centre and periphery is reflected in the classroom in *Le Gone du Chaâba*, where there is a physical division as Azouz and his fellow Algerians sit at the back of the class, with the pupils who belong to the majority ethnic population sitting in front of them. Moreover, a division between these two same groups as regards accepted conduct is brought to light, which is underlined by the teacher's lessons on 'morale', during which Azouz remarks that 'entre ce qu'il raconte et ce que je fais dans la rue, il peut couler un oued tout entier!'³⁵³ While the 'élèves français' engage positively with the topic, 'pour montrer leur concordance morale avec la leçon d'aujourd'hui', the Arab pupils remain silent, and the difference that Azouz perceives between the behaviour approved by the teacher and his own outside school constitutes another source of shame for Azouz, who declares himself 'indigne de la bonne morale'.³⁵⁴ Once again, it is when the protagonist finds himself in the presence of the majority ethnic population that his sense of shame arises, and this repeated impression that Azouz's difference constitutes a fault recalls Fanon's assertion that 'en Europe, c'est-à-dire dans tous les pays civilisés et civilisateurs, le nègre symbolise le péché'.³⁵⁵ Taking into account Fanon's reference to 'civilised' and 'civilising' countries, the 'mission civilisatrice' of the colonial project is brought to attention, underlining the potential overlap between Fanon's specific reference to 'le Noir' and the Franco-Algerian context with which this thesis engages. As a descendant

³⁵³ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 57.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 173.

of the colonised subject, in the overwhelming presence of the former coloniser, Azouz perceives his Arab specificity as a fault or sin. Azouz himself points to his ethnicity as shaping his ‘uncivilised’ nature by evoking ‘un oued’, a clear reference to the natural landscape of North Africa, to emphasise his difference from the accepted way to behave. In this way, Azouz’s difference is construed as uncivilised and sinful, and Fanon proposes two contrasting methods of dealing with this realisation, as follows:

Comme je m’aperçois que le nègre est le symbole du péché, je me prends à haïr le nègre. Mais je constate que je suis un nègre. Pour échapper à ce conflit, deux solutions. Ou bien je demande aux autres de ne pas faire attention à ma peau; ou bien, au contraire, je veux qu’on s’en aperçoive.³⁵⁶

To a certain extent, the two solutions offered by Fanon to the realisation that one’s colour and ethnic difference denote sinfulness can be mapped onto the concepts of *invisibilisation* and *visibilisation*: it is possible to avoid attention to one’s colour by detaching oneself from dominant society, or it is possible to force others to recognise one’s colour by seeking to affirm one’s presence in dominant society. However, analysis of Begag’s first two novels illustrates a blurring of such a connection between the two binary paradigms. We have already seen that, in *Béni*, the eponymous protagonist seeks recognition in dominant society not by forcing the majority to accept his skin colour (or his curly hair as the case may be), but by attempting to efface references to his ethnicity (and indeed by assuming the characteristics of the majority ethnic population, such as straight hair). In this way, *Béni* associates indifference to his origins with acceptance in dominant society, and this association is also apparent in *Le Gone du Chaâba*.

³⁵⁶ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 179.

Unsettled by the continuing difference between himself and the majority of his class, Azouz resolves to become ‘comme les Français’,³⁵⁷ and does so by placing himself at the front of the class on returning to school, determined to be ‘parmi les plus obéissants [...] parmi les plus actifs en cours’.³⁵⁸ However, in his enthusiasm, Azouz vociferously expresses his accord with whatever the teacher says, including shouting his approval to the statement that all the members of the class are ‘descendants des Gaulois’,³⁵⁹ which, of course, the protagonist is not. Significantly, Azouz does not question this, but light-heartedly states that the teacher must be right.³⁶⁰ Thus, like his older reincarnation, Azouz attempts to efface references to his origins and reconfigure himself as majority ethnic French in order to be accepted. In doing so, Azouz, like Béni, demonstrates his desire for identification with a pre-conceived impression of Frenchness. Fanon himself uses the example of Antillean youths referring at school to ‘nos pères, les Gaulois’ to underline this kind of identification, a process in which ‘le jeune Noir adopte subjectivement une attitude de Blanc’.³⁶¹ Furthermore, Azouz’s adoption of whiteness in this way underlines the way in which he, like Béni, initiates the dissolution of his Arabness in the majority ethnic Gaulishness.

This adoption of whiteness is clearly underlined by Azouz’s declaration that ‘j’ai décidé de changer de peau’,³⁶² which further echoes Fanon’s observations in *Peau noire masques blancs*, in which he equates whiteness to being human, thus explaining the desire to whiten oneself: ‘Je commence à souffrir de ne pas être un Blanc [...] Alors, j’essaierai tout simplement de me faire blanc, c’est-à-dire j’obligerai le Blanc à reconnaître mon humanité’.³⁶³ Once again therefore, whiteness equates to a higher form of humanity, and Azouz resolves to become white in order to assert his own human

³⁵⁷ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 58. This is also reminiscent of Béni’s desire to be ‘comme tout le monde’. Begag, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, p. 44.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ See Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 60.

³⁶¹ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 140.

³⁶² Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 58.

³⁶³ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 99.

worth. To an extent, this transformation amounts to an act of visibilisation, as Azouz affirms his presence to the majority ethnic population, represented by the majority of his class and his teacher, thanks to an improvement in his schoolwork after his resolution to be ‘comme les Français’.

Eventually however, it becomes clear that this ‘changing of skin’ constitutes a false visibilisation, as it only serves to further accentuate his inner conflict. Of course, Azouz cannot escape his skin and, no matter how hard he tries to conform to an impression of whiteness at school, he fails to truly achieve the notion of morality that has been imposed on him. After his decision to ‘become white’, confrontations with both majority ethnic and ethnic Algerian populations continue to provoke a sense of shame in him. For example, in another lesson on ‘morale’, Azouz’s teacher suggests that a child who has been brought up well should greet the headmaster and teachers in the playground before school starts.³⁶⁴ Despite a collective bemusement amongst the class at the idea of doing such a thing, Azouz takes the opportunity the next morning to try and prove to his teacher that he conforms to his notion of being brought up well, but only succeeds in inciting laughter amongst the group of teachers to whom he extends his hand in greeting.³⁶⁵ It is, of course, the way Azouz holds out his hand to be shaken that causes such amusement amongst the staff, and his teacher tells him this afterwards. He also tells him that what Azouz did was polite and that he should continue to be so.³⁶⁶ However, this does not reduce Azouz’s embarrassment and shame and, despite the reassurance from his teacher, he informs us that ‘j’ose à peine le regarder. J’ai été le seul de la classe à faire œuvre de bonne morale. Je ne le serai plus jamais. D’ailleurs, je vais éviter de passer devant tous ces gens à l’avenir’.³⁶⁷ Thus, Azouz is once again left

³⁶⁴ See Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, pp. 63-64

³⁶⁵ See Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, pp. 68-69.

³⁶⁶ See Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 69.

³⁶⁷ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 69.

to question what constitutes 'la bonne morale' and to doubt his ability to conform to this definition.

Of course, it is not due to his ethnic background and upbringing that Azouz consistently fails to conform to the notion of morality imposed on him at school, but the way in which he is caught in external perceptions of what it means to be French ultimately attributes this failure to his ethnic difference. Despite his attempts, he can never truly efface his origins and 'become French', and thus he can never conform to what he perceives to constitute morality. Indeed, the idea that Azouz can never be accepted as one of the majority ethnic population reflects the end of *Béni*, when the eponymous protagonist fails to gain entry into the nightclub, setting up dominant French society and identity as a Paradise in which neither Béni nor Azouz can be accepted due to their lack of the inherited identity possessed by the majority ethnic population.³⁶⁸ Therefore, once again it emerges how a certain definition of what it means to be French is set up as an ideal, but is simultaneously shown to be ever elusive for those who do not possess the 'acceptable' ethnic background.

Rather than allow him to assert his human worth, Azouz's decision to 'changer de peau' constitutes a false visibilisation, as it only reinforces the impossibility of Azouz ever conforming to what he perceives to constitute morality and humanity. Furthermore, his attempts to achieve such an affirmation of his humanity also lead to a stripping of his Arab identity, illustrating that the alternative to making oneself visible by gaining acceptance in French society is not an invisibilisation in the sense that one simply ceases to seek to reinforce ties with the dominant culture and resumes existence on the margins. On the contrary, failing to make oneself visible leads to an invisibilisation of identity altogether, in the sense of being condemned to an in-between, undefined space of identity in which identification with either dominant or marginal

³⁶⁸ See Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. 19.

cultures becomes unattainable. For example, as his schoolwork improves, Azouz finds himself in conflict with his Arab friends and marked out as a traitor. Firstly, when implored by the mother of one of his Algerian classmates, Nasser, to sit with her son in order to help him, he refuses, judging this to be cheating. Nonetheless, Azouz is torn between his loyalty to his fellow Algerians and his desire to conform to the morality which he associates with Frenchness, reflecting Fanon's idea of the opposition between 'la partie sombre' and 'la partie claire' in the consciousness of the person of colour.³⁶⁹ While Azouz is convinced that helping Nasser in this way would amount to cheating, this does not mean that he lacks feelings of guilt for turning his back on his compatriot. At first, his newfound dedication to the 'morale' introduced to him in class prevails, but he subsequently needs reassurance from his elder sister that he made the right decision in order to chase away 'le doute d'être un faux frère'.³⁷⁰ In fact, he is not successful in dispelling this doubt as his discovery that his mother knows Nasser's mother well leads to, once again, feelings of shame: 'Cette fois, j'ai un peu honte. J'aurais peut-être dû proposer mon aide en dehors de la classe. Je serais allé chez Nasser pour l'aider à faire ses devoirs...'.³⁷¹

For Azouz, it appears impossible to conform to a definition of Frenchness and retain identification with his ethnic origins, as in adhering to his definition of morality, he detaches himself from his ethnic group, and this detachment is underlined by Nasser's mother's plea to Azouz 'au nom de [leur] origine commune, au nom de [leurs] familles, au nom des Arabes du monde'.³⁷² By refusing to help Nasser, despite his mother's appeal to a common ethnic origin, Azouz loses identification with his own

³⁶⁹ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 176.

³⁷⁰ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 77.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 75. Furthermore, Azouz's refusal to help Nasser reflects the assertion made by Begag and Chaouite that, 'du point de vue de la définition de ses places dans la société française, de l'intégration, un immigré n'est pas égal à un autre immigré', and that 'un immigré plus un autre immigré ne constituent pas automatiquement une communauté d'immigrés'. Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 59. Though Nasser's mother does attempt to appeal to a sense of Algerian community, Azouz's reluctance to respond to her appeal exemplifies the rejection of the notion of such a sense of community within French society.

ethnicity. Furthermore, the shame that this encounter eventually causes him serves to question his definition of morality, and thus question his ability to attain Frenchness. Like Béni, Azouz's attempts to affirm his presence by seeking identification with the majority ethnic population, eradicating references to his origins in the process, only result in the initiation of a process of invisibilisation which confirms his inability to conform to a definition of Frenchness, and which detaches him from his cultural origin as well.

In addition to reflecting his in-between status, Azouz's attempts to transgress the limits imposed on him by his marginalisation and to escape the shame that this marginalisation entails in fact lead to more feelings of shame. As Begag and Chaouite observe, the shame engendered by the sense that one is excluded leads to a desire to seek 'la preuve de la légitimité de son être',³⁷³ which Azouz attempts. However, the ultimate impossibility of Azouz ever escaping his marginalisation and being accepted as part of the dominant, central, majority ethnic population constitutes a source of continuing shame for Azouz, which manifests itself in encounters with both majority and minority ethnic populations. Therefore, the setting-up of an ultimately unattainable definition of Frenchness for those who do not possess the 'acceptable' ethnic origin perpetuates the sense of shame engendered by this insurmountable exclusion, creating a vicious circle of shame for the children of Algerian migrants. In turn, the impression of permanence evoked by the notion of the unbroken vicious circle points towards a sense of shame which has been historically imposed on Algerians and which has been inherited from the colonial period, as the marginalisation of ethnic Algerian populations in contemporary France mirrors that of colonialism. Consequently, Fanon's notion that in the 'civilised' world 'le nègre symbolise le péché',³⁷⁴ put forward at a time when colonialism was still in place, is extended to the postcolonial period and to all colonised

³⁷³ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, pp. 56-57.

³⁷⁴ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 173.

subjects, including those of Algerian origin. Though a possible escape from this trope is presented in the form of offering values that amount to a definition of Frenchness, the accomplishment of this escape is far from realisable since only the dominant, privileged (white) section of the population can attain such a definition. Indeed, as we see in both *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni*, the elevation of such prerequisites of acceptance, and the inevitable failure of achieving them, instigates a gradual dissolving of ‘vulnerable subjectivities [...] that have [...] not obtained full legitimacy’,³⁷⁵ due to the eradication of minority ethnic references in the pursuit of this unattainable legitimacy.

This dissolution is evidenced by the stripping of Azouz’s Arab identity in a confrontation with his fellow North African classmates, whose underachievement is highlighted in class by the teacher’s announcement of the classification of the pupils’ compositions backwards, as follows: ‘Premier: Ahmed Moussaoui [...] Deuxième: Nasser Bouaffia [...] Azouz Begag: avant-dernier’.³⁷⁶ The indignation of Moussaoui and Nasser that is caused by this rather public humiliation is taken out on Azouz, who they claim joined in the laughter at the teacher’s somewhat tactless technique, and leads Moussaoui and Nasser to declare that Azouz is no longer an Arab like them, as highlighted by the following extract:

- T’es pas un Arabe, toi!

Aussitôt, sans même comprendre la signification de ces mots, je réagis:

- Si. Je suis un Arabe!

- Non, t’es pas un Arabe, j’té dis!

- Si, je suis un Arabe!

- J’té dis que t’es pas comme nous!

Alors là, plus aucun mot ne parvient à sortir de ma bouche. Le dernier est resté

³⁷⁵ Asibong, ‘Travel Sickness’, p. 119.

³⁷⁶ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, pp. 84-85.

coincé entre mes dents. C'est vrai que je ne suis pas comme eux.³⁷⁷

This confrontation highlights a contradiction that reflects Azouz's inner conflict: the idea that Azouz is and is not like his North African classmates which, furthermore, suggests a transcendence of the dichotomy that dominates the title of Fanon's *Peau noire masques blancs*. Underlining this possibility of transcending the restricting dichotomies which Azouz faces, Swamy argues that 'by inhabiting *and* owning that vanishing point that is the real intersection between the seemingly parallel Arab and French tracks, Azouz is able to both justify and revel (even if with some discomfort) in a new "French" space'.³⁷⁸ In this way, *Le Gone du Chaâba* does point towards an escape from the conflicts which consume Azouz, in the creation of a new identity to overcome the quandary that is so evident in both of Begag's first two novels and that is encapsulated by the *visibilisation/invisibilisation* dichotomy: that of choosing between one's cultural origin and one's 'host' culture, between France and Algeria. The evocation of a more fluid definition of identity is reflected by Azouz's admission that, while he may be an Arab like his classmates, he differs from them in several other ways. Ultimately however, young Azouz is caught too far in his own external perceptions to fully accomplish an escape from the dichotomies such as those brought to light by his fellow North African classmates, who demand to know whether Azouz is 'avec eux ou avec nous'.³⁷⁹ Azouz's immediate reaction to his confrontation with Moussaoui and Nasser is, again, a sense of shame and inner conflict,³⁸⁰ and he eventually yields to the clear-cut distinctions put to him, stating that 'je crois qu'ils ont raison'.³⁸¹ Rather than challenge Swamy's view of this incident in the novel, that 'Azouz obviously does not agree with this clear-cut distinction between "us" and "them" to which Moussaoui

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁷⁸ Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. 13. Original's italics.

³⁷⁹ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 92.

³⁸⁰ See Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, pp. 91-92.

³⁸¹ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 92.

subscribes',³⁸² I would suggest that the idea that Azouz yields to such clear-cut distinctions is not evidence that he does agree with them, but that he is caught in external perceptions to the extent that he does not contest Moussaoui's view, even if he may disagree with it. Thus, Azouz's pre-conceived, pre-imposed definitions of what it means to be (and not to be) French overwhelms the possibility of him transcending such dichotomies. While the novel points towards an escape, the protagonist himself is not able to achieve it, and this reading aligns itself with Swamy's own reading of Begag's first two novels as 'a suggestion that until and unless society frees itself from a construction of identity based upon a bipolar exclusionary model, marginalised groups, rejected by mainstream society, will find it increasingly difficult to savour the "paradise" created by this mainstream'.³⁸³

Failing to consolidate a new, fluid, Franco-Algerian conception of identity, Azouz is consequently stripped of his Arab identity. Furthermore, the scene which immediately follows Azouz's confrontation with Moussaoui and Nasser serves to reinforce the protagonist's inability to conform to the majority ethnic population. In a 'morale' lesson on hygiene, Azouz becomes aware that 'au Chaâba nous étions de très mauvais praticiens [de l'hygiène]',³⁸⁴ once again confirming the difference between Azouz and dominant accepted practices. Thus, while he attempts to assert his Frenchness by moving to the front of the class and improving his schoolwork, he simultaneously initiates a dissolution of his Arab identity, all the while failing to truly conform to what he perceives to constitute Frenchness. Therefore, Azouz is ultimately caught in between Arab and dominant French identity, unable to attain a fluid, Franco-Algerian identity. The undesirable nature of the in-between position in which he finds himself is exemplified when a heated argument breaks out during the lesson on hygiene between the teacher and Moussaoui, and Monsieur Grand points to Azouz as an

³⁸² Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. 13.

³⁸³ Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. 21.

³⁸⁴ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 96.

example of an Arab pupil who can do well in class.³⁸⁵ Rather than instil a sense of pride in Azouz, he wishes that the teacher had never singled him out in such a manner and fears ‘les représailles des cousins’.³⁸⁶ Such praise directed to Azouz from the teacher should constitute the culmination of his attempts to ‘become French’, a task which he set himself and which he has finally achieved. However, his inevitable identification with his fellow Arab classmates, despite their disowning of him, causes him to resent the position of being the exception, caught between his attempts to conform to the majority and retaining his Arab identity, a position in which he claims that ‘je n’existe plus’.³⁸⁷

Though a throwaway remark on the part of Azouz, the idea that he has been placed in a position in which he does not exist due to his in-between status underlines the dissolution to which his identity has been subjected. His attempts to ‘become French’ have caused him to lose references to his origins and have not led to the sense of self-worth that he has associated with Frenchness. Instead, he finds himself in an undefined space of identity in which identification with either dominant or minority cultures becomes unattainable. His attempt to make himself visible has initiated the invisibilisation of his identity, which recalls Fanon’s notion that the person of colour is faced by the dilemma to ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’.³⁸⁸ In fact, in the context of the overall preoccupations of this chapter, taking into account the republican principle of ‘unity by uniformity’, which is based on ‘l’invisibilité des distinctions “d’origine”’,³⁸⁹ the choice put forward by Fanon does not constitute a choice at all. On the contrary,

³⁸⁵ See Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 99. Indeed, the teacher’s singling out of Azouz underlines his position as the ‘exception that proves the rule’, a position which Begag himself found himself occupying to an extent as the ‘token Beur’ in the French government. See Reeck, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond*, pp. 25-26. In both instances – Begag’s symbolic presence in government and his fictional persona’s singling out in class as an Arab who can succeed at school – rather than prove the success of the French model of integration, the highlighting of such exceptions only underlines that the majority of Arabs remain non-integrated.

³⁸⁶ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 100.

³⁸⁷ Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba*, p. 100.

³⁸⁸ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 100.

³⁸⁹ Simon, ‘La Stratégie de la discrimination positive’, p. 446.

whitening oneself equates to disappearing and invisibility and strengthens the idea that, for members of the marginalised Franco-Algerian population, attempts to ‘transgress identity borders to assert their “whiteness”’³⁹⁰ only result in a dissolving of identity in the hegemonic definition of Frenchness. Indeed, Fanon rejects the inevitability of this predicament for the person of colour, stating that ‘le Noir ne doit plus se trouver placé devant ce dilemme: se blanchir ou disparaître, mais il doit pouvoir prendre conscience d’une possibilité d’exister’,³⁹¹ which is reiterated more recently by Swamy’s argument, and indeed by my own discussion in this chapter, that the ‘construction of identity based upon a bipolar exclusionary model’ needs to be overcome if characters such as Azouz and Béni, and the ethnic group which they represent, are to be accepted in dominant French society.³⁹² Thus, ethnic Algerian minorities are still faced by restrictive binary paradigms similar to that highlighted by Fanon (‘se blanchir ou disparaître’) in their attempts to assert their legitimate but still elusive place in French society, and Swamy further underlines the contemporary relevance of the issues raised in *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni* as follows:

For the moment, Azouz, Béni and their compatriots [...] have an uphill struggle to live their lives in the hope of legitimising themselves one day, a day that will perhaps always be a “tomorrow” unless there is a radical change in the existing social order.³⁹³

As Swamy notes, the conflicts faced by Azouz and Béni are revealed to persist in contemporary French society, underlining the intention of this chapter, and the thesis on the whole, to illustrate the enduring significance of the unresolved issues raised in the primary texts. In particular, Swamy’s evocation of a day when the the children of Algerian migrants attain their legitimate place in French society being forever beyond

³⁹⁰ Kiwan, ‘Alterity and Identity in Contemporary Francophone Cultures’, p. 14.

³⁹¹ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, pp. 100-01.

³⁹² Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. 21.

³⁹³ Ibid.

reach reflects the notion of the vicious circle to which I have referred in the first two chapters of this thesis. In the context of the present section, it is argued that the constant desire to overcome the imposition of a sense of shame, engendered by exclusion, and to affirm one's presence in French society comes into conflict with the French Republic's hostility to ethnic difference, which posits ethnic difference as a fault and a source of shame in the first place. Faced with the impossibility of conforming to a conception of nationhood based on the invisibility of ethnic difference, attempts to affirm one's presence, to make oneself visible, result in underlining one's exclusion, one's invisibility, and one's sense of shame, illustrating the notion of the vicious circle. Furthermore, this entrapment in the vicious circle reflects the restrictions brought to light by the dichotomies discussed in this chapter (*visibilisation/invisibilisation*, 'se blanchir ou disparaître'). In the next section, I discuss an alternative method of resolving the kind of inner conflict we find in Begag's first two novels by examining how the protagonist of Sebbar's *Fatima* engages with such dichotomies and presents possibilities of escaping them.

Fatima and 'La Fugue': Escaping Embodied Conflict

Compared to the protagonists of both of Begag's first two novels, the protagonist of Sebbar's *Fatima*, Dalila, does not demonstrate such a keen desire to eradicate references to her origins. For example, during a family conversation about the prospect of visiting Algeria, Dalila's siblings are divided in that the elder ones object to the suggestion, while the younger ones are excited by the possibility. Dalila herself, one of the elder siblings, does express a desire to go to Algeria, displaying an attachment to her origins that is lacking in Begag's protagonists. What is more significant, though, is her reaction

to her brothers' allusion to the oppression suffered by women in Algeria, represented as follows:

Ses frères "Pour une fille c'est encore pire. Une copine nous a raconté qu'on lui a jeté des pierres parce qu'elle voyageait avec son copain – un Algérien comme nous – en moto. Une fille en pantalon sur une moto, seule avec un type ça se fait pas là-bas, tu comprends". Dalila "Mais moi j'irai pas sur une moto avec un type, j'irai toute seule à pied".³⁹⁴

Despite saying that she would like to go to Algeria, this response nonetheless excludes Dalila from the hypothetical family visit to the homeland and, furthermore, recalls Sebbar's own claim that she is in exile from Algeria.³⁹⁵ Indeed, it is this exile that allows Sebbar to discover her identity on her own terms, as it allows her to '[s]'exposer à [elle-même] dans cette perte, ce deuil du pays natal'.³⁹⁶ Similarly, Dalila's hypothetical, self-imposed exclusion from a family visit to Algeria illustrates her determination to discover her identity on her own terms and escape the confines imposed on her by both her ethnicity and her gender, thus representing a means by which the North African female character may 'open up the brutally silenced North African female voice and the veiled female body to be heard and seen, though not as an *object* of a patriarchal gaze but rather as an *agent* of her own subjectivity'.³⁹⁷ Dalila's suggestion that she will go and discover Algeria (and thus discover a part of her personal identity and history) by herself exemplifies her wish to act 'as an agent of her own subjectivity', allowing her to retain references to her ethnic origin and potentially transcend the dichotomies that hinder the attempts of Azouz and Béni to affirm their legitimate presence in French society. Once again, overcoming gendered oppression

³⁹⁴ Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, p. 50.

³⁹⁵ See Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, p. 129.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Helen Vassallo, 'Embodied Memory: War and the Remembrance of Wounds in Nina Bouraoui and Leïla Sebbar', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1.2 (2008), 189-200 (p. 192). Original's italics.

posits the possibility of overcoming oppression based on ethnicity as well, and it is Sebbar's female character who is able to put this escape forward, while Begag's male characters remain constricted by dichotomies based on race. Though Dalila expresses this possibility with reference to Algeria, her suggestion that she would discover Algeria on her own terms demonstrates a defiance of the gender-based restrictions which she would face there, while also demonstrating a desire to discover her inherited Algerian culture. Thus, faced with the dual confines imposed on her by her gender and her ethnicity in France, the suggestion of Dalila transcending the confines she would encounter in Algeria opens up the possibility of her achieving the same in France.

References in Sebbar's novel to the practice of hijab, the Islamic custom that obliges women to keep the majority of their body covered, elucidate the restrictions that Dalila faces, but also point towards overcoming these restrictions and allow us to broaden our interpretation of the definitions of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation*. As a symbol of patriarchal oppression, the veil or headscarf represents Dalila's own oppression that she suffers at home, but the way in which such objects are subverted in the text, eventually becoming objects which allow female characters to escape patriarchal oppression, has the effect of underlining the need for Dalila to negotiate her own subjectivity. Furthermore, as objects that cover the body ('invisibilise'), the different functions of the veil or headscarf in *Fatima* allow for further development of our understanding of the *visibilisation/invisibilisation* dichotomy.

The representation of the headscarf as a symbol of oppression is evident in one of the many stories told by the 'Algériennes au square' which largely make up the narrative. One of the women recounts the breakdown in her relationship with her daughter, a conflict similar to that which causes Dalila to eventually leave home, as the mother repeatedly beats her daughter for disobeying her and for her continual retorts. It is these retorts that provoke the mother into threatening to gag her daughter with a

headscarf, as follows: ‘il faut toujours qu’elle me réponde. Je lui ai dit un jour que je lui bâillonnerais la bouche avec un foulard solide’.³⁹⁸ Despite such a threat coming from the mother, the restrictions placed on the daughter are a result of patriarchal Islamic conventions and women perpetuating these without questioning them and, thus, the headscarf becomes an object that silences (symbolically and, in this case, literally) and that maintains oppression, imprisoning the younger generation in traditional Algerian culture. This notion of imprisonment recalls the constraint that Béni perceives being placed on him by the name Ben Abdallah, and Bouraoui’s observation that ‘les noms arabes sont des prisons familiales. On est toujours le fils de avec Ben ou le père de avec Bou’.³⁹⁹ In *Fatima*, it is a different cultural aspect that is distinctly Arab, the headscarf, that imprisons the female character in her culture of origin, which is reflected not only by the daughter in the story, but by Dalila’s own self-imposed imprisonment at home, of which we are made aware at the start of the novel. However, while Béni rejects his distinctly Algerian name in his quest for visibilisation, which ultimately contributes to the invisibilisation of his identity, the re-appropriation of objects such as the Islamic headscarf in *Fatima* opens up the possibility of female characters escaping their culture of origin in order to live their own subjectivity, rather than initiate the dissolution of that subjectivity in the majority ethnic Frenchness.

Furthermore, the image of the younger generation being gagged by the older generation suggests a double silencing, the effects of which are conflicting. As intimated above, the gagging of the younger generation detaches it from French society as it keeps it silenced and imprisoned in Algerian culture and tradition. Conversely, the transmission of historical silence through the generations detaches the younger generation from a collective Algerian history which they inherit. This double silencing illustrates the entrapment of the children of Algerian migrants between being visible

³⁹⁸ Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, pp. 72-73.

³⁹⁹ Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, p. 124.

and invisible in French society, an entrapment which was brought to light with reference to Begag's two novels and the protagonists' confinement to an in-between, undefined space of identity. In *Fatima*, the re-appropriation and subversion of symbols which contribute to this entrapment, such as the headscarf and veil, represent the possibility of escaping such entrapment by rejecting outright the restrictions which Begag's protagonists are unable to transcend.

The possibility of escaping oppression is exemplified by an account of a Moroccan friend of Dalila's who returns to Morocco from France to be married (an arranged marriage). We are told that Dalila's friend did not want to marry the man who was chosen for her, but 'elle s'était laissé faire; comme depuis toujours elle avait obéi',⁴⁰⁰ underlining the submissive role that North African women are expected to fulfil. However, repulsed by her husband to the extent that she does not want any part of her body to be touched by him, the veil is then referred to as a potential means of hiding herself from him, as follows: 'Elle aurait mis des gants, un voile sur son visage, qu'il ne voie pas le moindre morceau de sa chair, de sa peau'.⁴⁰¹ Thus, Dalila's friend uses the veil, which is conventionally worn to conceal women from other men, to hide herself from her own husband, reversing its role as a symbol of male oppression into a defence against this oppression.⁴⁰² This notion is compounded in the text by a further reference to the veil in such a context, as the narrator confirms that 'les femmes là-bas s'en

⁴⁰⁰ Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, p. 183.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 186.

⁴⁰² This subversion of the submissive role that North African women are expected to fulfil recalls a scene in Mounsi's *La Noce des fous* (discussed in more detail later on in this chapter, see pp. 149-50), in which the protagonist and his gang must disguise themselves as male prostitutes in order to enter a debauched costume ball at a mansion, which they burgle. Thus, the gang must take on submissive roles in order to enter a world that is inaccessible to them due to their marginalisation. Ultimately, this disguise allows them to breach the boundary and infiltrate white, privileged society, represented by the mansion (far from suggesting that the ball taking place in the mansion is also representative of dominant society, I interpret it as Mounsi's indication of the flawed, 'perverse' nature of this society). Therefore, in both *Fatima* and *La Noce des fous*, submissive roles are assumed and employed to fulfil the ultimate goal of escaping oppression or marginalisation. However, as we shall see, for the male characters of *La Noce des fous*, this breach is eventually unsuccessful as they are imprisoned for burglary and murder. Thus, the male characters remain unable to overcome their marginalisation, even when they attempt to subvert their own masculinity by taking on a submissive role. This failure further underlines the role of women in pointing towards escape from different forms of oppression, and further illustrates the role of Sebbar as a counterpoint to the other, male authors included in the primary corpus.

servaient bien pour échapper à la surveillance familiale et maritale'.⁴⁰³ Therefore, the veil, by default an object that 'invisibilises', is used as an object of resistance to the invisibilisation (both in concealing the body, but also, with regard to the place of North African women in French society, in preventing their capacity to reinforce links with dominant society) caused by patriarchal oppression. This resistance proves successful for Dalila's friend, whose personal story is embedded by Sebbar in a collective resistance on the part of female characters of North African origin against male oppression and the invisibilisation that this oppression causes, as follows:

La copine marocaine expliquait que le mariage était une manière d'échapper à la surveillance de la famille dès lors qu'on savait – et c'est ce qu'elle avait décidé – qu'on quitterait le mari quelques semaines après la cérémonie. Elle ajoutait que plusieurs de ses amies s'étaient mariées dans la famille, forcées, mais qu'elles avaient aussitôt fugué, reprenant ainsi une liberté qu'elles n'avaient jamais connue qu'épisodiquement, se séparant avec violence et de manière définitive de la famille, du mari, deux autorités désormais dérisoires.⁴⁰⁴

As indicated by the above extract, not only the veil but the institution of (arranged) marriage, which also has the capacity to stand for oppression against women, is re-appropriated as a means to gain a hitherto unfamiliar freedom. In the violent and definitive separation from patriarchal oppression, represented by the family and the husband, a path towards visibilisation (affirming one's presence in society) is put forward for female characters of North African origin. This path is represented by the re-appropriation of what is an 'invisibilising' object, the veil, as it is subverted to reflect the need to seek this legitimate existence in society by rejecting oppressive dichotomies and traditions and achieving visibility on one's own terms.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 199.

⁴⁰⁴ Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, p. 189.

Consequently, there is not so much an obscuring of the *visibilisation/invisibilisation* dichotomy in *Fatima*, but a complete rejection and re-appropriation of its imposed restrictions, as represented by Sebbar's own rejection and re-appropriation of symbols of male oppression to create, instead, objects that help liberate North African women from those same objects that have historically kept them silenced and imprisoned. Therefore, in order to take charge of her own subjectivity and live it on her own terms, it becomes apparent that Dalila needs to leave home, where the restrictions and oppression inherent in the *visibilisation/invisibilisation* dichotomy are reinforced. A reappearance of the idea of returning to Algeria serves to illustrate this need to leave home. In this instance, Algeria is shown to be an undesired destination for Dalila, as her father suggests that he will send his daughter to Algeria if she continues to return home late and to act in the 'immoral' way that France facilitates, prompting the protagonist to ask: 'L'Algérie était donc un pays de rééducation?'⁴⁰⁵ Thus, Algeria is presented as a prison – Dalila's mother herself asks her husband to stop referring to their homeland 'comme s'il s'agissait d'un bagne'⁴⁰⁶ – and, consequently, France is implicitly set up as a land of freedom. Indeed, the setting-up of Algeria as a prison is particularly pertinent considering Dalila's self-imposed imprisonment in her own home, and the parallel serves to highlight the idea that Dalila is imprisoned by her own culture. Therefore, in order to escape this imprisonment, Dalila must leave home. However, the representation of Algeria as a prison and the implicit contrast to France as the land of freedom recalls the dilemma faced by black people, and in this case people of Arab origin, to 'se blanchir ou disparaître'.⁴⁰⁷ To escape the invisibility and imprisonment of being Arab, Dalila must 'whiten' herself by leaving home and immersing herself in Frenchness, rejecting her family and Algerian tradition. However, we have already seen that, for the minority ethnic Other, whitening oneself is not a route to freedom, but in

⁴⁰⁵ Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, p. 108.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁰⁷ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 100.

fact risks a ‘sickening dissolution’.⁴⁰⁸ In the light also of the French Republic’s hostility to ethnic difference, it can be seen that France does not constitute an antidotal land of freedom, which underlines the notion that the choice between ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’ is, in fact, not a choice at all, but an indication of the imprisonment and invisibility of people of ex-colonial origin, with no apparent escape from this. Therefore, if Dalila is to leave home to escape being imprisoned by her own culture, she must also somehow avoid falling into the trap of ‘whitening herself’ if she is to take her subjectivity into her own hands.

Accordingly, Dalila puts forward the potential transcendence of the ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’ dilemma in that her flight from home does not involve the eradication of references to her origins. Convinced that, if her family goes to Algeria on holiday, her father will leave her there, Dalila vows to leave home before their departure. For Dalila, though, leaving home does not equate to ‘whitening herself’, and she rejects being forced to live in Algeria or under the patriarchal constraints imposed on her at home ‘*même si elle ne voulait pas être française*’.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, while she will not be forced to discover her origins, Dalila again demonstrates that she does not intend to turn her back on them, indicating that ‘aller vivre là-bas, elle le refusait [...] Elle irait plus tard’.⁴¹⁰ Thus, Dalila’s flight from home adds further layers of meaning to the concepts of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation*, and to the dilemma of ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’.

Taking first the dichotomy put forward by Fanon, it is perhaps initially tempting to view Dalila’s act of leaving as a disappearance since it is not, as established earlier, an act of ‘whitening herself’ (‘se blanchir’). However, it is not an act of disappearance in the negative sense that it causes Dalila to become non-existent: on the contrary, this act of ‘disappearance’ can be equated to the definition of *visibilisation* as put forward by Begag and Chaouite. By leaving home, Dalila hopes to escape the confines imposed on

⁴⁰⁸ See Asibong, ‘Travel Sickness’, p. 111.

⁴⁰⁹ Sebbar, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, p. 109. My italics.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

her by her own culture and affirm her presence in French society, which her family life prevents her from doing. Thus, Dalila rejects the choice imposed on her to ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’ and, instead, attempts to ‘se montrer un peu plus en affirmant sa présence,’⁴¹¹ which Fanon himself proposes in his discussion of the black person’s entrapment in this dichotomy, as follows: ‘le Noir ne doit plus se trouver placé devant ce dilemme: se blanchir ou disparaître, mais il doit pouvoir prendre conscience d’une possibilité d’exister’.⁴¹² As we have seen over the course of this chapter, Fanon’s dilemma can be mapped onto the Franco-Algerian characters in the primary texts, as evidenced especially by Begag’s protagonists’ attempts to eradicate references to their ethnic origins and replace these with features typical of the majority ethnic population. However, contrary to initiating her non-existence or dissolution within majority ethnic white identity, by rejecting the ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’ dichotomy, Dalila gives herself the possibility of existing on her own terms, escaping the oppression that she suffers at home and rejecting any imposition of a hegemonic definition of Frenchness. This desire to leave home, but not replace the culture she is leaving behind with Frenchness, reflects Sebbar’s own definition of ‘la fugue’ as ‘cet espace de liberté qui n’est pas la famille et qui n’est pas encore la société française’.⁴¹³ While also constituting an in-between space, the space evoked by Sebbar does not carry the same negative connotations of being trapped in between dominant and minority identities and belonging to neither, which we find in Begag’s first two novels. On the contrary, Sebbar’s space is one which has freed itself from the restrictions of having to belong to either one conception of identity or the other, exemplifying the notion that Dalila rejects completely the restrictions of the ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’ dichotomy, and indeed that represented by the opposition of the concepts of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation*. This

⁴¹¹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 59.

⁴¹² Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, pp. 100-01.

⁴¹³ Hiddleston, ‘Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l’oubli’, p. 8.

space of freedom, which rejects 'l'identité donnée à la naissance' and French society,⁴¹⁴ is a space where a fluid Franco-Algerian identity can be constructed, since 'la fugue [...] c'est le passage, la transition, la frontière qu'on imagine, comme le lieu de tous les possibles'.⁴¹⁵ In this way, the space in between identities becomes a positive, hopeful space where anything is possible, and this space is attained by Dalila through her 'fugue'. This reclaiming of Dalila's own subjectivity distinguishes her from Begag's two protagonists, whose entrapment in the same dichotomies that Dalila rejects leads their in-between space to be one of imprisonment rather than freedom.

As a result, *Fatima* points to a means of escape from the marginalisation and invisibilisation suffered by the Algerian population in France: it demonstrates a re-appropriation of the *visibilisation/invisibilisation* dichotomy put forward by Begag and Chaouite, and an alternative, more successful means of making oneself visible to those exemplified in both *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni*. Dalila's attempt at visibilisation does not conform to either definition of the two terms, since invisibilisation consists of detaching oneself from one's 'communauté d'appartenance' (France), and visibilisation comprises reinforcing 'ses liens avec elle'.⁴¹⁶ More so than Béni or Azouz, Dalila puts forward the possibility of constructing a fluid Franco-Algerian identity which claims its legitimate place in French society, but which does not renounce its cultural origin. Such an understanding of identity amounts to an entwining of the two seemingly opposing concepts of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation*, rather than adherence to one or the other. Thus, while Begag's novels present a failure in the protagonists' attempts to make themselves visible by eradicating references to their origins, *Fatima* proposes that the children of Algerian migrants need to retain their ethnic difference in entering French society, challenging the republican principle of unity by uniformity which only perpetuates the repetition of divisions inherited from the colonial past.

⁴¹⁴ Hiddleston, 'Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l'oubli', p. 9.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴¹⁶ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d'identité*, p. 59.

While *Fatima* sets up this route to escape from marginalisation, novels by Mounsi and Charef demonstrate that the desire to affirm one's presence can give rise to its own problems, notably violence, and a discussion of the manifestation of visibilisation as violence will be the focus of the next section. In my analysis of the texts, I will continue to take into account the definitions of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation* in order to demonstrate that the desire to make oneself visible 'en recherchant la confrontation'⁴¹⁷ conversely leads to invisibilisation, underlining the ambiguities and overlaps inherent in the terms put forward by Begag and Chaouite. Furthermore, this violent visibilisation is discussed with reference to the notion that the coloniser instils violence in the colonised subject, a violence which is then transmitted to the descendant of the colonised subject who, in the postcolonial period, enacts that same violence on the former coloniser, thus further indicating the potential of colonial conflicts to be replayed in the contemporary, postcolonial period.

Visibilisation and Violence

Though *Fatima* proposes a means by which the children of North African migrants can establish their legitimate place in French society on their own terms, represented in Sebbar's novel by 'la fugue', it is significant that such a process occurs, as Sebbar herself suggests, in 'cet espace de liberté qui n'est pas la famille et qui n'est pas encore la société française'.⁴¹⁸ While the attempts of Begag's protagonists to affirm their presence in dominant French society and identity are dictated by dichotomies which lead to the dissolution of their identity, Dalila's 'fugue' allows her to circumvent those same dichotomies and attain a space of relative freedom where she can conceive her

⁴¹⁷ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d'identité*, p. 59.

⁴¹⁸ Hiddleston, 'Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l'oubli', p. 8.

identity on her own terms, away from the restrictions imposed on her both at home and by republican definitions of nationhood. Thus, she transcends the constraints imposed on her by her ethnicity, but does not then attempt to conform to prerequisites for acceptance in French society: while Begag's protagonists conceive only of one side of the polarity or the other, Dalila rejects the polarity altogether. However, Sebbar's indication that this space of freedom 'n'est pas encore la société française' suggests that, while 'la fugue' denotes the possibility of constructing a new, fluid Franco-Algerian identity, the acceptance of such an identity in French society is still far from being realised. Furthermore, the idea that this identity only exists in the in-between space between dominant and minority cultures suggests that it falls short of the definition of *visibilisation*, as it does not affirm one's presence in dominant French society. Therefore, while Sebbar conceives of a space in which a fluid, Franco-Algerian identity may be constructed, this space continues to be situated outside of the sphere of dominant society. The subsequent analysis of the violent confrontation between the protagonists of *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* with dominant society underlines the notion that that central sphere remains beyond reach for the children of Algerian migrants.

It will be argued in this section that the desire to make oneself visible 'en recherchant la confrontation'⁴¹⁹ is complicated by the legacy of colonial violence which is transmitted to the children of Algerian migrants as descendants of colonised subjects. Thus, the transmission of colonial violence to the contemporary period becomes another aspect which is inherited from the history of colonisation and war shared by France and Algeria, with which this thesis engages. Significantly, it is the coloniser who brings 'la violence dans les maisons et dans les cerveaux du colonisé' in the first place, as Fanon argues in *Les Damnés de la terre*.⁴²⁰ This violence, Fanon argues, will be reclaimed by

⁴¹⁹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 59.

⁴²⁰ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 27.

the colonised subject and enacted on the coloniser when the former brings about the destruction of the colonial world, as follows: ‘La violence qui a présidé à l’arrangement du monde colonial [...] sera revendiquée et assumée par le colonisé au moment où, décidant d’être l’histoire en actes, la masse colonisée s’engouffrera dans les villes interdites’.⁴²¹ This violent exchange between the political and the personal is reinforced by Fanon, who goes on to clarify that ‘faire sauter le monde colonial’ can be carried out ‘par chacun des individus constituant le peuple colonisé’.⁴²² The violence enacted on a political scale by colonialism becomes ingrained in the ‘colonisé’ on a personal level, who will then re-enact that violence on the coloniser and the colonial system.

More than two decades later, Sebbar echoed Fanon’s ominous declaration with reference to the children of the colonised subject and, more specifically, those of Algerian origin, as follows:

Les enfants de l’immigration feront violence à la France comme elle a fait violence à leurs pères ici et là-bas. Ils sont sans mémoire mais ils n’oublient pas, je crois. Ils auront, avec la France, une histoire d’amour mêlée de haine, perverse et souvent meurtrière.⁴²³

Like Fanon, Sebbar links the personal with the political, as she suggests that the historical violence perpetrated against Algeria will be re-enacted on France by ‘les enfants de l’immigration’. Furthermore, Sebbar transposes the violence enacted against the coloniser in the destruction of the colonial world, evoked by Fanon, to the postcolonial period, in which the descendant of colonial violence will enact that same violence on the former coloniser, represented by dominant French society. The ‘villes interdites’ to which Fanon refers become central French society from which the descendant of the colonised subject is excluded, and *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des*

⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, p. 62.

fous reinforce the parallel as they present their protagonists attempting to violently affirm their presence in dominant French society. Consequently, the protagonists become representative of ‘la masse colonisée [qui] s’engouffrera dans les villes interdites’ as they attempt to escape their invisibility, physically and figuratively on the margins of French society, identity, and history.⁴²⁴

The idea that the history of violence perpetrated by the coloniser is ingrained in the colonised subject and is transmitted to the postcolonial period manifests itself in Charef’s figurative use of the concrete that dominates the facades of the HLM blocks in *Le Thé au harem*. According to the narrator, the concrete becomes an intrinsic component in the character of those who live in this peripheral space, stating that ‘les enfants [...] grandissent et lui ressemblent, à ce béton sec et froid. Ils sont secs et froids aussi, durs, apparemment indestructibles, mais il y a aussi des fissures dans le béton’.⁴²⁵ The gradual widening of these cracks in the concrete, representative of the growing desperation that reigns on the periphery, eventually results in an explosion of violence, depicted as follows: ‘c’est l’explosion, ça se reveille comme un volcan *qui a longtemps ruminé sa vengeance contre tout ce qui lui a été bourré dans la gueule*’.⁴²⁶ This evocation of a violent revenge that has been brooding for a long period of time transmits the legacy of colonial violence into the postcolonial period, the lack of any reference to the colonial period testifying to the inherent nature of this violence which does not need

⁴²⁴ Such a move from periphery to centre is illustrated in Mathieu Kassovitz’s film *La Haine* (1995), famous for its hard-hitting depiction of life in the *banlieues* of Paris. In particular, the idea of ‘infiltrating’ central, bourgeois Parisian society is highlighted when the three main characters enter an art gallery, from which they are forcibly ejected after an angry confrontation. See *La Haine*, Dir. Mathieu Kassovitz. Studio Canal. 1995. Indeed, the short promotional synopsis on the back cover of the English translation of Mounsi’s *La Noce des fous* likens the novel’s own unrelenting style to *La Haine*, emphasising the place of the texts I will be discussing in this section within a genre of French cultural production that seeks to represent the extent to which ethnic minorities suffer from being excluded from French society.

⁴²⁵ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 62.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63. My italics.

a frame of reference to be explained, reflecting Sebbar's suggestion that the victims of this legacy of violence 'sont sans mémoire mais ils n'oublient pas'.⁴²⁷

In addition to the representation of concrete as an ingrained source of violence, which has itself been engendered by the history of colonial violence,⁴²⁸ and the inability to escape from being scarred by it ('on ne se remet pas du béton'),⁴²⁹ the image of concrete also acts as an illustration of the marginalisation and invisibility of those who are born into this world. Charef calls this excluded part of society 'les mômes du béton',⁴³⁰ evoking a legacy of marginalisation which is passed on from generation to generation by the idea that the children born on the margins are created by the concrete itself, which is representative of marginalisation since it is an outwardly perceptible characteristic of the HLM blocks on the periphery of central French society. This legacy of marginalisation causes the excluded to seek confrontation, enacting upon those responsible for their exclusion the violence that they themselves have suffered. This idea links Begag's and Chaouite's observations to the notion that colonial violence is ingrained in the descendants of the colonised subject and needs an outlet. According to Begag and Chaouite, becoming aware of his/her marginalisation, the marginalised person will seek to 'donner la preuve de la légitimité de son être',⁴³¹ or, in other words, will try to make him or herself visible. Consequently, as visibilisation consists of seeking confrontation with dominant society, and as violence is ingrained in the marginalised descendant of colonial violence, what ensues is a violent confrontation with dominant society. This interplay between marginalisation and violence is

⁴²⁷ Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, p. 62. This idea is further corroborated by Farid Aïchoune's observation that 'on assiste [...] à l'émergence d'une génération sans mémoire qui essaie de prendre sa revanche contre tous'. Farid Aïchoune, *Nés en banlieue* (Paris: Éditions Ramsay, 1991), p. 13.

⁴²⁸ Later references include the description of concrete as 'livide'. See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 161. As well as depicting the colour of the concrete, the use of this particular adjective evokes the image of bruising, and reflects the idea that the inhabitants of the HLM blocks suffer from wounds that have been inherited from the violence of the colonial period.

⁴²⁹ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 63.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴³¹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, pp. 56-57.

encapsulated by Charef's figurative use of the image of concrete, which represents both an inherited violence and marginalisation.

Before the violent confrontation with dominant society, *Le Thé au harem* reflects another of Fanon's observations, which further underlines the legacy of colonial violence and its manifestation in the contemporary period. Fanon indicates that 'cette agressivité sédimentée dans ses muscles, le colonisé va la manifester d'abord contre les siens',⁴³² and this 'autodestruction collective',⁴³³ is illustrated in Charef's novel by the violence perpetrated by the youths of the *cit * within the *cit * itself. As well as the division between centre and periphery that is highlighted in the novel, there exists a generational conflict that manifests itself in violent confrontations between the youths of the *cit * and its older inhabitants, irrespective of any family relationship that may exist between them. For example, when Jean-Marc realises that a wine bottle dropped intentionally from a flat above to land amongst Madjid and his group of friends is one of his father's, he has no hesitation in letting the gang know the identity of the perpetrator, and the gang's response to this incident is to burn Jean-Marc's father's car down.⁴³⁴ Such conflict between younger and older inhabitants of the *cit * flares up to a greater or lesser extent at several points throughout the novel, and culminates in a violent clash in which the residents come to blows, resulting in injuries on both sides. More significantly, though, the clash is not depicted as conclusive or definitive in any way, leaving the possibility of further violence open, as follows: 'La m me nuit, cinq voitures br l rent, le plus beau feu d'artifice jamais vu   la cit  des Fleurs. On en parle encore'.⁴³⁵ The idea that this event continues to be discussed attributes an enduring aspect to this type of conflict, strengthening the notion that marginalised spaces such as the *cit * depicted in *Le Th  au harem* are breeding grounds for violence, which is itself

⁴³² Fanon, *Les Damn s de la terre*, p. 36.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 38. Charef himself using the term 'autodestruction' in the narrative, underlining the parallel between colonial and postcolonial violence.

⁴³⁴ See Charef, *Le Th  au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, pp. 36-37.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

placed there by the history of colonial violence and its transmission to the contemporary period. Indeed, the riots of 2005, which were initiated by residents of marginalised HLM blocks such as that in which Madjid lives, suggests that such violence as depicted in *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* remains on the periphery of France's big cities, threatening to reawaken periodically. Furthermore, the violent reactions to the exclusion suffered by the inhabitants of Madjid's *cité* recall the way in which 'le colon entretient chez le colonisé une colère qu'il stoppe à la sortie', due to the fact that 'le colonisé est pris dans les mailles serrées du colonialisme'.⁴³⁶ Such parallels indicate both a legacy of violence and one of inescapability and imprisonment, again reflecting Charef's figurative use of the image of concrete, which represents inherited violence and inherited marginalisation. This imposition of restraint, represented by the 'mailles serrées du colonialisme', develops into an embodiment of suppressed violence which builds up and which 'se libère périodiquement dans des explosions sanguinaires',⁴³⁷ such as the sporadic outbursts of violence amongst the inhabitants of the *cité* in *Le Thé au harem*.

Since characters such as Madjid are trapped in their marginalisation, the violence that breeds as a result of this marginalisation finds an outlet in the peripheral space itself, illustrating that the excluded do seek escape from this invisibility, but cannot achieve it since they cannot free themselves from the 'mailles serrées' that are imposed on them by the repetition of colonial oppositions in contemporary society. However, *Le Thé au harem* does present instances when Madjid and Pat find a release for this aggression when they transgress the centre-periphery border and confront dominant society. In doing so, they fulfil the latter part of the definition of *visibilisation* – 'se montrer un peu plus en affirmant sa présence et *en recherchant la*

⁴³⁶ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, pp. 37-38.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

*confrontation*⁴³⁸ – as well as provide an example of the oppressed surging into the ‘villes interdites’.

The burglary committed by the pair in a tennis club changing room is indicative of this violent attempt at visibilisation, as it exemplifies the opposition in class and its correspondence to the centre-periphery division – a correlation which *Le Thé au harem* seeks to highlight. On coming across the tennis courts, Madjid remarks that ‘il paraît qu’y a que les riches qui font du tennis’, and Pat suggests breaking into the changing rooms because ‘doit y en avoir du pognon dans ces vestiaires’.⁴³⁹ Thus, the forbidden centre, ‘les villes interdites’, represented here by the exclusive tennis club, is designated as a wealthy, middle-class space as opposed to the deprived, lower-class periphery to which Pat and Madjid belong, and the infiltration of this space by the marginalised is exhilaratingly proclaimed by Madjid in the aftermath of the pair’s successful burglary, as follows: ‘Eh! Paris! tiens-toi bien, v’la les banlieusards!’⁴⁴⁰ This emphatic announcement is indicative of Madjid’s desire to affirm his presence and make himself visible in central French society which, in this case, manifests itself in an unlawful confrontation and signifies the possibility of attempting to achieve visibilisation through acts of violence and aggression as a result of the violence that has been transmitted to the descendant of the colonised subject.

However, if we relate this type of visibilisation more closely to the definition put forward by Begag and Chaouite, contradictions once again emerge. While this type of infiltration of central French society provides a means for Madjid to ‘se montrer un peu plus en affirmant sa présence’, it does not allow him to ‘renforcer ses liens avec [sa communauté d’appartenance]’.⁴⁴¹ On the contrary, such acts only provide a sense of justification to the construction of ‘cette figure des “jeunes de cités” [qui] constitue

⁴³⁸ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 59. My italics.

⁴³⁹ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 171.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

⁴⁴¹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 59.

l'une des principales peurs collectives de la société française': an image of the children of migrants that, as Laurent Mucchielli argues, continues to prevail in contemporary French society.⁴⁴² By conforming to this prevalent stereotype, Madjid detaches himself further from French society, thus conforming to the definition of *invisibilisation*: 'se détacher de sa communauté d'appartenance'⁴⁴³ (the 'communauté d'appartenance' being French society). Therefore, in *Le Thé au harem*, Charef presents an invisible world which, even in its attempts to make itself visible, remains excluded and detached from central French society, recalling the idea that the protagonists of the primary corpus are trapped in a vicious circle. This entrapment is perpetuated by the repetition of colonial oppositions in the postcolonial present, exemplified by the transmission of colonial violence which is inherited by the children of immigration and re-enacted on dominant French society, substantiating Sebbar's claim that 'les enfants de l'immigration feront violence à la France comme elle a fait violence à leurs pères'.⁴⁴⁴ Over the course of this chapter, different ways in which dominant French society maintains the invisibility of the formerly colonised subject and his/her descendants have been discussed and, in each case, the realisation of one's exclusion from dominant society leads to a desire for visibility. This desire manifests itself in multiple ways, one of which is violence and aggressive confrontation with central society which, as evidenced in *Le Thé au harem*, only leads to further invisibility. This type of (in)visibilisation is similar to that attempted by Béni and Azouz, both of whose attempts to conform to a hegemonic definition of 'Frenchness' lead to a dissolution of their identity. Though the means by which the characters attempt to make themselves visible differ from Begag's novels to Charef's, the outcome of engendering further invisibility

⁴⁴² Laurent Mucchielli, 'Immigration et délinquance: fantasmes et réalités', in *La République mise à nu par son immigration*, ed. by Nacira Guénif-Souilamas (Paris: La Fabrique éditions, 2006), pp. 39-61 (p. 39).

⁴⁴³ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, 59.

⁴⁴⁴ Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, p. 62. Indeed, the perpetuation of violence indicated by Sebbar's evocation of the re-enacting of colonial violence on the former coloniser by the formerly colonised subject itself indicates a vicious circle.

is the same, as is the creation of the impression of entrapment in a vicious circle. Thus, the vicious circle is not only evident in the cyclical nature of the construction of the novels themselves, which begin by pointing towards a pessimistic future and end with an indication that that pessimism will continue, as evidenced in the first chapter, but also in the instances when protagonists actively attempt to escape the invisibility to which the vicious circle confines them. If the first chapter demonstrated that characters such as Madjid, Béni, and Azouz are trapped by default, then the second seeks to demonstrate that attempts to overcome these pre-defined circumstances are equally challenging, and this double entrapment is evidenced further in Mounsi's *La Noce des fous*.

Embodying a History of Violence

While Charef uses the image of concrete to represent the ingrained accumulation of violence that resides in those who inhabit the HLM blocks, Mounsi evokes more directly Fanon's suggestion that the coloniser 'porte la violence dans les maisons et dans les cerveaux du colonisé',⁴⁴⁵ indicating that violence is embedded deep in the bodies of the children of the periphery and dictates the totality of their expression and their action, as follows:

Cité des Marguerites, à Nanterre [...] J'appris à me battre avec les autres gamins du quartier *qui n'avaient rien d'autre que cette violence, là, dans le ventre, placée au milieu du plexus* et qui

⁴⁴⁵ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 27.

vous sert de mots, faite à coups de pied, de coups de poing, de cris, de hurlements, de fuites vers je ne sais où.⁴⁴⁶

Indeed, while Charef's depiction of the concrete of the HLM blocks reflects Fanon's argument that the coloniser instils violence 'dans les maisons [...] du colonisé', Mounsi's expression of the embodied violence of the excluded corresponds more closely to Fanon's notion that the coloniser ingrains violence 'dans les cerveaux du colonisé'. In *La Noce des fous*, the reference to Nanterre confirms that the setting is again the peripheral *banlieues* of Paris, where Madjid's *cit * is also located (furthermore, the school attended by Pat and Madjid is also in the Marguerites area).⁴⁴⁷ However, the impression of marginalisation is advanced by the narrator of *La Noce des fous* to become one of non-existence, as he states that 'je n'ai jamais  t  s r d'avoir exist . Je me suis toujours confondu dans un vague souvenir qu'il me semblait avoir v cu'.⁴⁴⁸ Going further than expressing his invisibility, the narrator is unsure as to whether he in fact existed at all, and he goes on to link this non-existence and invisibility with violence, stating immediately after this expression of his non-existence that 'j' tais dans la vie comme dans une sale histoire, t moin d'un meurtre dont j' tais l'assassin et l'assassin '.⁴⁴⁹ While there is no explicit reference to the history of colonisation here, the 'sale histoire' to which the narrator refers, and the possible double interpretation of 'histoire', transposes the narrator's personal story of violence and invisibility onto the wider history of colonisation shared by France and Algeria. Indeed, the evocation of a 'sale histoire' resonates with the common depiction of the Algerian War as 'une sale guerre',⁴⁵⁰ implicitly indicating the transmission of the violence of the war to the children of immigration. Furthermore, the idea that the narrator is both the assassinated

⁴⁴⁶ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 11. My italics.

⁴⁴⁷ See Charef, *Le Th  au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 59.

⁴⁴⁸ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 14.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ See for example Stora, *La Gangr ne et l'Oubli*, p. 321.

and the assassin in this ‘sale histoire’, both victim and perpetrator of violence, brings to mind the notion that, as a victim of colonial violence, the colonised subject is consequently turned into a perpetrator of that same violence, the legacy of which resides and is embodied in the descendant of the colonised subject, represented in *La Noce des fous* by the narrator-protagonist. Thus, in the same way that the image of the concrete of the HLM blocks symbolises both an inherited marginalisation of the world presented in *Le Thé au harem* and the violence that is ingrained in this world, Mounsi associates marginalisation and violence, which are both inherited from an unspecified ‘sale histoire’. The lack of explicit reference to the nature of this history again recalls Sebbar’s assertion that the children of immigration are ‘sans mémoire mais ils n’oublient pas’, which indicates the transmission of a history of violence, even if the memory of that history has not been transmitted in the most effective manner. Like the personal story of violence and invisibility of the narrator-protagonist of *La Noce des fous*, the history of colonisation and war in question is a history of violence which has suffered a great degree of effacement, implying furthermore that the preservation of this effacement perpetuates the violence inherited from the past.

This further indication of the vicious circle in which the children of Algerian migrants are trapped is underlined by the way in which, like Madjid, the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* attempts to attain visibility through violence, which ultimately only leads to consolidating his invisibility. The notion of a division between centre and periphery, and the breach of that border by the descendant of the colonised subject, is enhanced in Mounsi’s novel by the robbery committed by the protagonist and his group of friends in a mansion hosting members of high society. The forbidden nature of the world that the group of friends enter in order to commit this crime is underlined by the narrator-protagonist’s admission that ‘seuls, jamais nous n’aurions osé approcher de ce quartier ni franchir ces murs, sentant que nous n’étions pas du même monde ni de la

même espèce que les gens qu'ils abritaient'⁴⁵¹ – the use of the verb 'franchir' creating the impression of a dividing line which separates the world of the narrator from the 'villes interdites' that he and his group of friends are entering. Not only is it intimated that the narrator and his friends come from a different world, but that they are also of a different species, recalling the association that Fanon makes between being white and being human,⁴⁵² to which I referred in my earlier analysis of Begag's texts. If we take the centre-periphery border to correspond to a division between majority and minority ethnic populations, then it becomes appropriate that, in order to be admitted into the mansion, the gang must wear costumes, since the residence is the setting for a debauched costume ball to which the protagonist and his friends are invited as male prostitutes, the guests seeking 'la compagnie de jeunes adolescents'.⁴⁵³ Therefore, the protagonist and his group of friends must disguise themselves in order to join in the ball, changing their appearance and taking on a different persona, highlighting the notion that those who do not conform to majority ethnic identity must undergo both an external and internal transformation in order to be accepted by the dominant group.⁴⁵⁴

Initially, this is a transformation which the group uses to its advantage, successfully infiltrating the ball and burgling the mansion. However, the violence ingrained in the members of the group takes hold when the owner of the mansion, unable to witness the violation of his possessions any longer, leaps onto one of the gang, Bako, who, 'par réflexe, planta la pointe de son cran d'arrêt dans la poitrine de

⁴⁵¹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 80.

⁴⁵² See Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 99.

⁴⁵³ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 75. Taking into consideration the previous discussion of the role of the female figure in opening up the possibility of overcoming oppression and marginalisation, it is perhaps also appropriate that the members of the gang take on submissive, less 'masculine' roles in order to transcend the boundaries to which they are confined.

⁴⁵⁴ As well as arguing that black people need to 'whiten themselves' in order for their humanity to be recognised, Fanon states that, in order to achieve the morality represented by being white, 'il faut que disparaisse de la conscience le noir, l'obscur, le nègre'. Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 176. Thus, 'whitening oneself' is a question of reconfiguring both one's physical appearance and one's inner consciousness. Similarly, in the context of this study, the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* must hide his physical Arab appearance as well as undergo a psychological reconfiguration of his identity in order to gain entry to the ball.

l'homme'.⁴⁵⁵ The lack of intent highlighted in Bako's reflexive action underlines the notion that this type of violence is ingrained within its perpetrators: Bako kills the owner of the mansion 'par réflexe', suggesting that he does so by some insuperable instinct, incarnating amorality, and the insistence on his horror after the man's death⁴⁵⁶ emphasises that, despite the possession of a gun, it was never anticipated that the planned burglary would extend to an act of murder. Furthermore, Mounsi ascribes a collective responsibility to the gang, even though it was only Bako who committed the deadly act. This has the effect of attaching the incarnation of amorality and violence, represented by Bako's reflexive action in killing the victim, to each of the members of the gang, including the narrator-protagonist. The murder is presented as a result of destiny – 'la main solennelle du destin s'était levée'⁴⁵⁷ – but, rather than this being the destiny of the member of the gang who committed the act, it is a destiny of violence in which the life of the narrator-protagonist is implicated as well, as follows: 'Voilée de ténèbres, la nuit avait glissé sous nos pieds dans l'aube des assassins'.⁴⁵⁸ Thus, Mounsi designates each of the members of the group as murderers as they leave the scene of the crime. The inevitability of the murder, along with the collective responsibility that the writer ascribes to the gang, imbricates the narrator-protagonist in a wider destiny in which he and the other members of his gang incarnate and enact violence, recalling Sebbar's claim that the children of immigration will re-enact the colonial violence suffered by their parents on the former coloniser. In particular, the murder perpetrated by the protagonist and his group of friends, and their designation as murderers, brings to mind Sebbar's idea that 'les enfants de l'immigration [...] auront, avec la France, une histoire d'amour mêlée de haine, perverse et souvent meurtrière'.⁴⁵⁹ The murder

⁴⁵⁵ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 87.

⁴⁵⁶ See Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 88.

⁴⁵⁷ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, pp. 89.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁵⁹ Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, p. 62.

indicates the imbrication of the gang in a murderous history shared by former coloniser and formerly colonised subject, underlining the enduring legacy of colonial violence.

Simultaneously and paradoxically, the idea that the murder was carried out by instinct and lacked real intent removes a degree of responsibility from the murderers, underlining the narrator-protagonist's earlier declaration that 'j'étais l'assassin et l'assassiné', and implying that we are to look elsewhere for the underlying reasons of this violence, such as to the transmission of colonial violence from coloniser to colonised subject and its embodiment in the descendant of the colonised subject. In this way, my reading of *La Noce des fous* reflects Hélène Jaccopard's observation that texts by the children of North African migrants 'are here to denounce the real criminals among us'.⁴⁶⁰ The unjust association of delinquency with the children of North African migrants, to which Jaccopard refers, will be discussed at length in the fourth chapter of this thesis, but, in the current chapter, it is the violence instilled in the colonised subject by the coloniser, and its transmission to the descendant of the colonised subject, that *La Noce des fous* is revealed to denounce implicitly. This view is reinforced by Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, who argue that *La Noce des fous* 'show[s] the reality of violence on the periphery but also [lays] the blame on the former colonial power',⁴⁶¹ underlining the idea that Mounsi is denouncing the violence enacted by the former coloniser in the first place.

Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie also argue that the purpose of the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* is to 'assert his existence', through violence and other immoral exploits,⁴⁶² emphasising the notion that violence is used as a means of visibilisation in Mounsi's text. Occupying a peripheral space in French society, to the

⁴⁶⁰ Hélène Jaccopard, 'Racaille versus Flics? Who's to Blame for Criminality and Delinquency in Franco-Maghrébine (*Beur*) Fiction?', in *Hexagonal Variations: Diversity, Plurality and Reinvention in Contemporary France*, ed. by Jo McCormack, Murray Pratt and Alistair Rolls (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 159-76 (p. 176).

⁴⁶¹ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 259.

⁴⁶² Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 259.

extent that he is not sure that he ever existed, the narrator-protagonist seeks to violently affirm his presence in society, and this confrontation is illustrated by the infiltration of the mansion by the protagonist and his gang. As we shall see, this attempt to make himself visible only leads to further invisibility, corresponding to the types of visibilisation attempted in the majority of the texts discussed in this chapter. However, the murder carried out by the gang appears at first to result in a visibilisation of the protagonist and his closest friend, Bako, who committed the murder. This increased visibility is highlighted in their arrest, with crowds of people surrounding them as they are led to the police van and the ‘crépitement hystérique des appareils photographiques’.⁴⁶³ In particular, the change in the perception of the police towards the narrator and Bako, brought about by the pair’s arrest for murder rather than less serious crimes, elevates them to a level of notoriety that borders on celebrity, and reinforces the impression that they have been able to make themselves visible through violence and crime, as highlighted by the following extract:

Fatigués de nos menus larcins sans lendemain, ils nous regardaient désormais avec attention; pour la première fois, j’eus l’impression qu’ils consentaient à nous voir. Je vis passer une lueur humaine dans leurs yeux, comme un regard de bonté; le sacrement des assassins nous hissait soudain au culte des enfants prodiges. Le mort nous revêtait de sa magnificence royale. L’on eût dit que ce crime nous recouvrait d’un titre de gloire.⁴⁶⁴

In this expression of glorification through notoriety, there is the suggestion that central French society, represented in this instance by the police, has been led to view the marginalised duo in a more human light. The suggestion that the police were now looking at Bako and the protagonist ‘avec attention’, and with ‘un regard de bonté’ and

⁴⁶³ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 102.

⁴⁶⁴ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 103.

‘une lueur humaine dans leurs yeux’, echoes the significance that Fanon places on recognition by the other on one’s own sense of human worth, as follows:

L’homme n’est humain que dans la mesure où il veut s’imposer à un autre homme, afin de se faire reconnaître par lui [...] C’est de cet autre, c’est de la reconnaissance par cet autre, que dépendent sa valeur et sa réalité humaines.⁴⁶⁵

In crime, Bako and the protagonist have caused the police to recognise and pay attention to them, thus forcing them to acknowledge their humanity and achieving an affirmation of their presence in central French society. However, the nature of this type of visibilisation, attained through violence and crime, inevitably leads to further invisibility, revealing itself to be a false visibilisation rather than a definitive assertion of the protagonist’s human worth and legitimate place in dominant society.

This false visibilisation is confirmed when the protagonist gives his statement to the police. Though in his statement the narrator sees ‘la mise en écriture de mon existence réelle’,⁴⁶⁶ suggesting a visibilisation of his existence in the recording of the crime, it is immediately turned into a representation of the narrator’s return to invisibility, as follows:

Je songeais à ces vies pleines de tumulte, couchées sur les registres dans les archives de l’administration, pareilles à des œuvres inachevées, dispersées dans les caves de la magistrature, toutes ces tristes confessions consignées dans les grands livres de l’autorité, et à la mienne, imprimée, qui connut le même sort. Dans l’histoire de chacune, qui n’est écrite nulle part ailleurs, je pouvais lire ma propre destinée.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, pp. 195-96.

⁴⁶⁶ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 108.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

Thus, an expression of the possibility that the protagonist has achieved visibility, through the recording of his crime, is immediately followed by the confirmation that, in fact, seeking visibilisation through crime and violence has only led to a consolidation of his invisible existence. Rather than asserting his existence, the life of the protagonist is embedded within the lives of the many who have previously been in his position, whose existences have been consigned to ‘les caves de la magistrature’, reinforcing, furthermore, the notion that there is a generational transmission of invisibility at work, reserved for Algerian migrants and their children. The ‘sale histoire’, in which the protagonist is not sure to have existed, reaches beyond the personal story of the protagonist to encapsulate a collective history of invisibility suffered by Algerians at the hands of the (former) colonising power. Furthermore, the comparison of the lives consigned to the police archives to ‘des œuvres inachevées’ suggests a lack of fulfilment which reflects the vicious circle that is characteristic of the process of visibilisation attempted by characters such as the narrator-protagonist of *La Noce des fous* and Madjid in *Le Thé au harem*. The violence perpetrated by these characters in order to achieve what is only a false visibility simply serves to perpetuate the invisibility in which they are trapped, and the constant desire for visibility that this triggers causes the cycle to be repeated, and the search for visibility never to be concluded. The repetitive nature of the vicious circle underlines the entrapment in a history of invisibility and violence suffered by Algerians and their children, which is highlighted further by the mirroring of the ominous foresights expressed by Fanon and Sebbar. While Fanon’s declaration that ‘la violence qui a présidé à l’arrangement du monde colonial [...] sera revendiquée et assumée par le colonisé au moment où [...] la masse colonisée s’engouffrera dans les villes interdites’⁴⁶⁸ occurred before the end of the Algerian War, a year before Algerian independence, the echo of these sentiments in

⁴⁶⁸ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 29.

Sebbar's remark twenty-five years later that 'les enfants de l'immigration feront violence à la France comme elle a fait violence à leurs pères ici et là-bas'⁴⁶⁹ reflects a continuation of colonial violence being reclaimed and re-enacted in the postcolonial period, due to the continuing invisibility and marginalisation suffered by the descendants of colonised Algerian subjects in French society. More recent events, such as the 2005 riots, indicate that the cycle of marginalisation and violence discerned in novels such as *La Noce des fous* and *Le Thé au harem* remains present in contemporary French society. As Swamy has recently suggested, one of factors behind the outbreak of the riots was 'the widening gap between mainstream French society and those who found themselves – politically, economically, socially, culturally, and even spatially – in its margins',⁴⁷⁰ strikingly recalling the marginalisation of the characters encountered in the primary texts analysed by this thesis. Thus, the notions of invisibility and seeking visibility through violence discussed in this chapter contribute to an understanding of the recurrence of social disillusionment and violence in contemporary French society, and illustrate the enduring legacy of colonial violence.

An event that serves to represent the relocation of colonial violence from the overseas battlefield to the metropolitan centre, mirroring the way in which Sebbar's comments relate those made by Fanon to postcolonial French society, is the brutal police repression of Algerian demonstrators on 17 October 1961. As Joshua Cole observes, the repression was indicative of 'a desperate state defending itself by unleashing the murderous violence that had long been routine in colonial spaces within the heart of the French capital itself',⁴⁷¹ illustrating that the violence that had become common in Algeria was no longer confined to the colony, but was now enacted on Algerians living in the metropolitan centre as well. While constituting one amongst other acts of state repression, House and MacMaster highlight the unique nature of the

⁴⁶⁹ Huston and Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes*, p. 62.

⁴⁷⁰ Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. xv.

⁴⁷¹ Cole, 'Massacres and their Historians', p. 109.

events of 17 October 1961, as they were played out in ‘the heart of empire’.⁴⁷² This playing out of the Franco-Algerian conflict in the metropolitan centre reflects the unique nature of the Algerian War itself, which was set apart from other wars of decolonisation due to fighting occurring in the land of the coloniser as well as the colony.⁴⁷³ A further reason for this transposition of colonial warfare to the Hexagon was the largest colonial presence in Europe, as Algerian immigrants financed the liberation struggle and carried out acts of terrorism themselves.⁴⁷⁴ Thus, the relocation of colonial violence from colony to metropolitan centre, as evidenced by the repression of 17 October 1961, is also seen to engender violence in the colonised subject. In turn, the colonised subject re-enacts the violence perpetrated against him/her on the coloniser, reflecting Fanon’s argument that violence will be reclaimed when the colonised subject enters the ‘villes interdites’, which now comprise the heart of empire itself.

Moreover, the hesitation to confront the memory of events such as the repression of 17 October 1961 and to assume responsibility for them on the part of the French state facilitates what Stora calls ‘la mauvaise mémoire’, defined as a ‘mémoire de revanche qui n’assume pas la conduite de cette guerre, qui ne pratique pas la distance critique, ne reconnaît aucune responsabilité dans la conduite de cette guerre, et qui peut être extrêmement dangereuse’.⁴⁷⁵ The prevalence of this ‘mauvaise mémoire’ in French society indicates precisely what allows for the transmission of aspects of the war, such as violence, to the present day, as demonstrated in Sebbar’s echoing of Fanon’s claim that the violence suffered by the victims of colonisation will be reclaimed and re-enacted on its perpetrators. The lack of consideration of the enduring legacy of the Algerian War, and the desire to suppress the memory of the war, transmit the conflict (in different forms) to the present day, corresponding, as Stora observes, ‘à ce que nous

⁴⁷² House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 5.

⁴⁷³ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 25.

⁴⁷⁴ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁷⁵ Stora, ‘La Guerre d’Algérie quarante ans après’, p. 133.

avons vécu dans le temps de cette guerre elle-même'.⁴⁷⁶ With specific regard to colonial violence, the debates that have continued to surround moments of violence during the Algerian War, such as the repression of 17 October 1961,⁴⁷⁷ perpetuating past conflicts, facilitate the spatial and temporal transmission of such violence, from colony to metropolitan centre, and from the colonial period to contemporary French society.

Furthermore, in the spatial transposition of colonial violence from the overseas battlefield to the metropolitan centre and subsequent problematic remembrance of the violence of the Algerian War, a further dislocation has occurred. The prevalence of 'la mauvaise mémoire' with regard to the war fails to anchor the memory of colonial violence in central French society, despite the enactment of this violence not only in the metropolitan centre of France, but in the heart of the capital itself, as evidenced by the repression of 17 October 1961. As a result, the violence is displaced to the outskirts of French society, where the victims of colonisation and their descendants have historically been confined. These breeding grounds for violence come in the form of the volatile, forgotten, invisible HLM blocks, in which the protagonists of novels such as *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* live their formative years, and where, as Charef illustrates, 'contre l'autodestruction, le silence, c'est la violence qui prend le dessus et on devient irrécupérable'.⁴⁷⁸ The idea that silence engenders violence reflects the way in which the hesitation to confront the wider implications of colonisation and the Algerian War fosters the violence perpetrated during that period. Furthermore, Charef suggests that, once violence takes its hold, there is no escape or regression from this state, and those who succumb to it become fixed or trapped – 'on devient irrécupérable' – reinforcing the assumption that the characters in *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous*

⁴⁷⁶ Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après', p. 133.

⁴⁷⁷ See for example Cole, 'Massacres and their Historians', pp. 108-09, and House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 8-11.

⁴⁷⁸ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 63. Furthermore, mirroring this depiction of the *banlieues* in literature, Stora speaks of 'la situation explosive dans les banlieues en France, où les jeunes issus de l'immigration se battent contre l'exclusion, pour la dignité et la reconnaissance du complément de richesse sensible qu'ils apportent à leur pays d'adoption. Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après', p. 135.

possess an innate amorality, as illustrated by Bako committing murder ‘par réflexe’.⁴⁷⁹ In turn, this highlights the inevitability of violence being reclaimed by the victims of colonisation and re-enacted on central French society, conforming to Stora’s claim in *La Gangrène et l’Oubli* that the absence of memory regarding the Algerian War eats at the heart of French society.⁴⁸⁰ Though the prevalence of ‘la mauvaise mémoire’ removes the memory of violence from the centre, its cultivation on the periphery causes it to return to the location where it was perpetrated in the first place through the constant attempts of the protagonists of novels such as *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* to make themselves visible in central society by means of violence and confrontation.

As we have seen, the violence that was introduced ‘dans les maisons et dans les cerveaux du colonisé’⁴⁸¹ endures and resides in the margins of French society, becoming an inevitable component of the lives of characters such as Madjid and the narrator-protagonist of *La Noce des fous*. However, this violence then acts as a hindrance to the attempts of these characters to make themselves visible in central French society, consolidating instead their invisibilisation. This distortion of the dichotomy proposed by Begag and Chaouite can be seen in the correspondence of the definition ‘se montrer un peu plus en affirmant sa présence’ to *visibilisation*.⁴⁸² Begag and Chaouite offer this affirmation of one’s presence in a positive light whereas, in *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous*, the protagonists do succeed in affirming their presence but, as this is achieved through crime and violence, their acts of affirming their presence deviate from the definition of *visibilisation* offered. Such a distortion of Begag’s and Chaouite’s definition leads, if not to further invisibility, then perhaps more accurately to a negative visibility. Whereas Begag and Chaouite conceive of *visibilisation* as a route to integration, or at least a route to attachment with one’s

⁴⁷⁹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 87.

⁴⁸⁰ See Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, p. 8.

⁴⁸¹ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 27.

⁴⁸² Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d’identité*, p. 59.

‘communauté d’appartenance’, the visibilisation by violence carried out by the protagonists of Charef and Mounsi only reflects and reinforces the inability of the excluded to integrate. Therefore, the consideration of a legacy of violence embodied by these characters reveals further complexities and contradictions inherent within the *visibilisation/invisibilisation* dichotomy. The notion that, in order to achieve visibilisation, the migrant must seek confrontation serves precisely to underline the difficulties faced by ethnic Algerian populations in attempting to affirm their presence in central, dominant French society.

Mirroring to a certain extent the choice put forward by Fanon to ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’,⁴⁸³ the binary dilemma that emerges when considering the notions of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation* in *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* is to choose between a peripheral existence on the outskirts of French society or a life in incarceration. Though this dilemma does not explicitly refer to the specific racial context which shapes that put forward by Fanon, it is nonetheless equally undesirable. Like the choice between ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’, it is not a choice at all, but a representation of the invisible existence in which the novels’ protagonists are trapped. Furthermore, given the (neo)colonial context in which the protagonists’ entrapment in immorality, violence, and invisibility is played out, there is an implicit racial context, highlighting the relevance to the protagonists of *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* of Fanon’s assertion that the person who is oppressed due to his/her ethnicity must overcome imposed and restrictive dilemmas and conceive of the possibility to exist.⁴⁸⁴ Indeed, the visibilisation in the form of violence which we find in *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* suggests a rejection of restrictive dichotomies, such as that carried out by Dalila in *Fatima*. In my discussion of *Fatima*, I argued that Dalila’s rejection of the dichotomies which she faces (*invisibilisation/visibilisation*, ‘se blanchir ou disparaître’)

⁴⁸³ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, p. 100.

⁴⁸⁴ See Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, pp. 100-01.

allows her a potential path to escape from oppression, as opposed to the relatively unsuccessful attempts at visibilisation, based on identification with a pre-conceived impression of Frenchness, carried out by the protagonists of Begag's novels. Similarly, the visibilisation in the form of violence that we find in *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* does not accept the exclusion from central French society encouraged by these dichotomies, and attempts to penetrate this forbidden space without initiating the liquidation of identity that we see in Begag's two novels. However, in rejecting their invisibility on the margins of society, the characters in *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous* are only faced by the inevitability of further invisibility, or negative visibility. By entering a life of immorality and crime, to which the violence with which they attempt to make themselves visible invariably leads, their existences continue to be dictated by the restrictive dichotomies and vicious circles encouraged by France's hostility to ethnic difference, and France's 'mauvaise mémoire' with regard to the Algerian War. Therefore, while for characters such as Madjid and the narrator-protagonist of *La Noce des fous*, visibility does not equate to sameness or acceptance, the ability to transcend the vicious circle in which they are trapped, in the way that is put forward by *Fatima*, also eludes them. Like Dalila, visibility for these characters constitutes the 'conscience d'une possibilité d'exister'⁴⁸⁵ which, like Dalila, they take into their own hands. However, the violence which has been transmitted and ingrained in them complicates the realisation of this possibility of affirming their existence in a way that does not affect Dalila. Somewhat paradoxically, out of all the protagonists of the primary texts, Dalila suffers the most violence, as she incurs the physical aggression of her father for returning later than accepted to her *cité*. Rather than let her father's violence become ingrained in her, though, she escapes it by leaving home, setting her apart from those characters who, as we find in *La Noce des fous*, 'n'avaient rien d'autre

⁴⁸⁵ Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, pp. 100-01.

que cette violence, là, dans le ventre, placée au milieu du plexus'.⁴⁸⁶ Despite suffering recurring violence, by leaving home Dalila prevents herself from embodying violence, escaping the transmission of violence from coloniser to colonised subject, which then resides on the margins and ingrains itself in the marginalised formerly colonised subject. Thus, not only does Dalila manage to escape the restrictions of the *invisibilisation/visibilisation* and 'se blanchir ou disparaître' dichotomies, but she also escapes the imbrication of the colonised subject and the descendant of the colonised subject in a history of violence.

Taking into account the overriding aspects highlighted in this chapter, it has been shown that, by relating a selection of novels by Franco-Algerian authors to the dichotomy put forward by Begag and Chaouite of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation*, various contradictions, complexities, and overlaps can be detected within this dichotomy. Indeed, such dichotomies are shown to restrict in themselves the ability to achieve visibility, as they play into the hands of the French state's ideal of universality and lingering hostility to ethnic difference, exemplified by the attempted identification with a pre-conceived notion of Frenchness sought by Begag's protagonists. Nonetheless, means of escape are indicated, if not wholly substantiated, through the rejection of being subjected to any condition which does not allow for the possibility to exist on one's own terms. Such a rejection is put forward by Dalila in *Fatima*, in which she refuses to eradicate references to her cultural origins in order to enter dominant French society, but attempts to affirm her presence all the same by escaping the patriarchal oppression and imprisonment by her own culture which she suffers at home. Unlike the protagonists of *Le Thé au harem* and *La Noce des fous*, she does not affirm her presence by enacting violence on dominant society, and her 'fugue' allows her to escape the history of colonial violence in which the descendant of the colonised subject

⁴⁸⁶ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 11.

is imbricated. While *Fatima* sets up routes to escape from marginalisation, the texts by Mounsi and Charef demonstrate that the legacy of colonial violence complicates the desire to take the affirmation of one's existence into one's own hands, underlining that while means of escape are posited, the realisation of this escape remains far from (if not beyond) reach for the descendant of the colonised Algerian subject. Outbreaks of violence such as those witnessed in 2005 suggest that this escape from marginalisation has not yet been fully achieved, and that the legacy of colonial violence continues to manifest itself in contemporary French society.

Despite the largely unsuccessful visibilisation brought to light in this chapter, the next chapter will discuss ways in which a selection of the primary texts achieve a more successful visibilisation, through the way in which they bring the history of the Other into confrontation with the dominant historical narrative. To elucidate this notion, reference will be made to Mireille Rosello's argument that the coming together of two apparently conflicting histories 'donnera peut-être à l'imaginaire collectif international une occasion de préférer un scénario différent de celui que l'histoire du conflit semble imposer d'avance ou rétrospectivement'.⁴⁸⁷ The debate will centre on the way in which the authors make the invisible, marginalised world, and the history ascribed to it, the focus of their texts, and how this process causes an alternative history to become entangled with the dominant French version of history, which for so long denied the Algerian War and responsibility for atrocities during the war. Thus, conclusions will be reached regarding the degree to which this entanglement challenges the dominant version of history and presents a more inclusive interpretation of the history that is shared by France and Algeria.

⁴⁸⁷ Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 26.

Chapter 3

Entanglement: Making Visible an Other History

In the previous chapter, the discussion of the concepts of *visibilisation* and *invisibilisation* centred largely on considerations of the potential for the children of Algerian migrants to integrate into French society. While this chapter will continue to take into account the terms coined by Begag and Chaouite, I will build on the original definitions of these terms so that they no longer relate only to considerations of integration. More specifically, I will take the elements that make up the definition of *visibilisation* and relate them to the wider history of colonisation, war, and immigration, thus moving beyond the personal story of the migrant to consider the imbrication of this story in a collective history which has been silenced. Thus, the term *visibilisation* will no longer only indicate the process of affirming one's presence in French society, but will also signify the possibility of bringing to light, and affirming the presence of, the collective history embodied by the children of Algerian migrants within the dominant French historical narrative.

This appropriation of the term *visibilisation*, which denotes a visibilisation of history as well as one's individual existence, recalls Fanon's notion that the emergence of a different history is needed to challenge the dominant history of colonisation, elucidated as follows:

Le colon fait l'histoire et sait qu'il la fait. Et parce qu'il se réfère constamment à l'histoire de sa métropole, il indique en clair qu'il est ici le prolongement de cette métropole. L'histoire qu'il écrit n'est donc pas l'histoire du pays qu'il dépouille mais l'histoire de sa nation en ce qu'elle écume, viole et affame. L'immobilité à laquelle est condamné le colonisé ne peut être remise en

question que si le colonisé décide de mettre un terme à l'histoire de la colonisation, à l'histoire du pillage, pour faire exister l'histoire de la nation, l'histoire de la décolonisation.⁴⁸⁸

As Fanon explains, the coloniser constructs a distorted version of history, as it only takes into account the history of the colonising nation and disregards the history of the culture that is being dispossessed, condemning the colonised subject to a state of 'immobilité'. This state of being frozen in history (which is reflected in the primary corpus by the entrapment of characters in a vicious circle of invisibility) can only be surmounted when the colonised subject puts an end to the dominant history of colonisation and of dispossession, and brings to light, or makes visible, an alternative history, what Fanon terms the history of decolonisation.⁴⁸⁹ The enduring relevance of Fanon's arguments is underlined by the historical hesitation with which the French state has confronted the Algerian War, which illustrates that the dominant French historical narrative has continued to foster a distortion of history beyond the end of colonisation and the time when Fanon was writing. The consequences of this forgetting manifest themselves in the exclusion from dominant French society, identity, as well as history, of France's ethnic Algerian population, and entrapment in this state of exile, as has been illustrated in the preceding chapters. Though escape from this entrapment of individual characters was revealed to be largely unsuccessful in the previous chapter, the current chapter will analyse the extent to which a selection of the primary corpus challenges the dominant version of history, and brings to light the history of the colonised subject. In this way, the analysis considers the degree to which the texts under discussion fulfil Michel Laronde's more recent argument that 'ce n'est pas la fin de la colonisation qui

⁴⁸⁸ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 36.

⁴⁸⁹ The use of the term decolonisation by Fanon should not be confused with the way in which Shepard uses the term. While Fanon is referring to decolonisation as an escape from the oppression of colonisation, Shepard uses the term to 'show how French bureaucrats, politicians, and journalists rewrote the history of imperialism and anti-imperialism so that decolonization was the predetermined end point'. Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, p. 4. My own reading of the term extends Fanon's use of it so that it indicates an escape from a legacy of oppression inherited from the colonial era, which is replayed in the present day through a continuing distortion of history and a repetition of colonial oppositions.

démystifie les hégémonies culturelles occidentales mais les réinscriptions successives de faits particuliers dans le cadre de l'écriture d'une Histoire postcoloniale contemporaine',⁴⁹⁰ which testifies to the potential of literature to challenge hegemonic discourses. Through a close analysis of the language used by the texts, it is also my intention to demonstrate the potential of language to represent a history that has been distorted by the coloniser, and that is consequently made up of fragments of history, of both remembrance and forgetting. Furthermore, rather than call into question Fanon's appeal for the end of colonisation, Laronde's observation that it is not the end of colonisation that brings an end to Western domination in fact reinforces the way in which Fanon's work continues to resonate today, by indicating that the rewriting of history advocated by Fanon can finally be achieved in the postcolonial period.

Given the prevailing consideration of history in this chapter, it is not surprising that the novels that will be discussed are those which confront history to a greater extent. These are the three later novels included in the primary corpus: Mounsi's *La Noce des fous* (1990) and *Le Voyage des âmes* (1997), and Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999). As has been previously suggested, Sebbar's text in particular has been noted for its prominent role in the wave of rewriting Franco-Algerian history,⁴⁹¹ and the second half of this chapter comprises an extended discussion of *La Seine était rouge* and the way in which it reconstructs the memory of the Algerian War and, specifically, the events of 17 October 1961. Mounsi's engagement with the memory of the Franco-Algerian past has been explored to a lesser extent,⁴⁹² even though history, whether a grand conception of History (as in *La Noce des fous*) or the specific history shared by France and Algeria (as in *Le Voyage des âmes*), permeates his literary oeuvre. The analysis of *Le Voyage des âmes* will centre on the way in which the narrative shifts back

⁴⁹⁰ Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 142.

⁴⁹¹ See Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire', p. 197. See also Laronde "Effets d'histoire".

⁴⁹² Exceptions can be found in Lay-Chenchabi's and Dejean de la Batie's article 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance' (2000), and Clerc's and Cruveiller's book *Parole de banlieue* (2009).

and forth in time and space from the narrator's Algerian childhood, recounting his experiences of the Algerian War, to his French adolescence, creating an entwining effect that illuminates the inexorable link between France and Algeria. In this way, the overwhelming of silenced Franco-Algerian history by dominant French historical narratives is challenged, and it is instead posited that the history of colonisation and the Algerian War is an intrinsic aspect of French history. This argument is also at the heart of the analysis of *La Noce des fous*: even though reference to the Franco-Algerian past is almost nonexistent from Mounsi's first novel, it will be argued that the 'entanglement' created by the albeit fleeting encounter between the marginalised descendant of the colonised subject and central French society exposes the history of decolonisation and attempts to bring it into contact with the dominant historical narrative.

Taking into account Stora's argument that 'une *autre histoire*' with regard to the Algerian War needs to emerge,⁴⁹³ as well as the work of Mireille Rosello and Laronde on the role of postcolonial literature in this process, I will discuss how *La Noce des fous* brings to light an Other history – in the sense that it is an alternative account of history to the hegemonic narrative, but also that this alternative narrative constitutes the history of the colonised Other and the descendants of the colonised Other. This Other history is entangled with the dominant narrative, and this entanglement allows for the superimposition of an Other history on the dominant version, while simultaneously detaching the two in order to prevent the Other history from being recuperated into the dominant narrative. Thus, my definition of 'entanglement' seeks to represent the complexity and difficulty of bringing together seemingly opposing versions of history, which are brought into contact but do not subsequently form a definitive, complete version of history. Instead, they form a complex entanglement that allows for an Other

⁴⁹³ See Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après', p. 133. Original's italics.

history to be brought to light and challenge the dominant historical narrative, rather than be subsumed within it. The analysis will then turn to the way in which *Le Voyage des âmes* continues this process of bringing to light an Other history, with more specific reference to the Algerian War, entwining this Other history with the dominant narrative to corroborate Pap Ndiaye's observation that 'le "national" et le "colonial" sont historiquement encastrés'.⁴⁹⁴ Representing the entwining of France and Algeria and dominant and silenced histories in this way puts forward the possibility of overcoming the conflicts inherited from the colonial past and coming to terms with a divisive history, and this possibility for coexistence is made increasingly evident in *La Seine était rouge*. However, rather than present this positive confrontation with the past as a definitive end to inherited conflicts, *La Seine était rouge* illustrates the difficulty of reconstructing a past that has been silenced and distorted by the hegemonic version of history. Taking into account previous work on Sebbar's text with regard to reconstructing the past and recovering the memory of 17 October 1961 (specifically, that carried out by Laronde, Anne Donadey, and Michael Rothberg), and with reference to House's and MacMaster's historical work on 17 October 1961 and its memory, I will discuss the way in which Sebbar constructs a history and a memory of 'gaps and blanks' with regard to the events of that particular date. The complexity of this process of recovering and reconstructing memories of the past, a past that may always be incomplete and elusive to an extent, recalls James E. Young's notion of 'the complex texture of memory', which seeks to represent 'its many inconsistencies, faces, and shapes'.⁴⁹⁵ Such a conception of memory, which insists on the deficiency and plurality of memories, can also be related to my definition of entanglement, which I will develop throughout this chapter. By entangling many individual, diverse, and incomplete memories of 17 October 1961, *La Seine était rouge* highlights the complexity of

⁴⁹⁴ Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire*, p. 32.

⁴⁹⁵ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. xi.

historical events and the complexity of the act of remembering itself. In this way, the novel does not seek to establish a definitive account of history, or a common memory of 17 October 1961 and the Algerian War, but brings to light an Other history that is inevitably characterised by incompleteness and silence, since it has been distorted and suppressed by the dominant version of the history of colonisation. In turn, this emergence of an Other history challenges the dominant version, and puts forward a more inclusive narrative that takes into account the multifaceted nature of contemporary, postcolonial French society.

Visibilisation and Entanglement in *La Noce des fous*

One of the underlying aspects of *La Noce des fous* is the insistence with which Mounsi depicts the violent, forgotten world to which his protagonist belongs, as illustrated by Lay-Chenchabi's and Dejean de la Batie's observation that 'Mounsi's intention here is to shock and confront the French reader with the descriptions of the extreme violence experienced and perpetrated by those who live on the margins of the big cities'.⁴⁹⁶ Already therefore, there is a confrontation between the depiction of the world to which the descendant of the colonised subject belongs, and that of the reader (dominant society). This confrontation recalls Begag's and Chaouite's definition of *visibilisation* – 'se montrer un peu plus en affirmant sa présence et en recherchant la confrontation'⁴⁹⁷ – but, rather than it being a question of individuals seeking to affirm their presence in dominant society through violent confrontation, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is the world of the narrator and the collective history attached to it that are brought to light.

⁴⁹⁶ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 252.

⁴⁹⁷ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d'identité*, p. 59.

This visibilisation of the history of the colonised subject, and his/her marginalised descendant, is indicated by the way in which the protagonist's 'individual destiny is never separated from a collective identity',⁴⁹⁸ underlining the idea that the personal story of the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* is imbricated in a collective history. Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie note that this collective history is that of 'the impoverished and forgotten of the human race, both past and present'⁴⁹⁹ – or that of the 'wretched of the earth' to borrow from the English translation of the title of Fanon's 1961 text – and it is true that *La Noce des fous* does not depict the misery experienced only by people of Algerian origin, but by the marginalised in general.⁵⁰⁰ Nonetheless, through the imbrication of the protagonist's personal story within this visibilisation of the 'wretched of the earth', a link to colonisation is implied, and Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie acknowledge that one of the purposes of *La Noce des fous* is to 'lay the blame on the former colonial power'.⁵⁰¹ Therefore, the specific history inherited by the protagonist does not need to be made explicit in order to permit an analysis of Mounsi's novel in the context of the history of colonisation. While Mounsi's later novel, *Le Voyage des âmes*, and Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* do refer explicitly to this particular history, as we shall see, the overriding preoccupation of *La Noce des fous* is to forcefully make visible the reality of a forgotten world, the violence and deprivation of which can be traced back to the collective history embodied by the protagonist.

In the first instance, the notion that *La Noce des fous* brings to light a collective history, in which the personal story of the protagonist is imbricated, is illustrated to an extent by the title of the book itself which, by evoking marriage, suggests the intertwining of lives, and Mounsi goes on to entwine the life of his protagonist with those of the various people, the 'fous' of the novel's title, that he encounters. This

⁴⁹⁸ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 258.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ See Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 258.

⁵⁰¹ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 259.

concept is first introduced when the protagonist is incarcerated, and he tells the reader that his life and those of his fellow inmates ‘s’enchêvêtraient les unes aux autres’ and that ‘les lignes de nos mains mêmes paraissaient identiques’.⁵⁰² Thus, an entanglement of the protagonist’s existence with the lives of the other prisoners is illustrated, underlining the idea that ‘the narrator sees himself mirrored in the existence of those he meets’.⁵⁰³ Furthermore, as this entanglement occurs amongst fellow prisoners, the idea that the text brings the underworld to light (in the sense that this is a criminal world, but also a world that has been forgotten and concealed) is reinforced. Indeed, in this particular entanglement, a common ethnic background is implied between the protagonist and his fellow prisoners by the idea that they are ‘identiques’,⁵⁰⁴ and the notion that the inmates share a common origin is accentuated in the following extract:

Tous ces gamins m’étaient familiers. Nous étions les pousses du même arbre. Dans leur façon de parler, je retrouvais l’accent de mes anciens compagnons, ceux que je rencontrais au coin des rues des bas quartiers juchés sur des motocyclettes. Je les reconnaissais à un signe dans les yeux que j’étais seul à percevoir. Ma ressemblance, je la détectais dans un regard, une démarche. Sans les connaître, je savais leurs gestes. Ils ne s’étonnaient pas des miens. Chaque détenu semblait n’avoir rien de commun avec les précédents et, pourtant, tous avaient la même origine. Aucun de nous ne se distinguait en rien des autres.⁵⁰⁵

Thus, the idea that there is a mirroring of the protagonist in the other prisoners is emphasised, as he recognises in them his own characteristics, such as the way in which he speaks and acts. Furthermore, he can visualise himself in their eyes and expressions,

⁵⁰² Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 117.

⁵⁰³ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, ‘Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance’, p. 258.

⁵⁰⁴ In passing, the apparent identical nature of the inmates conforms to Western notions of people of Arab origin being indistinguishable from one another. With regard to the French context, Etienne Balibar affirms that ‘many French people are unable to distinguish between an Algerian, a Tunisian, a Moroccan and a Turk (they are all “Arabs”, a generic designation which already constitutes a racist stereotype [...])’.

Etienne Balibar, ‘Racism and Crisis’, in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 217-27 (p. 220-21).

⁵⁰⁵ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 116.

reinforcing the notion of mirroring. This reflection extends to a common origin, as illustrated by the image that the inmates were ‘les pousses du même arbre’, as well as by the more explicit pronouncement that ‘tous avaient la même origine’. However, despite this familiarity, at the same time ‘chaque détenu semblait n’avoir rien de commun avec les précédents’, and this apparently paradoxical observation further underlines the idea that the prisoners are part of the same collective history: while they share a significant amount that links them inexorably, they remain distinct, and the accumulation of these individualities into a collective is indicative of the way in which the text brings to light the ‘forgotten, humiliated masses’.⁵⁰⁶ The emergence of this world through the text causes it to come into contact with the world of the reader and, consequently, has the effect of bringing the alternative history ascribed to this forgotten world into contact with the dominant historical narrative.

The idea of history and an alternative history is evoked further by the narrator-protagonist’s observation that ‘chaque visage que je rencontrais, je m’en souvenais comme au cours d’une autre existence’,⁵⁰⁷ indicating that the protagonist and his fellow inmates are the descendants of a succession of forgotten people, stretching back far beyond the birth of the protagonist. Furthermore, the notion that this history constitutes ‘une autre existence’ suggests the forgetting of the history in question and its subaltern nature. Given this impression of forgetting and the ethnic origin of the author of the text and its protagonist,⁵⁰⁸ a connection can be made to the specific history shared by France and Algeria. Indeed, the reference to ‘une autre existence’ and the way in which Mounsi brings this Other existence and history to the fore in *La Noce des fous* recall Stora’s assertion that an Other history must be brought to light with regard to the Algerian War, as follows:

⁵⁰⁶ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, ‘Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance’, p. 258.

⁵⁰⁷ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 116.

⁵⁰⁸ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie affirm that *La Noce des fous* is ‘undoubtedly semi-autobiographical’, allowing us to assume that author and protagonist share, at least, an ethnic origin. Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, ‘Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance’, p. 252.

Il ne s'agit pas seulement de connaître l'histoire vécue [...] mais aussi de saisir les traces, mélange de souvenirs vivaces et d'oubli qui s'impriment dans le présent et qui, à la manière de blancs et de lacunes, superposent aux faits une *autre histoire*, celle des malentendus et des refus.⁵⁰⁹

According to Stora, this 'autre histoire' is made up of gaps and blanks and forgetting,⁵¹⁰ and the way in which Mounsi exposes the invisible, forgotten, 'autre existence' of his protagonist, and the imbrication of his protagonist in a collective subaltern history, superimposes this Other history onto the dominant historical narrative. The consequences of such a superimposition and, specifically, its potential to challenge hegemonic versions of history, will be revisited throughout this chapter.

Having served his sentence, the narrator-protagonist's life goes on to become entangled with the lives of further people who make up the 'fous' in the novel's title, with whom the protagonist engages in shocking acts of violence and depravity.⁵¹¹ The first of these is Malou, of whom the protagonist remarks that 'sa méchanceté ressemblait trait pour trait à la mienne',⁵¹² seeing his own reflection in another character that he encounters. His separation from Malou is then immediately followed by the introduction of another character, Mario, who engages the protagonist in work as a gigolo. Thus, Mario is connected to Malou as well as to the protagonist, creating a more complex entanglement between the lives of all the characters whom we encounter in the novel and not just the individual two-way relationships that the protagonist forms with any given character. In this way, a complex network of a plurality of lives is created, reinforcing the idea that the protagonist's 'individual destiny is never separated from a

⁵⁰⁹ Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après', p. 133. Original's italics.

⁵¹⁰ The notion of constructing a history of gaps and blanks will be discussed in greater detail with reference to *La Seine était rouge*.

⁵¹¹ See for example Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, pp. 162-65.

⁵¹² Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 165.

collective identity',⁵¹³ and bringing the underworld of which the protagonist is a part into further prominence.

It is through his work as a gigolo that the protagonist meets Lise, an encounter which signals a departure from the entanglement of the protagonist in a life of violence and depravity. An entanglement still occurs, in the same way that the protagonist's life was previously entangled with the lives of Mario, Malou, and the inmates at the young offenders' institution, as Lise offers him another reflection of himself. However, this reflection contrasts greatly with that which Malou offers him for instance: while in Malou, the protagonist saw his own 'méchanceté', with regard to Lise, he states that 'son visage m'offrait un étrange miroir. À m'y contempler, peu à peu mes yeux devinrent doux comme ils l'étaient autrefois. Sa tendresse se répandait sur mes traits'.⁵¹⁴ The negative reflection that Malou offers him is turned into a positive one when he encounters Lise, and the protagonist's relationship with Lise provides him with a rare (and ultimately short-lived) period of stability and happiness.

Furthermore, as Lise belongs to dominant, privileged society, she represents the world from which the protagonist is excluded, which is illustrated by the protagonist's remark that 'elle m'ouvrit des lieux inaccessibles',⁵¹⁵ and this encounter between dominant society and the forgotten underworld brings the histories that these two worlds represent into contact. Such an encounter allows for the possibility of an alternative historical narrative, as Rosello notes:

[L'encotre] donne lieu à un récit [...] qui viendra s'ajouter à un répertoire déjà constitué. La présence de cet autre récit donnera peut-être à l'imaginaire collectif international une occasion

⁵¹³ Lay-Chenchabi and Dejean de la Batie, 'Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance', p. 258.

⁵¹⁴ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 188.

⁵¹⁵ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 190.

de préférer un scénario différent de celui que l'histoire du conflit semble imposer d'avance ou rétrospectivement.⁵¹⁶

Mirroring Stora's notion that 'une autre histoire' needs to be superimposed on the dominant narrative, Rosello argues that the encounter in literature constitutes 'l'inauguration d'une nouvelle scène',⁵¹⁷ which is added to an already existing narrative. As a result, the imposition of the dominant narrative is challenged and an alternative version, preferable to one that perpetuates oppositions, such as those inherited from the Algerian War,⁵¹⁸ can be put forward. Thus, an escape from the inherited conflicts which affect the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* and other characters in the primary corpus is posited, and this escape can be realised through the encounter between those who represent apparently conflicting histories, such as that which occurs between the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* and Lise.

However, as has been already intimated, the encounter between the protagonist and Lise is short-lived. Indeed, the narrator is aware that the relationship will not last even before it comes to an end, stating that 'peu à peu, à force de confondre nos corps, il nous arriva de ne plus en former qu'un, dans le temps de la tendresse qui unifie deux âmes [...] Je savais qu'un jour on ne se connaîtrait plus'.⁵¹⁹ Despite the unity of the two characters, represented here by the entwining of their two bodies, the protagonist knows that the relationship will come to an end, suggesting the inevitability that such encounters will always be temporary due to the history which imposes 'une pression immense sur les conditions de la rencontre entre des sujets piégés par le passé et le présent'.⁵²⁰ The narrator-protagonist himself attributes the inevitable end of their relationship to history, stating that 'on ne parlait jamais de ce temps qui file entre les

⁵¹⁶ Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 26.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

⁵¹⁸ Rosello's study itself refers to the conflicts inherited from the Algerian War, which shapes Franco-Algerian encounters. See Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 16.

⁵¹⁹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 190.

⁵²⁰ Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 15.

mains des gens qui s'aiment, comme le sable. Mais mon passé, la mort seule pouvait y mettre fin'.⁵²¹ Though the protagonist is referring here to his past life of criminality and violence, this personal story, as has been discussed, is strongly embedded within a collective history of 'the wretched of the earth'. As the protagonist admits, this past is something from which he cannot escape, since only death can put an end to it.

Therefore, it is both his personal history and the collective history that he inherits which the protagonist cannot escape, and which ultimately exercise too great a pressure on his encounter with Lise. Thus, in this instance, it appears that the weight of historical conflict hinders the potential for the consideration of an alternative narrative to that which is already imposed, and this failed encounter between those who represent apparently conflicting histories exemplifies the nuances of the term 'entanglement'.

While evoking the interlocking of the various characters and their histories in *La Noce des fous*, including between the protagonist and Lise, the idea of entanglement also denotes a complex situation, escape from which proves to be problematic. This conception of entanglement reflects Rosello's notion that encounters such as that between the protagonist of Mounsi's text and Lise take place between 'des sujets piégés par le passé et le présent',⁵²² which underlines the difficulty of escaping from the weight of history in which these characters are trapped. In the protagonist's entanglement with Lise, the dominant and subaltern histories which they represent have been brought into contact, positing the superimposition of an Other history on the dominant narrative. However, this encounter is only temporary, reflecting the difficulty and complexity of overlaying hegemonic versions of history with those that have been silenced and forgotten. This interaction between dominant and subaltern histories and the

⁵²¹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, pp. 190-91.

⁵²² Rosello herself engages with the concept of 'entangled memories' in an article on francophone Algerian author Boualem Sansal's literary text *Le Village de L'Allemand* (2008). See Mireille Rosello, 'Guerre des mémoires ou "parallèles dangereux" dans *Le Village de L'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 18.2 (2010) 193-211.

simultaneous (and paradoxical) dismissal of their coexistence is at the heart of my definition of entanglement.

'La Noce des fous': Superimposing an Other History

After leaving Lise, the narrator-protagonist of *La Noce des fous* is reunited with his closest friend, Bako, on his release from prison, and their association with another marginalised character, Fania, signals the narrative's return to intertwining the life of the protagonist with the lives of the forgotten and the destitute. Fania's marginalisation is highlighted by the fact that she is a gypsy, and the three characters live 'dans la joie triste d'être ensemble',⁵²³ underlining their entanglement in a kind of blissful sadness that is indicative of Mounsi's celebration of life on the margins. This type of existence is one of misery, but also one in which joy can be found and, furthermore, a life which the protagonist chooses for himself, having left Lise to rejoin this forgotten world.

According to Clerc and Cruveiller, this choice to remain on the margins indicates a challenge to the French model of integration,⁵²⁴ which is based on the hostility to ethnic difference and dissolution of that difference in majority ethnic identity. In this way, the choice of Mounsi's protagonists to remain on the margins contrasts to certain strategies of visibilisation discussed in Chapter 2, with reference especially to Begag's texts.

Expanding upon this notion, and in keeping with the present chapter's preoccupation with history, I would argue that Mounsi's insistence on maintaining his characters' marginalisation also prevents the history which they embody from being recuperated into the dominant historical narrative, as they remain separated from central French society and the history attached to it. Such a recuperation of history would oppose

⁵²³ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 219.

⁵²⁴ See Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 13.

Stora's advocacy of the superimposition of an Other history on the dominant historical narrative, as this Other history would lose its otherness and become dissolved within the dominant version (working in a similar manner to the assimilation and invisibilisation of ethnic identity within dominant conceptions of Frenchness).⁵²⁵ By insisting on depicting the forgotten world to which his protagonist chooses to belong, Mounsi creates an uneasy, paradoxical entanglement of dominant and subaltern histories, as the two come into contact, but only fleetingly, and ultimately remain detached. This simultaneous contact and detachment corresponds to Laronde's concept of 'l'écriture d'une Histoire postcoloniale contemporaine qui, toujours en prise avec une vision coloniale, tend tout de même à s'en détacher'.⁵²⁶ Similarly, the Other history brought to light in *La Noce des fous* is revealed to have a connection with the dominant history, which comprises the history of colonisation, but detaches itself from it at the same time. In this way, dominant, official narratives can be revised and rewritten, as Laronde goes on to argue thus: 'Faire surgir l'Histoire hors des idéologies homogénéisantes, l'en détacher peu à peu, par bribes successives, nécessite que les lectures officielles soient constamment réactualisées sous de nouvelles formes'.⁵²⁷ By entangling dominant and Other history, *La Noce des fous* takes part in this gradual reconsideration and reconstruction of 'official' historical narratives.

To perceive this entanglement in its entirety, it is necessary to note the way in which *La Noce des fous* has, since the incarceration of the protagonist in the young offenders' institution, methodically intertwined his life with a variety of other characters. The entanglement begins with his fellow inmates and continues in his encounters with Malou, Mario, Lise, and Bako and Fania. This series of entanglements

⁵²⁵ The concept of a unified version of French history has been criticised more recently in light of proposals to inaugurate a Maison de l'histoire de France, which would deny the plurality of narratives that make up French history. See Nora, 'Lettre ouverte à Frédéric Mitterand sur la Maison de l'histoire de France'.

⁵²⁶ Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 142.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

results in a fluctuation from the depiction of the forgotten, violent, and depraved world to which the protagonist belongs, to an encounter between this world and dominant, privileged society when the protagonist meets Lise. This fluctuation ends by returning to the depiction of life on the margins after the protagonist abandons Lise, and continues until the novel's end (which is marked by the deaths of Fania, Bako, and the protagonist, underlining their condemnation to being forever forgotten). In this way, the subaltern history embodied by the protagonist and by the forgotten lives in which he sees himself mirrored (themselves entangled in one another) comes into contact and becomes entangled with dominant society and dominant history. Though the coexistence of these two worlds ultimately proves unsuccessful, the way in which the forgotten world of the protagonist is emphatically brought to light towards the end of the novel does challenge the dominant historical narrative to an extent. By keeping this underworld and the history it represents detached from dominant society, its superimposition on the dominant narrative, rather than its recuperation within it, is made possible.

The depiction of the forgotten world of the protagonist at the end of *La Noce des fous* culminates in an emphatic visibilisation through the description of a dream that the protagonist has. The dream acts as a celebration of the underworld, with a gathering of marginalised groups at the wedding of Bako and Fania, including gypsies, beggars, murderers, thieves, the blind, and prostitutes (illustrating the correlation of marginalisation with crime and violence, to which we will return in the next chapter).⁵²⁸ The multiple interpretations of the novel's title are thus brought to light: if 'la noce des fous' refers to the marriage of Bako and Fania, or to the gathering of all these marginalised characters in celebration of this marriage, then the dream in which the event takes place also reflects the marriage, or entanglement, of the various characters

⁵²⁸ See Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 236.

throughout the text. The entanglement of the life of the protagonist with the various lives that he has encountered over the course of the novel is emphasised in one celebration of the world of the forgotten, whose lives all become entangled in the protagonist's dream, the marriage in the dream underlining this entanglement. The illumination of this forgotten world is intensified by the cumulative use of light imagery to depict the celebration of the wedding, as follows: 'L'air était d'une transparence *lumineuse* [...] La rue baignait dans des *reflets* rouges et blancs et roses *ourlés d'or* [...] Des lampions *allumés*, des boules *multicolores* [...] Un arc-en-ciel *illuminait* la chaussée et la terre'.⁵²⁹ The dream, the participants in it, and the forgotten history of oppression which they embody are thus all brought to light, to as literal an extent as possible, as the scene is infused with an abundance of colour and light.

The position of the dream as the climax of the sequence of entanglements that have preceded it reinforces this powerful visibilisation. Mounsi has not merely created an entanglement between the life of the protagonist and other lives that mirror it. He has also entangled this violent, deprived, forgotten world, and the history of oppression attached to it, with dominant society and the dominant historical narrative, eventually rejecting the latter and returning to an emphatic depiction of life on the margins. In this way, the Other history embodied by the subaltern is kept detached from the hegemonic version of history, preventing the dissolution of this Other history in the dominant version, and instead opening up the possibility of superimposing 'une autre histoire' on the dominant narrative. This detachment maintains a crucial distinction between the potential coexistence of these two historical narratives and the dissolving of Other history in the hegemonic version. While, as Ndiaye notes, the separation of 'national' and 'colonial' history is no longer feasible, since 'le "national" et le "colonial" sont historiquement encastrés',⁵³⁰ indicating an inevitable intertwining between the histories

⁵²⁹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, pp. 235-36. My italics.

⁵³⁰ Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire*, p. 32.

in question, for such a multifaceted history to emerge, it is essential that the history of the subaltern is not recuperated and appropriated by the dominant version, but that it contributes to a rethinking and rewriting of the dominant historical narrative. Having set up this possibility in *La Noce des fous*, the analysis will now turn to Mounsi's later novel, *Le Voyage des âmes* (1997), to examine the extent to which it posits a reconsideration of history, with more specific reference to the history shared by France and Algeria and the memory of the Algerian War.

Entwined Histories in *Le Voyage des âmes*

Published in 1997, *Le Voyage des âmes* appears at a point of transition with regard to the memory of the Algerian War, coming at the end of a phase of 'slow emergence' of memory and at the beginning of a phase of 'higher visibility' of the Algerian War from 1997 onwards,⁵³¹ as the trial of Maurice Papon, which also began in 1997, prompted increased interest in this period of history. Rosello also points to a wave of memory that swept through France in the 1990s, which influenced literature and cinema as well as history and the social sciences,⁵³² and the two most recent novels in the primary corpus (*Le Voyage des âmes* and Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*) can certainly be included in this movement. However, Rosello goes on to observe that this renewed preoccupation with history does not result in the construction of a definitive, unified historical narrative, nor does it necessarily resolve conflicts inherited from the past, as follows:

L'émergence de paroles multiples et souvent passionnées ne donne pas lieu à une sorte de calme plat de la mémoire. Les récits, films, autobiographies ou romans, parfois même des cérémonies

⁵³¹ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 192.

⁵³² See Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 12.

officielles ou de nouvelles dispositions légales tantôt apaisent et tantôt ravivent des blessures des uns ou des autres en exacerbant le souvenir des conflits entre la France et ses anciennes colonies ou protectorats. Dans ce flot turbulent [...] coexiste toute une gamme de représentations contradictoires, souvent hostiles les unes aux autres. Des visions différentes de passés traumatisés se heurtent, véhiculés par des héros, des narrateurs et des récits qui se rencontrent pour nous parler de rencontres passées ou présentes.⁵³³

As Rosello explains, rather than resolve conflicts inherited from the past, a profusion of memories threatens to further prolong these conflicts, as opposing accounts clash and exacerbate tensions. In this section, it will be argued that *Le Voyage des âmes* does not in fact seek to establish ‘une sorte de calme plat de la mémoire’, highlighting instead the ‘flot turbulent’ characteristic of the memory of the past shared by France and Algeria. However, in doing so, the text does not advocate a repetition of past conflicts, but entwines France and Algeria, and dominant and silenced histories, putting forward an alternative, Other history that is made up precisely of both remembrance and forgetting, reflecting Stora’s notion of ‘une autre histoire’ that takes into account ‘les traces, mélange de souvenirs vivaces et d’oubli qui s’impriment dans le présent’.⁵³⁴

The dominant, ‘official’ history of silence with regard to the Algerian War would seem to be denying the experience of the majority of the French population, as McCormack states that ‘most families in France have a grandfather, a father, a husband, a brother, or another member of the family who fought in North Africa’.⁵³⁵ Furthermore, Harbi and Stora contend that ‘au total, plus de cinq millions de personnes dans la France de ce début du XXIe siècle, sont directement concernées par la guerre d’Algérie’,⁵³⁶ suggesting that the number of people who are indirectly affected by the war would increase this figure. Harbi and Stora go on to explain that the portion of the

⁵³³ Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 12.

⁵³⁴ Stora, ‘La Guerre d’Algérie quarante ans après’, p. 133.

⁵³⁵ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 100.

⁵³⁶ Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora, eds, *La Guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2004), p. 10.

population affected by the war holds ‘des expériences très partielles, très individualisées, très différentes, où il se révèle difficile de délimiter les souvenirs communs’.⁵³⁷ Therefore, the overriding memory of the Algerian War is, in fact, elusive, incomplete, and multifaceted – a ‘flot turbulent’ rather than ‘une sorte de calme plat de la mémoire’. This ‘flot turbulent’ is reflected in *Le Voyage des âmes* and, consequently, an Other history that is characterised precisely by a disorder of memory is put forward.

A feature of *Le Voyage des âmes* which has the effect of both illustrating the disorder of memory with regard to the Algerian War and entwining France and Algeria is the way in which the narrative ‘se traduit par un aller et retour incessant entre un “ici” et un “là-bas”, entre un “en ce temps-là” et un “aujourd’hui” qui caractérise fondamentalement cette écriture migrante’.⁵³⁸ While the implications of the migratory nature of the narrative evoked here will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter, the present section will consider the way in which this particular feature of the narrative results in linking dominant and silenced histories through the constant shift in time and space between the narrator-protagonist’s Algerian childhood and his subsequent life in France. Crucially, the protagonist’s life in Algeria, including his experiences of the Algerian War, is recalled through ‘des souvenirs parfois enfouis qui oscillent entre réalité effective et reconstitution imaginaire’.⁵³⁹ The elusive nature of these memories, treading a fine line between reality and imagination, reflects the idea that the Other history envisaged by Stora merges memory and forgetting, and uncovers traces of history that become distorted in the process of remembering. Similarly, in *Le Voyage des âmes*, the entwining of France and Algeria is highlighted through recollections drifting between reality and imagination, illustrating on the one hand Ndiaye’s

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 7.

⁵³⁹ Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 7.

observation that ‘le “national” et le “colonial” sont historiquement encastrés’,⁵⁴⁰ and, on the other, that this shared history is intrinsically complex and elusive in nature.

The entwining of France and Algeria in *Le Voyage des âmes* can be observed in two consecutive chapters which both refer explicitly to the Algerian War, and which exemplify the ‘aller et retour incessant entre un “ici” et un “là-bas”’ that typifies the narrative.⁵⁴¹ The chapters begin in exactly this fashion, the first beginning with ‘Ici’, the second with ‘Là-bas’.⁵⁴² For the majority of the former chapter, the protagonist describes the poor conditions in which he and his father live in France, to which the ‘ici’ refers, as they share a room in a hostel for migrant workers with several others in similar positions to them. However, the chapter ends with references to the Algerian War, as the protagonist recalls hearing the men living in the hostel talking about the regular visits of members of the Algerian National Liberation Front, the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale), to collect money from the Algerian immigrants. This type of event is rooted in reality, since the FLN regularly collected payment from every Algerian working in France at the time of the Algerian War in order to finance the liberation struggle.⁵⁴³ Yet, the description of the narrator’s recollection creates an impression of ambiguity concerning this memory, as follows:

À cette époque-là, j’étais réveillé plusieurs fois, tard dans la nuit, par des bruits de voix. Parmi elles je reconnaissais celle, grave, de mon père, puis d’autres inconnues qui lui répondaient. De quoi parlaient-ils?⁵⁴⁴

The memory is one of being woken up late at night by voices, amongst which the protagonist’s father’s is discernible, but the others are ‘inconnues’, and this impression

⁵⁴⁰ Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire*, p. 32.

⁵⁴¹ Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 7.

⁵⁴² See Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 52 and p. 61.

⁵⁴³ See Joshua Cole, ‘Entering History: The Memory of Police Violence in Paris, October 1961’, in Lorcin, *Algeria & France 1800 – 2000*, pp. 117-34 (p. 118).

⁵⁴⁴ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 58.

of uncertainty is compounded by the protagonist himself asking what they were discussing ('De quoi parlaient-ils?'). In fact, the protagonist proceeds to give an answer which, though it seems to lessen some of the uncertainty surrounding this memory, retains a certain impression of ambiguity, as follows:

Il y avait un nom, qu'ils répétaient chaque fin de mois. Ils le disaient doucement pour que dehors on ne les entende pas. Ils prenaient un air grave qui m'intriguait. "Le FLN, le collecteur du FLN va passer." C'était un secret entre eux.⁵⁴⁵

Though the use of direct speech, for example, may suggest a memory that is real, the secrecy that surrounds this scene maintains a trace of doubt regarding the recollection, as the narrator-protagonist evokes the hushed tones of the men, who do not wish to divulge the arrival of the FLN collector.⁵⁴⁶ Far from the above recollections being altogether shrouded in doubt, it is the blend of reality with hints of doubt that creates the impression that these memories constitute 'des souvenirs parfois enfouis qui oscillent entre réalité effective et reconstitution imaginaire',⁵⁴⁷ reflecting, through the language used by Mounsi, the complex and elusive nature of the memory of the Algerian War itself.

The oscillation between imagination and reality becomes more pronounced as these recollections tinged with doubt give way to another, more certain recollection, depicted by the narrator-protagonist immediately afterwards, in which the events of 17 October 1961 are evoked as follows:

Une fois, le collecteur n'était pas venu seul. Un autre homme l'accompagnait, un militant. Il semblait extrêmement affligé; il répétait obstinément: "Ils les ont jetés dans la Seine... Ils les ont

⁵⁴⁵ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 59.

⁵⁴⁶ The secrecy and trepidation amongst the Algerian men can be explained by the fact that failure to support the cause of the FLN often resulted in Algerians being punished and, in some cases, executed. See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 66.

⁵⁴⁷ Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, p. 7.

noyés comme des animaux.” Il rappelait ainsi à voix sourde l’histoire que tous connaissaient par cœur, celle de ce 17 octobre 1961 [...] Il parlait du malheur, de la guerre ici et là-bas, de la mort, qui revient toujours. Cette guerre qui grondait au-delà des mers comme le bruit de l’orage, et que je ne pouvais oublier.⁵⁴⁸

Though the militant in this recollection speaks in a muffled tone of voice, the recounting of this memory is more convincing than that of the preceding recollections, as the protagonist is in no doubt about the events referred to by the militant. The events of ‘ce 17 octobre 1961’, the addition of the demonstrative pronoun eradicating any element of uncertainty about what is being recalled, constitute ‘[une] histoire que tous connaissaient par cœur’. Furthermore, the Algerian War itself, ‘cette guerre [...] que je ne pouvais oublier’, is beyond forgetting for the narrator, contrasting with the dominant, official memory of silence. However, the way in which France and Algeria are entwined in the above extract, prefiguring the wider entwining of France and Algeria created by the shift in time and space from one chapter to the next, superimposes the history of the Algerian War on the dominant narrative of silence. The militant’s evocation of the war itself shifts from recounting the events of 17 October 1961 to ‘cette guerre qui grondait *au-delà* des mers’,⁵⁴⁹ connecting through the medium of the Algerian War the ‘ici’ of Paris and the ‘là-bas’ of Algeria. As a result, the notion that the Algerian War is an event in history which has caused France and Algeria to be inexorably tied is emphasised through Mounsi’s use and manipulation of language. Therefore, the history of silence is challenged as the war is revealed to constitute an intrinsic part of French national history. At the same time, through this entanglement of France and Algeria, and dominant and silenced histories, the historical silence is not definitively broken but, in fact, becomes an intrinsic part of the memory of the war. This blend of memories and forgetting is evidenced by the reconstruction of the protagonist’s own memories,

⁵⁴⁸ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, pp. 59-60.

⁵⁴⁹ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 60. My italics.

which fluctuate between uncertainty and reality, testifying to the complexity of the act of remembering, and the potential impossibility of ever constructing a definitive truth regarding the Algerian War. In this way, the Other history brought to light in *Le Voyage des âmes* recalls Rosello's discussion of francophone Algerian writer Boualem Sansal's literary text *Le Village de l'Allemand* (2008), in which, Rosello notes, 'il n'y a pas naissance d'un nouveau grand récit que l'on peut faire circuler, enseigner, transmettre'.⁵⁵⁰ Similarly, Mounsi's text does not present a new, definitive version of history to replace the official history of silence, but indicates that the memory of the Algerian War may always be characterised by a 'flot turbulent' of memories and forgetting.

The disorder of memory is emphasised further by the shift in time as well as space from the chapter depicting the 'Ici' of France – describing the poor living conditions in which the protagonist and his father live, and ending on the reference to the Algerian War and 17 October 1961 – to the chapter referring to the 'Là-bas' of Algeria. In this transition, France and Algeria continue to be entwined by the connecting thread of war, which runs seamlessly from one chapter to the next. From the end of the 'Ici' chapter, when the FLN militant 'rendait compte des combats que livraient les Djounouds au pays contre les ennemis',⁵⁵¹ the narrative moves in the 'Là-bas' chapter to Algeria, where 'les femmes racontaient des choses terribles, des viols, des villages détruits, des hommes tués, d'autres faits prisonniers ou enfuis dans la montagne'.⁵⁵² Thus, in the unstable flux of the narrative, as it shifts back in space and time from the protagonist's life in France to his Algerian childhood, the war remains as a constant frame of reference, once again underlining how the war has inexorably tied Algeria and France. Furthermore, through the constant fluctuation of the narrative in time and space,

⁵⁵⁰ Rosello, 'Guerre des mémoires ou "parallèles dangereux" dans *Le Village de l'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal', p. 208.

⁵⁵¹ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 60.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

of which the transition from one chapter to the next discussed here is an example, not only are France and Algeria entwined, but so are the past and the present. More specifically, the enduring effect of the past on the present is brought to light, as evidenced by the narrator-protagonist's use of the present tense, despite recounting his childhood experiences in the chapter depicting the war in Algeria. In this way, he initiates a process of actively remembering the past from his present position, as follows:

*Je me souviens des coups sourds des obus dans la terre, des saccades des mitrailleuses, des voix, des pas d'hommes, des ordres lancés par les officiers. Je regarde ces souvenirs comme à travers le viseur d'une mitrailleuse, et je ne vois qu'un chaos de terre et d'arbres brûlés.*⁵⁵³

In addition to the italicised phrases in the above extract, which denote the narrator-protagonist's active remembrance in the present, the image that he is viewing these memories through the sight of a machine gun suggests a means by which he can look directly on to his past, the machine gun acting as a guide in aiming the direction and accuracy of his memory. Thus, the memories evoked here remain vivid, and their recollection in the present tense transposes these memories from the past to the present, underlining their continuing relevance for the narrator-protagonist on a personal level, but also, on a collective level, highlighting the enduring significance of the Algerian War in contemporary French society.

Taking into account the vividness with which the protagonist's experiences of the Algerian War are recollected, the memories presented to us in the 'Là-bas' chapter are not characterised so much by a 'reconstitution imaginaire' as by a 'réalité effective'. However, in the final two paragraphs of the chapter, Mounsi explicitly engages with the 'fictional' aspect of the Algerian War. In what functions as a break in the narrative in

⁵⁵³ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 62. My italics.

order for the author to address the reader directly, he states that ‘maintenant, la guerre est devenue une histoire, une légende transformée par l’imagination des conteurs’,⁵⁵⁴ suggesting that the war has entered the realm of storytelling: it is ‘une histoire’ rather than ‘l’Histoire’. Furthermore, it is a story with more than one version, as it has been appropriated and retold by a number of ‘conteurs’, indicating a plurality of memories with regard to the war, as well as a multitude of intermediary agents, each with a different story to tell. Thus, writing the war has gone beyond the realm of ‘official history’, and has become the result of ‘des expériences très partielles, très individualisées, très différentes, où il se révèle difficile de délimiter les souvenirs communs’.⁵⁵⁵ In turn, *Le Voyage des âmes* is itself implicated in this retelling of the Algerian War, as Mounsi acknowledges by openly addressing this aspect of it. However, the acknowledgment that the war has taken on a ‘fictional’ nature is immediately offset by a reminder of the brutal reality of the war, as follows:

Mais tous nous avons vu la mort, de ces femmes, ces enfants, ces hommes, ces vieillards, ces civils que les balles de mitraillette projetaient en arrière, ou pliaient en deux comme sous le coup d’un poing invisible.⁵⁵⁶

This evocation of the reality of death, brought about by the war, underlines the reality of the memories described throughout this particular chapter. Rather than use this reality as a means by which to contest the mythical nature that the author himself admits the war has assumed, the reminder that ‘tous nous avons vu la mort’ functions as an indication of the enduring nature of the spectre of the war. The author accepts the complexity of the war’s memory, its blend of imagination and reality, but what *is* contested is the memory of silence which refused to acknowledge that a war took place. By reiterating

⁵⁵⁴ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 70.

⁵⁵⁵ Harbi and Stora, *La Guerre d’Algérie*, p. 10.

⁵⁵⁶ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 70.

the brutal reality of war, and by remembering the victims, the state-sponsored memory of silence with regard to the Algerian War is condemned, and the possibility of mourning the dead is put forward.⁵⁵⁷ As Rothberg notes in his discussion of *La Seine était rouge*, ‘it is the state that produces the dynamics of terror by refusing to recognise all of the dead’,⁵⁵⁸ indicating a continuation of the spectre of violence beyond the end of the war, which is permitted by the state silence on the war that avoids recognising the dead. By remembering the dead in *Le Voyage des âmes*, Mounsi challenges the state silence and opens up the possibility of moving beyond the conflicts inherited from colonialism and the Algerian War, permitted in this case by the continuing spectre of violence, through the text’s confrontation with the enduring legacy of the war and the violence perpetrated during it. Furthermore, like Sebbar in *La Seine était rouge*,⁵⁵⁹ Mounsi does not assign sides to good and evil, just and unjust, but puts forward a collective mourning, remembrance, and acceptance of past violence, as evidenced by the affirmation that ‘*tous nous avons vu la mort*’. The lack of clarity as to whom Mounsi is referring results in encompassing the many diverse actors and witnesses in the Algerian War within a collective process of acknowledging the dead and accepting the atrocities of war.

Through the constant shift of the narrative of *Le Voyage des âmes* in time and space, Mounsi entwines France and Algeria, and dominant and silenced histories. As a result, an Other history characterised by a plurality of memories which blend reality and imagination is put forward. Furthermore, this entwining results in the promotion of a collective process of remembrance, encompassing the many different groups of people affected, directly and indirectly, by the Algerian War. In this way, the entwined histories and memories brought to light in *Le Voyage des âmes* put forward ‘une

⁵⁵⁷ This opening-up of the possibility of mourning is put forward by Michael Rothberg in his discussion of *La Seine était rouge*. See Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 296.

⁵⁵⁸ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 308.

⁵⁵⁹ See Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 306.

occasion de préférer un scénario différent de celui que l'histoire du conflit semble imposer d'avance ou rétrospectivement',⁵⁶⁰ opening up the possibility of constructing a history that is desired rather than imposed. This potential construction of 'new places of concord' is mirrored in Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, as Rothberg observes,⁵⁶¹ and it is to this text that the analysis will now turn. More specifically, my discussion of Sebbar's text will centre on the way in which the narrative reflects Stora's notion that the Other history with regard to the Algerian War is superimposed on the dominant version 'à la manière de blancs et de lacunes',⁵⁶² creating a history of gaps and blanks.

Entanglement and Incompleteness in *La Seine était rouge*

Throughout this chapter, we have seen that there is a correlation between when the primary texts were published and the extent to which they refer to the past shared by France and Algeria: the more recent the year of publication of the novel, the more reference they give to this past. With very little explicit reference to this past in *La Noce des fous*, which nonetheless implicitly brings to light the history of the forgotten colonised subject, the Algerian War becomes a central part of the narrative in *Le Voyage des âmes*. This reflects a temporal development, in that *Le Voyage des âmes* (1997) was published at a time when the Algerian War was gaining greater public attention, while *La Noce des fous* (1990) was published at a time when the war was still in the process of being recognised on a wider scale.⁵⁶³ Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* underlines this correlation between the time of publication and the extent to which the texts included in the primary corpus refer to the Algerian War. Published in 1999, it

⁵⁶⁰ Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 26.

⁵⁶¹ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 308.

⁵⁶² Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après', p. 133.

⁵⁶³ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 192.

takes as its main focus a specific event of the Algerian War: the brutal police repression in Paris of a peaceful Algerian demonstration on 17 October 1961. Therefore, from the selection of texts included in the primary corpus, there is an increasing trend to refer to the Algerian War over time, which is indicative of the ‘puissante vague mémorielle qui s’est levée en France dans les années 1990’.⁵⁶⁴ From no reference to the war in *La Noce des fous*, more explicit (but not overwhelming) reference to it appears in *Le Voyage des âmes*. In *La Seine était rouge*, not only is the war referenced but, furthermore, a single, specific, and crucial event that occurred during the war is at the heart of the narrative.

The significance of 17 October 1961 is encapsulated in Laronde’s argument that the demonstration and subsequent repression constitute ‘l’événement le plus référencé et référentiel des rapports conflictuels entre la France et l’Algérie sur le territoire national français’.⁵⁶⁵ Thus, 17 October 1961 has moved beyond the events that occurred on this date themselves to become a symbol of colonial and state violence, as House and MacMaster observe in their discussion of the multiple connotations of 17 October 1961.⁵⁶⁶ Furthermore, House and MacMaster reinforce the significance of this date by referring to its status as a ‘contested site’, mirroring the wider debates relating to the Algerian War and France’s colonial past that continue to divide French society.⁵⁶⁷ Highlighting the contested nature of the events, there continues to be uncertainty regarding the exact number of Algerian victims, with estimates ranging from thirty to over three hundred.⁵⁶⁸ Therefore, like the Algerian War more generally, the events of 17 October 1961 are characterised by plural and conflicting accounts, making it difficult to establish a definitive narrative. However, like *Le Voyages des âmes*, Sebbar’s text does

⁵⁶⁴ Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 12.

⁵⁶⁵ Laronde, “Effets d’histoire”, p. 145.

⁵⁶⁶ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 14.

⁵⁶⁷ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁶⁸ For a detailed discussion on the debate surrounding the number of victims of 17 October 1961, see House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 161-67.

not seek to construct a definitive account of history, but reflects the elusive, incomplete nature of this history.

Made up of accounts from a diverse range of people who experienced the events, *La Seine était rouge* traces the attempts of three characters, Amel, Louis, and Omer, to reconstruct the demonstration of 17 October and its suppression. As has been observed by Anne Donadey, these three characters represent the principal groups for whom reclaiming the memory of 17 October and of the Algerian War more generally is a necessity: French (Louis), Algerian (Omer), and Algerian migrants to France (Amel).⁵⁶⁹ Thus, as in *Le Voyage des âmes*, coming to terms with the past extends beyond the individual to constitute a collective process of remembrance, encompassing the different actors in the war and their descendants, to whom the war's memory has been transmitted. Both Louis, whose parents participated in the Algerian War as 'porteurs de valise',⁵⁷⁰ and Amel, whose mother and grandmother took part in the demonstration, are frustrated by their families' silence regarding 17 October 1961, and both go in search of uncovering this past: Louis through making a film comprised of interviews with various people who experienced the events, Amel by retracing the demonstration in central Paris in the company of Omer. The subsequent narrative moves back and forth from snippets of Louis's film to Amel's and Omer's topographical retracing of 17 October 1961, recalling the way in which the narrative of *Le Voyage des âmes* constantly shifts in time and space from the protagonist's life in France to his Algerian childhood. In *La Seine était rouge*, the entwining of Louis's and Amel's and Omer's approaches to confronting the events of 17 October results in bringing to light a history of incompleteness, of gaps and blanks, which is, like in *Le Voyage des âmes*, characterised by a plurality of memories and continuous shifts between remembrance and forgetting. In this way, the representation of 17 October 1961 in *La Seine était rouge* underlines the

⁵⁶⁹ See Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire', p. 192.

⁵⁷⁰ For a detailed account of French resistance to the Algerian War, see Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

complexity of remembering the Algerian War more generally, and challenges attempts to provide a definitive, monolithic version of this history.

The impression of incompleteness is generated in *La Seine était rouge* before the quest to uncover the past begins, reflecting the historical lack of transmission as regards 17 October 1961, whether this be inter-generational transmission, or public transmission from the government to French society in the form of state commemoration. Indeed, the events of 17 October only came to wide public attention with the much-publicised trial of Maurice Papon for crimes against humanity during the Second World War, which highlighted his role as chief of police in the repression of the Algerian demonstration, and initiated the opening of state archives for the first time.⁵⁷¹ The victims of the repression were subsequently commemorated by a plaque unveiled on the Pont Saint-Michel in 2001, erected by the municipality of Paris. However, as House and MacMaster observe, the unveiling of the plaque was not attended by any members of government, and the wording of the plaque hides the agency of the perpetrators of the violence, testifying to a continuing denial of state responsibility and ‘de-officialising’ a supposedly official commemoration.⁵⁷² Thus, even a commemorative monument, which, as Young observes, ‘has been defined as that which by its seemingly land-anchored permanence could also guarantee the permanence of a particular idea or memory attached to it’,⁵⁷³ fails to establish a permanent, ‘official’ memory of 17 October 1961, testifying to the enduring incompleteness characteristic of this memory. Furthermore, Laronde affirms that the silence of the victims of the demonstration colludes with the state silence, stating that ‘à un mécanisme de refoulement de la

⁵⁷¹ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 8-9. For a discussion of how the events of 17 October 1961 fell out of public consciousness in the years that followed and were kept silenced in the ensuing decades, see House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 242-87.

⁵⁷² See House and MacMaster, pp. 318-19. The fact that the plaque was sanctioned by the municipality of Paris, rather than the government, also points to the continued denial of state responsibility with regard to the repression of 17 October 1961.

⁵⁷³ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. 3.

reconnaissance des actes de répression du côté français correspond un réflexe ancien de silence du côté immigré'.⁵⁷⁴

In Sebbar's novel, the inter-generational transmission of silence, and desire to break it, is shown to affect both Amel, a descendant of the generation of Algerian immigration to France, and Louis, whose parents were not migrants but 'porteurs de valise' during the Algerian War. Thus, by demonstrating that the war was not ethnically specific, the complexity of the war (not just a war which set French against Algerian, but one which set Algerian against Algerian, and French against French) is presented at the outset of the novel. Nevertheless, the legacy of silence and need to remember remain the same, despite Louis and Amel belonging to different groups (French and French of Algerian origin), underlining Donadey's assertion that both characters belong to groups for whom recovering these particular memories is a necessity, and reinforcing the notion that confronting the Algerian War is needed on a collective scale in French society. The silence with which both Louis and Amel are confronted, and their shared need to remember, are emphasised by Sebbar's use of parallel narrative techniques to evoke the lack of transmission which both characters face. For example, in our first encounter with Louis, Sebbar reveals how, like Amel, he is eager to find out about his family past and, in particular, his parents' experiences during the Algerian War. The conversation Louis has with his mother about the war bears a striking parallel to the conversation Amel has with her grandmother in the first chapter of the novel, as she too attempts to elicit memories of the war. Asking about his parents' involvement in the war, Louis expresses his frustration at the silence with which he is confronted, as follows: 'Je ne sais pas ce qu'il a fait, ni toi, vous commencez à parler et vous vous arrêtez, et si je pose des questions, vous ne voulez pas répondre. Pourquoi?'⁵⁷⁵ This frustration of not knowing is shared by Amel, who in the first chapter conveys her

⁵⁷⁴ Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", pp. 148-49.

⁵⁷⁵ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 18.

annoyance at her grandmother for withholding the past from her, as follows: ‘Tu dis toujours ça, plus tard, plus tard et je sais rien. Tu parles avec maman, tu pourrais me dire tout, et tu ne dis rien, et maman ne dit rien’.⁵⁷⁶ The frustration displayed by Louis and Amel reflects the conflict between the desire for knowledge of the younger generations, and the silence from their elders, and the idea that it is a shared frustration is underlined by the language used by both characters to respond to this silence, which is repeated almost word for word: Louis states that ‘si je pose des questions, vous ne voulez pas répondre’, while Amel states that ‘si je te pose des questions, tu ne réponds pas’.

Such a distinct reflection of the lack of (and desire for) knowledge about 17 October 1961 and the Algerian War in the introduction of two characters who represent different groups, but for whom this history is equally significant, creates an entanglement between these two characters that points towards the plurality of memories with regard to the history in question. This entanglement is reinforced throughout the narrative and eventually encompasses the presence of Omer as well, who represents the third group (Algerian) for whom reclaiming memories of 17 October 1961 constitutes a necessity. By demonstrating the significance of this process of reconstructing the past to different groups, *La Seine était rouge* indicates that the very nature of this past is that it is not made up of one single narrative, but of plurality and complexity, and this is further reflected in the various experiences expressed in the novel itself, which Louis, Amel, and Omer all go on to reveal. These experiences are made up of oral accounts of 17 October 1961, collected mainly by Louis for his film, including that of a harki, an Algerian who was saved from drowning in the Seine, a French man who was unaware of his Algerian lover’s involvement in the struggle for independence, a French student who participated in the demonstration, a bookshop

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

employee who came to the aid of injured Algerian demonstrators, and a French policeman who witnessed colleagues of his attack unarmed demonstrators and throw them into the Seine. Thus, overlapping the entanglement of Amel, Louis, and Omer is another entanglement of the experiences of various actors in the 17 October demonstration.

Significantly, although these memories are diverse, they do not clash, but bring to light a collection of accounts which serve the unified purpose of denouncing the police violence of 17 October. Even the accounts of the harki and the French policeman do not uphold the official state version of events, which continued to underestimate the extent of the suppression even after state archives were finally opened in 1997 in the wake of the Papon trial.⁵⁷⁷ In *La Seine était rouge*, the harki admits that ‘on a jeté des manifestants dans la Seine’,⁵⁷⁸ and the French policeman reveals that the demonstrators ‘ont pas tiré sur nous, ils étaient pas armés’,⁵⁷⁹ bringing to light the severity of police violence during the demonstration. Other accounts focus on how French people came to the aid of the Algerian demonstrators, underlining the notion that *La Seine était rouge* comprises recollections which are at once disparate and parallel in nature. On the one hand, it emerges that Sebbar collects memories which correspond to Harbi’s and Stora’s argument that memories of the Algerian War are made up of ‘des expériences très partielles, très individualisées, très différentes, où il se révèle difficile de délimiter les souvenirs communs’.⁵⁸⁰ In *La Seine était rouge*, the memories that are revealed are elicited from a variety of actors in the 17 October demonstration – not only from the victims of violence, but from an Algerian who worked for the French police, and a French policeman who implicitly denounces the violence perpetrated by his colleagues.

⁵⁷⁷ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁷⁸ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 37.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵⁸⁰ Harbi and Stora, *La Guerre d’Algérie*, p. 10.

On the other hand, though these memories are partial, individual, and different, the accounts serve a common goal: to challenge the state version of 17 October 1961.

Nevertheless, reconstructing a common memory of the events remains elusive, suggesting that *La Seine était rouge* does not establish a ‘collective memory’ of 17 October in the sense that Maurice Halbwachs posits, that is to say the reconstruction of an impression of the past that is ‘in accord [...] with the predominant thoughts of society’.⁵⁸¹ Instead, the processes of remembering that emerge in *La Seine était rouge* correspond more closely to Young’s notion of ‘collected memory’, which he defines as ‘the many discrete memories that are gathered into common memorial spaces and assigned common meaning’.⁵⁸² In *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar gathers many discrete memories into the memorial space constituted by the text and assigns them the common meaning of challenging and rewriting the dominant, state-sponsored historical narrative. The notion of entanglement with which this chapter engages reflects this simultaneous, almost paradoxical process of memories being distinct but having a common function, as the collection of disparate memories does not lead to the easy resolution of state silence and amnesia, and Sebbar’s text certainly does not indicate this. On the contrary, the collection of diverse memories in *La Seine était rouge* has the effect of emphasising the silence and amnesia characteristic of this past, thus preserving ‘the complex texture of memory – its many inconsistencies, faces, and shapes’.⁵⁸³ Therefore, while many discrete memories are brought together and assigned a common meaning, they remain interlocked in a complex entanglement which is in no way divested of its own intricacies and deficiencies.

One of the ways in which these deficiencies manifest themselves is through the silence and forgetting characteristic of 17 October 1961, which are reflected in *La Seine était rouge* by the impression of incompleteness. This incompleteness is especially

⁵⁸¹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 40.

⁵⁸² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. xi.

⁵⁸³ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. xi.

evident in the opening pages of the text, in which several of Sebbar's sentences remain unfinished, the frequent use of ellipses truncating the narrative. For example, when Amel first meets Omer, she is reminded of her grandfather, who used to work in an automobile factory in Paris. However, Sebbar's account of Amel's grandfather is eventually discontinued, as follows:

Il était fier de l'usine de "l'île", heureux de montrer à sa fille "le temple de l'industrie automobile française", comme disait le contremaître, jusqu'au jour où... le grand-père n'en a jamais dit davantage sur ce fameux jour.⁵⁸⁴

The silence signified by the ellipsis in this extract is compounded by the words that follow it, as Sebbar tells us that, indeed, Amel's grandfather said nothing more of this 'fameux jour'. The events of this day are not made explicit, but it is reasonable to assume that Sebbar is referring to 17 October 1961, not only because this day is the main focus of the text, but because the silence surrounding 'ce fameux jour' in this extract corresponds to the general evocation of silence that takes place in these opening pages of the text. The events of 17 October 1961 remain unspoken, for the older generations at least, discontinuing the transmission of this history to the younger generations, and creating a memory of incompleteness which is reflected in the text through the use of ellipses.

Again, Sebbar insists that this incompleteness is an aspect which affects other groups for whom remembering 17 October 1961 constitutes a necessity, and reinforces the parallel by employing the same narrative techniques to evoke the lack of transmission with which Louis is confronted. Referring to the limited information Louis is given from his mother about his parents' experiences during the Algerian War, Sebbar emphasises that this information remains incomplete, as follows:

⁵⁸⁴ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 16.

Sa mère lui a parlé des prisons de femmes, où elle a été incarcérée pendant la guerre d'Algérie [...] Elle disait qu'elle avait rencontré des femmes qu'elle n'aurait pas connues autrement et qu'elle ne regrettait pas ce temps même si... Elle n'achevait pas son récit.⁵⁸⁵

As when Amel's grandfather fails to complete his story about 'ce fameux jour', we are confronted with an incomplete sentence, illustrated by an ellipsis, which is followed by an overt confirmation of the incompleteness of the sentence: 'Elle n'achevait pas son récit'. Thus, the entanglement between Louis and Amel is reinforced by the mirroring of the incomplete memories with which they are both faced. Once more, this entanglement does not point towards an easy resolution by bringing to light a singular memory common to both Louis and Amel. On the contrary, what Louis and Amel share is a legacy of non-transmission: the entanglement is made up of incomplete memories, not a shared past, and the lack of an easy resolution to this incompleteness is exacerbated by the (physical) separation of Louis and Amel throughout the majority of the text.

This impression of incompleteness reflects Stora's notion that the memory of the Algerian War is made up of a 'mélange de souvenirs vivaces et d'oubli qui s'impriment dans le présent et qui, à la manière de blancs et de lacunes, superposent aux faits une *autre histoire*, celle des malentendus et des refus'.⁵⁸⁶ In particular, the idea that an Other history can emerge from 'de blancs et de lacunes' reveals itself to be acutely relevant to *La Seine était rouge*, in which Sebbar literally uses 'de blancs et de lacunes' in the narrative itself in the form of ellipses. Furthermore, as Donadey observes, the anti-colonial struggle, in which she includes *La Seine était rouge*, comprises 'une ré-écriture, une ré-évaluation et une ré-interprétation de l'histoire', redressing the distortion of history carried out by colonialism.⁵⁸⁷ Thus, the Other history brought to light by

⁵⁸⁵ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 17.

⁵⁸⁶ Stora, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après', p. 133.

⁵⁸⁷ Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire', p. 187.

Sebbar's text constitutes a reinterpretation and re-appropriation of the history written by the coloniser, and is made up of 'de blancs et de lacunes' precisely because it is attempting to rewrite a silenced history. This aspect of *La Seine était rouge* is also acknowledged by Donadey, who argues that this type of literature 'reconstruit des bribes d'histoire fragmentée, insistant sur les blancs de l'histoire coloniale et utilisant la fiction pour en combler quelques-uns'.⁵⁸⁸ Indeed, the gaps and blanks evident at the outset of Sebbar's text provide the narrative thread for the rest of the novel which, in a sense, goes on to 'fill in the blanks' introduced at the beginning of the narrative.

However, rather than accomplishing this in the simple manner that the idea of 'filling in the blanks' suggests, this Other history is, in fact, born of the gaps and blanks left behind by the coloniser's distorted version of history. That is to say, Sebbar does not proceed to straightforwardly present the reader with a singular, monolithic version of history to resolve the lack of historical transmission regarding the 17 October 1961 and the Algerian War. On the contrary, the ensuing narrative is inevitably fragmented, made up of various pieces of information collected from different sources, and constantly shifting between Amel's quest to retrace the footsteps of the Algerian demonstrators in the company of Omer and the description of clips from Louis's film. In this way, the Other history that emerges in *La Seine était rouge* does so by continuing to emphasise the state silence and amnesia with regard to 17 October 1961 and the Algerian War.

Filling in the Blanks

The encounter with Mourad, the Algerian chef of a bar visited by Amel and Omer as they retrace the footsteps of the Algerian demonstrators, is key in exemplifying my

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

argument that *La Seine était rouge* brings to light a history of gaps and blanks, of memories mixed with forgetting. Asked about 17 October 1961, Mourad proceeds to evoke in detail his experiences of that day. He claims that his memory of the events is still strong ('j'ai tout vu [...] J'ai rien oublié')⁵⁸⁹ and his insistence on being a witness to what took place ('je suis témoin')⁵⁹⁰ emphasise his 'souvenirs vivaces' of that day. However, having recounted his experiences, he then tells Amel and Omer how he had since forgotten about the events, as follows: 'J'ai voulu témoigner, j'ai pas eu l'occasion et là, à ce comptoir, c'est à vous que je parle, pour la première fois, trente-cinq ans après. J'ai oublié, au cours des années. Il faut travailler, on travaille, on oublie'.⁵⁹¹ Thus, forgetting is added to Mourad's initial vivid remembrance, and the legacy of silence is evident in his admission that this is the first time he has spoken of 17 October 1961 since the period itself. Indeed, the silence is not only a result of France's deliberate amnesia, but also as a consequence of the need to survive, which supersedes the desire to remember ('on travaille, on oublie'), underlining the notion that the victims' silence colludes with that of the state.

The breaking of Mourad's silence suggests that the recovery of memory occurs through the younger generations eliciting the testimony of the preceding generations, which is further enhanced in the novel by the notion that Mourad is giving a deferred witness account of what he saw at the time the events of 17 October 1961 unfolded. Though he was unable to testify at the time, he is given the opportunity to do so informally thirty-five years later. The role of the younger generations in drawing out the memories of the previous generations is underlined by Laronde, who argues that 'c'est [...] à la génération des petits-enfants de déclencher le mouvement de remontée dans le temps, jusqu'aux mères, la génération qui les précède, et la génération qui est celle avec

⁵⁸⁹ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 77.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., p. 79.

laquelle s'est installé le silence'.⁵⁹² For Laronde, the silence of the victims with regard to 17 October 1961 originates from the first generation, which experienced the repression as adults, and persists to a large extent once the second generation of immigration has reached adulthood. This argument is largely confirmed by the texts included in the primary corpus, the protagonists of which, with the exception of Amel, all belong to the second generation of immigration, and none of whom seek to break the silence of 17 October 1961 (the only possible exception being the protagonist of *Le Voyage des âmes*, who only references 17 October once and in no great depth).⁵⁹³ Thus, it is left to the third generation, of which Amel is a part, to initiate the recovery of memory. The continuity of silence traced by Laronde from first to second generations, which is then discontinued by the third, is encapsulated by the striking first sentence of *La Seine était rouge*: 'Sa mère ne lui a rien dit ni la mère de sa mère'.⁵⁹⁴ Emphasising that Amel is frustrated by her mother's silence as well as her grandmother's, the first sentence of Sebbar's text, which stands alone, constituting a paragraph in its own right, also indicates from the very outset of the novel that this silence will be broken (or, at least, an attempt to do so will be made) over the course of the remaining text.

The isolation of the novel's first sentence is significant in that it points towards the fragmentation which will typify the ensuing recovery of memory. The opening sentence is followed by a gap before the narrative begins in earnest, and this fragmented structure continues throughout the text, in which Sebbar often ends chapters with single sentences cut off from the preceding paragraph.⁵⁹⁵ These isolated sentences at the end of chapters often depict Amel imagining the voice of her mother (for example, 'Amel entend la voix de sa mère')⁵⁹⁶, and Donadey comments that this aspect of the text highlights 'la dialectique entre passé et présent qui se trouve au cœur de l'anamnèse', as

⁵⁹² Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 146.

⁵⁹³ See Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 59.

⁵⁹⁴ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 9.

⁵⁹⁵ See for example Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 24, p. 31, p. 43, p. 47, p. 64.

⁵⁹⁶ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 24.

the image of Amel hearing the voice of her mother in the present is then followed by her mother's recollections of 17 October 1961.⁵⁹⁷ Thus, the fragmentation of the text, created by the isolation of single sentences, contributes to the recovery of memory enabled by the link between past and present, child and parent. As a result, the idea that this recovery of memory is nonetheless characterised by fragmentation is underlined. Furthermore, the text is punctuated by short chapters, sometimes comprising only one or two paragraphs,⁵⁹⁸ structuring the narrative in such a way that blank spaces become a predominant visible aspect of the text. Therefore, in addition to the gaps and blanks represented by Sebbar's use of ellipses, the conspicuous and frequent blank spaces in the text create a fragmented narrative and a fragmented process of reclaiming memories of 17 October 1961. Indeed, as transmission of 17 October has been characterised by silence and incompleteness, these gaps and blanks are an inescapable part of its memory and so, in *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar goes on to fill in the blanks in this memory with more gaps and further silence. In this way, the incomplete transmission of the memory of 17 October and of the Algerian War more generally, a memory which may always be incomplete, is underlined, again exemplifying how *La Seine était rouge* preserves the 'complex texture of memory – its many inconsistencies, faces, and shapes'.⁵⁹⁹ As Young notes, such a conception of memory insists on memory's deficiency and complexity, the 'difficulty of [...] memory-work, not its easy resolution',⁶⁰⁰ which reflects my definition of entanglement. The entanglement in *La Seine était rouge* of many diverse, individual memories does not construct a complete, definitive narrative, but an inevitably fragmented one that highlights the complexity of the act of remembering. Furthermore, Laronde states that the process of eliciting the memories of the older generations by the third generation 'passe nécessairement par un *hiatus*, terme

⁵⁹⁷ Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire', p. 196.

⁵⁹⁸ See for example Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 12, p. 38, p. 39, p. 58, p. 61, p. 84, p. 101.

⁵⁹⁹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. xi.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

qu'il faut prendre dans son double sens, contradictoire et complémentaire, de continuité et d'interruption, celui d'une continuité interrompue qu'on cherche à retrouver',⁶⁰¹ and this interrupted continuity is very much in evidence in *La Seine était rouge*. As Laronde suggests, the recovery of memory in Sebbar's text by the third generation is necessarily fragmented and interrupted: as a result, *La Seine était rouge*, in a paradoxical manner, rewrites the coloniser's distorted version of history by bringing to light the gaps and blanks left behind by this distortion.

Closer analysis of Amel's and Omer's encounter with Mourad further underlines the complexity and interrupted continuity ascribed to recovering the memory of 17 October 1961 in *La Seine était rouge*. In particular, Mourad's reference to the Papon trial reflects Rosello's observation that the wave of memory with regard to the Algerian War in the 1990s, rather than lead to 'une sorte de calme plat de la mémoire', led to a 'flot turbulent' to which novels, films, official ceremonies, as well as legal proceedings played out to wide public attention (such as the Papon trial) all contribute.⁶⁰² Mourad's own reference to the Papon trial reinforces the significance of this particular event as a turning-point in the wave of interest regarding 17 October.⁶⁰³ Having told Amel and Omer that 'au cours des années [...] on oublie' when asked about the events of that day, he continues by stating that 'c'est l'affaire Papon qui a remué tout ça'.⁶⁰⁴ The use of the verb 'remuer' highlights the turbulent nature of this fluctuating memorial process, and underlines the notion that memories of 17 October 1961 comprise forgetting mixed with remembrance, and continuously shifting between the two. Moreover, in this instance it is intimated that the Papon trial is an event that revives wounds rather than appeases them (the verb 'remuer' generating a negative connotation), suggesting that Mourad has been forced to remember a past which he

⁶⁰¹ Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", pp. 146-47. Original's italics.

⁶⁰² Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 12.

⁶⁰³ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 8.

⁶⁰⁴ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 79.

himself has kept silenced due to its traumatic nature. Thus, the argument that the forgetting of the trauma of the past on the part of the victims colludes with France's deliberate amnesia is further underlined, which also reinforces Laronde's notion that the recovery of memory is characterised by an interrupted continuity, as Mourad's silence since the events themselves is finally broken by Amel's and Omer's wish to reconstruct the past. Furthermore, Mourad's silence illustrates that Sebbar is not specifically seeking to condemn France for its role in the forgetting of 17 October 1961, conforming to Rothberg's argument that *La Seine était rouge* indicates 'the impossibility of clearly assigning sides to the just and the unjust'.⁶⁰⁵ The silence originates from both the perpetrators of the violence and its victims and, as a result, the breaking of the silence will never comprise the straightforward task of 'filling in the blanks' by giving a voice to the victims.⁶⁰⁶ On the contrary, *La Seine était rouge* demonstrates that breaking the silence comprises a complex, gradual process of reconstructing a memory made up of both remembrance and forgetting which may never be complete.

As the narrative alternates between Amel's and Omer's retracing of the demonstration and Louis's film, it emerges that Louis's attempts to reconstruct the events of 17 October 1961 also result in partly remembered accounts. The way in which Amel's mother recounts her experiences to Louis reflects this partial remembrance, as follows:

Louis, quand on raconte, on oublie, tout vient dans le désordre, je ne peux plus dire exactement l'emploi du temps de ce soir-là [...] il faudra que tu remontes ton film dans l'ordre chronologique, si c'est possible, parce que je crois que la manifestation a eu lieu dans plusieurs endroits au même moment.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁵ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 306.

⁶⁰⁶ The silence emanating from the colonised subject is reflected in Sebbar's own attempts to 'fill in the blanks' in the autobiographical *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*, in which she pleads with her father to tell her about the Algerian War only to be met by silence. See especially Leïla Sebbar, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (Paris: Juillard, 2003), pp. 12-13.

⁶⁰⁷ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 86.

Amel's mother's indication that 'quand on raconte, on oublie' is reminiscent of Mourad's statement that 'on travaille, on oublie',⁶⁰⁸ but while Mourad evokes the need to survive as a reason for his forgetting, Amel's mother suggests that even when the opportunity arises to recount past experiences, forgetting remains part of the memorial process. The enduring nature of this forgetting underlines the idea that breaking the silence does not comprise the simple task of giving a voice to the victims of violence, since forgetting permeates the memories of the victims even when they are given the opportunity to break their silence. In addition to Amel's mother's account being partial, the above extract also evokes the complexity of both memory and the actual unfolding of the events, and the lack of a definite chronology of the events. For example, Amel's mother's comment that 'tout vient dans le désordre' is ambiguous. On the one hand, the comment is preceded by her admission that 'on oublie', suggesting that she forgets because her memory is in disorder. On the other hand, she continues by saying that she is unable to recall 'l'emploi du temps de ce soir-là', suggesting that the disorder is referring to the unfolding of events of that evening. Consequently, the disorder eventually refers to both Amel's mother's memory of the events and the events themselves. In addition to reiterating the turbulent process of remembering 17 October, this evocation of the deficiency of memory reflects Laronde's argument, which is itself at the heart of my own analysis of Sebbar's text, that memory itself, and its incompleteness, becomes an object of study for the third generation in relation to the events (to which both Amel and Louis belong).⁶⁰⁹ In this vein, Louis's film, like Sebbar's novel, seeks not to 'établir "les faits" une bonne fois pour toutes puisque ceux-

⁶⁰⁸ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 79.

⁶⁰⁹ See Laronde, "'Effets d'histoire'", p. 150.

ci sont sujets à arbitration et sujets à revision',⁶¹⁰ bringing to light instead the deficiency of memory.

Attempting to overcome this deficiency of memory, Amel's mother insists that Louis's film must be in chronological order, implying that establishing a definite timeline of the events is a crucial factor in the process of reclaiming the memory of the tragedy. However, in suggesting to Louis that he must follow a definite timeline '*si c'est possible*', Amel's mother indicates the very impossibility of giving these events any precise chronology, which is compounded by her previous remark that '*je ne peux plus dire exactement l'emploi du temps de ce soir-là*'. Therefore, this account of 17 October 1961 is characterised by remembrance and forgetting, disorder, and an incomplete, indistinct timeline. This lack of a precise chronology is another factor which engenders a plurality of memories, as Raphaëlle Branche argues, noting that '*la guerre d'Algérie n'a pas commencé à la même date pour tous. Elle ne s'est pas finie non plus au même moment*'.⁶¹¹ As a result, the events of 17 October 1961 live on, far beyond what might be considered the official end of the war, due to the precise inability to establish a definite conclusion.⁶¹² The idea that a definite conclusion to the war cannot be established reflects one of the underlying arguments of this thesis: that the conflicts inherited from the war are replayed in contemporary French society and in postcolonial Franco-Algerian literature. Branche goes on to explain that one of the reasons for this blurring of timelines is '*la multiplicité des vécus de la guerre*',⁶¹³ an aspect that Sebbar emphasises in *La Seine était rouge*. Thus, it emerges that, in *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar is not attempting to establish a definitive timeline of 17 October

⁶¹⁰ Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 151.

⁶¹¹ Raphaëlle Branche, *La Guerre d'Algérie: une histoire apaisée?* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), p. 13.

⁶¹² Branche suggests that the ceasefire, Algerian independence, the installation of pieds-noirs in France, and the amnesties granted to those having committed crimes during the war, could all constitute the official end of the war. See Branche, *La Guerre d'Algérie*, p. 13.

⁶¹³ Branche, *La Guerre d'Algérie*, p. 13.

1961 or the Algerian War, but to highlight that this incompleteness, enhanced by a multiplicity of experiences, is a defining characteristic of the war.

This plurality of memories is exemplified by Louis, Amel, and Omer who, as well as belonging to three different groups for whom recovering these memories is a necessity, reveal the diverse experiences of several actors in the demonstration through their own attempts to reconstruct the past. In this way, disparate memories and experiences are collected within the text, coming together to challenge and rewrite the official state version of the events. Nonetheless, traces of state amnesia remain in this rewriting of history, signified by the gaps and blanks that Sebbar brings to light in the text and, as a result, *La Seine était rouge* reflects the idea that a society's memory comprises 'an aggregate collection of its members' many, often competing memories'.⁶¹⁴ With regard to remembering 17 October 1961, the reconstruction of the past competes with the transmission of silence, whether this be state silence or inter-generational silence. Furthermore, as Amel and Omer find on their search to retrace the footsteps of the demonstrators, any sites of significance to 17 October are overwhelmed by references to France's glorious past. As such, remembering the Algerian War also competes with remembering other moments in France's history, bringing the possibility of these memories coexisting into question. However, as Rothberg has observed, by 'inscribing memory of the Algerian War of Independence *alongside* official French war memory, [*La Seine était rouge*] does not engage in competitive memory',⁶¹⁵ pointing instead to the potential coexistence of competing memories. This possibility of the complex memories of 17 October 1961 and the Algerian War coexisting with dominant French historical narratives will be the focus of the next section.

⁶¹⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. xi.

⁶¹⁵ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 299. My italics.

Reinscription: Bringing to Light a Memory of Gaps and Blanks

In its entanglement of Louis's and Amel's and Omer's quests to reconstruct the events of 17 October 1961, *La Seine était rouge* also entangles the diverse, incomplete memories brought to light by the three characters with memories of the glorified triumphs in dominant French history, such as the anti-Nazi Resistance during the Second World War. These memories appear to come into conflict, as exemplified by Amel's reaction when she and Omer approach the Marianne statue, commemorating the French resistance during the Franco-Prussian War in this instance, in the La Défense district of Paris. Viewing the statue, Amel ascribes an alternative interpretation to it that clashes with what it originally seeks to represent, as evidenced in her following explanation of why she reads the plaque to Omer:

Parce que les Parisiens, le peuple de Paris a résisté à l'ennemi [...] Ensuite, parce que la statue a été le point de rendez-vous des Algériens le 17 octobre 1961. Qui les a défendus quand les flics ont chargé au pont de Neuilly? Tu les a entendus les récits, la panique, les corps piétinés, les blessés, les morts... Les familles en habits du dimanche, les voitures d'enfants renversées, des souliers perdus, des grands, des petits...⁶¹⁶

Amel reinscribes the statue with an alternative interpretation and an alternative history: it is no longer only a commemoration to French resistance, but is assigned the significance of being the meeting-point for Algerian demonstrators during the 17 October protest. However, in this reinscription, Amel evokes the privileging of French resistance over Algerian resistance to French colonialism exemplified by the 17 October demonstration. These memories do not only come into conflict but, moreover, the memory of Algerian resistance is overwhelmed by that of French resistance, and Amel

⁶¹⁶ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 43.

reinforces this opposition between official state commemoration and remembering the Algerian War by stating that the latter does not constitute ‘l’histoire officielle’.⁶¹⁷

This opposition between glorified moments in French history and the Algerian War is further made evident in the entanglement of memories of World War Two anti-Nazi Resistance and memories of Algerian anti-French resistance. The overwhelming of memories of the Algerian War by those of French World War Two Resistance is intimated by Rothberg’s observation that ‘while, by the late 1990s, memory of World War Two and the Nazi genocide had become widespread in French discourse and public space, the counter-memories of Algerians and their descendants remain outside of the mainstream’.⁶¹⁸ However, while *La Seine était rouge* brings this imbalance of memory into focus, it also suggests parallels between these seemingly opposing memories which are ignored by the privileging of one over the other. These parallels are brought to light when Amel, Louis, and Omer meet outside La Santé prison and literally reinscribe a commemorative plaque on the prison walls dedicated to ‘des lycéens et des étudiants qui [...] se dressèrent les premiers contre l’occupant’ during the Second World War.⁶¹⁹ The result is captured by Louis for his film, which depicts the original plaque with, to its side, a different commemoration written in red spray-paint dedicated to ‘des résistants algériens qui se dressèrent contre l’occupant français’.⁶²⁰ Such a reinscription brings to light the parallels between anti-Nazi Resistance and Algerian resistance to colonialism, recalling McCormack’s observation that ‘in the Algerian War there is a certain “replaying” of World War Two in so far as similar issues reoccur except that rather than it being the Germans who are “les bourreaux” [...] this time it is the French’.⁶²¹ This parallel is reinforced by the way in which the reinscription imitates the wording of the original plaque, which has the subversive effect, as Donaday has

⁶¹⁷ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 42.

⁶¹⁸ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 299.

⁶¹⁹ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, pp. 20-21.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶²¹ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 16.

observed,⁶²² of identifying ‘l’occupant français’ with ‘l’occupant’, the latter referring of course to the Nazi German army. Furthermore, the Algerians are ‘qualifiés du terme sacré de “résistants”’,⁶²³ appropriating a word which is itself almost synonymous with France in World War Two. Thus, the apparently competing memories of anti-Nazi Resistance and Algerian resistance are brought together, which is underlined by the way in which, as Rothberg observes, ‘Omer’s messages never cover over other sites, but rather take their place *alongside* them’.⁶²⁴ Unlike the way in which official state memorials overwhelm memories of the Algerian War, the characters’ reinscription of these commemorations places memories of glorified moments in French history and memories of the Algerian War in coexistence.

However, conforming to the definition of entanglement developed in this chapter, this reinscription does not ‘fill in the blanks’ in a straightforward, simplistic manner which puts a definitive end to competing memories and state amnesia and silence. To an extent, apparently competing memories are brought together and placed side by side but, as France is equated to Nazi Germany and French heroism is turned into oppression, an impression of conflict remains. Furthermore, as Donadey observes, through recovering the memory of 17 October 1961, the protagonists ‘mett[e]nt en lumière [...] à la fois les événements de la guerre d’Algérie et le manque de commémoration officielle à ce sujet en France’.⁶²⁵ In this way, the silence is broken, but is broken not only by drawing attention to what happened, but by highlighting the lack of state recognition of what happened. This notion is illustrated by the reinscription of the plaque on La Santé prison which, by ironically imitating the wording of the original plaque and by taking the form of graffiti (thus constituting an unofficial, impermanent commemoration which invites parallels with vandalism), emphasises the lack of official

⁶²² See Donadey, ‘Retour sur mémoire’, p. 195.

⁶²³ Donadey, ‘Retour sur mémoire’, p. 195.

⁶²⁴ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 299. Original’s italics.

⁶²⁵ Donadey, ‘Retour sur mémoire’, p. 195.

recognition of the Algerian War, and the long-lasting effacement of the war and 17 October 1961.

Therefore, even when bringing to light the parallels between anti-Nazi Resistance and Algerian anti-colonial resistance, *La Seine était rouge* continues to represent the history of state silence with regard to the memory of 17 October 1961 and the Algerian War, reflecting the way in which, over the course of the narrative, Sebbar's text brings to light a memory 'of gaps and blanks', characterised by incompleteness, fragmentation, and further silence. As such, *La Seine était rouge* does not attempt to provide a definitive truth with regard to the past that it uncovers, nor does it resolve once and for all the many competing memories present in French society which may circulate to the detriment of a single coherent narrative of 17 October 1961. However, by collecting a multitude of diverse memories, the novel does not 'produce divisiveness but rather seek[s] to uncover already existing, unresolved divisions',⁶²⁶ such as those inherited from the colonial period and the Algerian War. As the French state continues to hesitate in constructing a coherent narrative regarding France's colonial past, even after the official recognition of the Algerian War and the unveiling of the plaque dedicated to the victims of 17 October 1961, the 'unresolved divisions' brought to light by Sebbar's text continue to prove pertinent. For example, Laronde points out that, in addition to acts of confronting France's role as oppressor, other memorials were inaugurated in 2003 and 2005 dedicated to the Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS), the pro-French Algeria organisation which perpetrated a number of murders during the Algerian War.⁶²⁷ The law of 23 February 2005 insisting on the positive role of French colonialism adds further ambiguity to the French state's stance towards its colonial past, and the more recent plans to inaugurate a Maison de l'histoire de la France suggest a desire to provide a unified history of the nation, and thus reinforce a singular,

⁶²⁶ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 272. Original's italics.

⁶²⁷ See Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", pp. 140-41.

homogenising conception of French national identity. The initiation of such projects overshadows the remembrance of silenced histories at the turn of the century, and once again overlooks the plurality of contemporary, postcolonial French society, a plurality that is emphasised in *La Seine était rouge*.

The recent fiftieth anniversary of 17 October 1961 suggests that the demonstration and its repression have firmly entered French public consciousness, supporting Rothberg's observation that 'the memory of October 1961 has inserted itself aggressively into the French public sphere in the last twenty-five years'.⁶²⁸ Acts of commemoration on 17 October 2011 included a ceremony at the Pont Saint-Michel, the site of the commemorative plaque unveiled in 2001, and the inauguration of another plaque on the Pont de Clichy, another site of significance to the 17 October demonstration, where protestors were thrown into the Seine by the Parisian police. Furthermore, at the Pont de Clichy, the Socialist candidate for the 2012 presidential election, François Hollande, laid a wreath in memory of the victims of the repression,⁶²⁹ and was joined by the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, in calling for state recognition of the violence.⁶³⁰ Such calls from politicians for the French state to recognise its responsibility in the repression of 17 October 1961 suggests that the events are beginning to enter the dominant, 'official' historical narrative. Furthermore, a petition launched by website Mediapart calling for the official recognition of the events has had success in attracting the signatures of a number of notable personalities, including writers and historians whose work is discussed in depth in this thesis, such as Azouz Begag and Benjamin Stora.⁶³¹ However, the 'unresolved divisions' highlighted by *La*

⁶²⁸ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 270.

⁶²⁹ See Anne Chemin, 'Au pont de Clichy, Hollande rend hommage aux Algériens morts en 1961', *Le Monde*, 17 October 2011 <http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2011/10/17/hollande-rend-hommage-aux-algeriens-morts-en-1961_1589233_823448.html#ens_id=1586465> [accessed 22 November 2011]

⁶³⁰ See for example '17 Octobre 1961: des manifestations pour la reconnaissance d'un "crime d'Etat"', *Libération*, 17 October 2011 <<http://www.liberation.fr/societe/01012366176-17-octobre-1961-des-manifestations-pour-la-reconnaissance-d-un-crime-d-etat>> [accessed 22 November 2011]

⁶³¹ See for example 'Succès d'une pétition pour la reconnaissance de la tragédie du 17 octobre 1961', *Le Point*, 16 October 2011 <<http://www.lepoint.fr/societe/succes-d-une-petition-pour-la-reconnaissance-de>

Seine était rouge have also appeared in light of the fiftieth anniversary commemorations of 17 October 1961, exemplifying Rosello's observation that waves of memory often exacerbate past conflicts.⁶³² As Anne Chemin notes in her article on the fiftieth anniversary of the violence, no high-ranking state representative has ever publicly accepted the state's responsibility in the repression,⁶³³ and this lack of official responsibility was echoed by the comments of the Minister of the Interior, Claude Guéant, who stated that France 'doit faire face à son passé [mais] ne doit certainement pas présenter des excuses'.⁶³⁴ Thus, despite the apparently increasing willingness to commemorate 17 October 1961, and its consequent forceful emergence into the French public sphere, the conflicts brought to light in *La Seine était rouge* persist, as the 'official' historical narrative continues to deny the state's responsibility in the violence.

Nonetheless, by bringing to light such conflicts, Sebbar's text poses a challenge to and rewrites the dominant version of history, testifying to the significance of *La Seine était rouge* in resisting the homogenising drive of state-sponsored narratives, and in providing a re-evaluation and re-appropriation of the history of colonisation.⁶³⁵ Furthermore, in this rewriting of history, and positing of an Other history, *La Seine était rouge* 'leave[s] open the possibility of building new places of concord',⁶³⁶ pointing to a potential coexistence of memories, as evidenced by the parallels made between the Second World War and the Algerian War. Rothberg's observation that 'it is the state that produces the dynamics of terror by refusing to recognise all of the dead'⁶³⁷ indicates

la-tragedie-du-17-octobre-1961-16-10-2011-1385109_23.php> [accessed 22 November 2011] For the full text of the petition, see <<http://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/17-octobre-1961/article/121011/appele-pour-la-reconnaissance-officielle-de-la-tragedie-d>> [accessed 22 November 2011]

⁶³² See Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 12.

⁶³³ See Chemin, 'Au pont de Clichy, Hollande rend hommage aux Algériens morts en 1961', para. 9 of 9.

⁶³⁴ '17 Octobre 1961: des manifestations pour la reconnaissance d'un "crime d'Etat"', para. 3 of 14.

⁶³⁵ Such a challenge to the coloniser's version of history through the medium of writing recalls Edward Said's assertion that the writer and intellectual has a significant role to play in presenting alternative historical narratives and contesting those which claim to provide the 'official' version of history and memory in order to consolidate national identity. See Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 141.

⁶³⁶ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 308.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

that the lack of state recognition of atrocities such as the repression of 17 October 1961 perpetuates the conflicts of the past, a notion that is propounded throughout this thesis. By confronting and depicting the many diverse and complex memories of 17 October 1961 and the Algerian War, *La Seine était rouge* challenges the perpetuation of past conflicts that is permitted by the prolongation of a narrative that refuses to recognise the victims of violence, opening up the possibility for reconciliation of such conflicts instead. Reinforcing this potential reconciliation, by bringing to light a plurality of memories, and by drawing parallels between the Second World War and the Algerian War, Sebbar does not privilege any memory or memories over another, reflecting Rothberg's observation that *La Seine était rouge* 'does not engage in competitive memory'.⁶³⁸ Consequently, these memories, however diverse and apparently opposing, are brought into coexistence and are given the common meaning of contesting violence (colonial or otherwise) and the conflicts perpetuated by the lack of state recognition of such violence.

As such, *La Seine était rouge* goes further than any other text included in the primary corpus in its confrontation with the past shared by France and Algeria, in its contestation of the historical silence that has characterised the memory of the Algerian War, and in the way in which it brings to light an alternative account of the history of colonisation to challenge the dominant version. Underlining this evident development, Sebbar's text not only challenges the dominant historical narrative, but also entangles silenced and glorified moments in French history to open up the possibility of the coexistence of what are, as *La Seine était rouge* illustrates, only superficially conflicting accounts of history. By indicating the way in which French resistance memories overwhelm memories of 17 October 1961, Sebbar sets up the apparent incompatibility between memories of France as victim and memories of France as oppressor, an

⁶³⁸ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 299.

incompatibility that reflects the notion that ‘la France, attentive à célébrer ses gloires, répugne à découvrir ses blessures’.⁶³⁹ However, the parallels strikingly brought to light in the text between the French Resistance in the Second World War and Algerian anti-colonial resistance allows for a reconsideration of such a distorted account of history that celebrates France’s glorious victories, but buries those moments when France itself acted as aggressor and oppressor. Consequently, through its use of language, and more specifically the manipulation of language by the characters’ reinscription, the text posits the potential coexistence of memories that are composed of the common meaning of challenging violence and oppression.

Throughout this chapter, I have emphasised the complexity of the various processes of superimposing an Other history on the dominant historical narrative. In none of the texts discussed in this chapter has the history shared by France and Algeria been straightforwardly made visible and incorporated in the dominant narrative, and this complexity constitutes a defining aspect of the notion of entanglement put forward in this chapter. In the analysis of *La Noce des fous*, it was argued that Mounsi’s insistence on depicting the world of the forgotten and the excluded causes the history attached to this world to only fleetingly come into contact with dominant society, and the history attached to that world. Therefore, the entanglement of these two histories is characterised by detachment as well as by interaction. With regard to *Le Voyage des âmes*, it was discussed that the coming together of France and Algeria becomes more pronounced, as Mounsi entwines his protagonist’s life in France and his Algerian childhood, the narrative constantly shifting in time and space. However, the way in which the protagonist’s memories are characterised by a blend of reality and imagination points towards the notion that the memory of the past shared by France and Algeria, and the Algerian War more specifically, is elusive, and may always be so.

⁶³⁹ Harbi and Stora, *La Guerre d’Algérie*, p. 10.

Thus, while Mounsi entwines France and Algeria, illustrating that the silenced history of the Algerian War constitutes an intrinsic aspect of dominant French history, he also indicates that a definitive account of the Algerian War is unrealisable. This aspect of the Algerian War then becomes the focus of Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, which brings to light a history 'of gaps and blanks' as Sebbar seeks to represent the historical silence with regard to 17 October 1961 and the Algerian War, and the distorted version of history put forward by the coloniser and former coloniser. These gaps and blanks are filled not with definitive truth, but with incompleteness, fragmentation, and further silence, again exemplifying the complexity with which an Other history is brought to light in these texts. Finally, *La Seine était rouge* entangles this Other history with histories that are firmly embedded in the dominant French narrative, such as that of the Resistance in the Second World War. This entanglement simultaneously brings these histories together *and* retains an impression of conflict, as France's role as colonial aggressor and oppressor is highlighted. While this does have the effect of opening up the possibility for a coexistence of memories, such an entanglement corresponds to Laronde's concept of 'l'écriture d'une Histoire postcoloniale contemporaine qui, toujours en prise avec une vision coloniale, tend tout de même à s'en détacher'.⁶⁴⁰ Indeed, the entanglement of alternative and dominant historical narratives brought to light in each of the three texts analysed in this chapter reflects Laronde's concept, as each text brings an Other history into contact with the dominant version, and simultaneously detaches it. According to Laronde, it is this writing and rewriting of contemporary postcolonial history that challenges Western cultural hegemonies, rather than the end of colonisation itself.⁶⁴¹ Furthermore, this notion responds to Fanon's call for the end of the history put forward by the coloniser, cited at the beginning of this chapter. According to Fanon, the oppression to which the colonised subject is

⁶⁴⁰ Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 142.

⁶⁴¹ See Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 142.

condemned can only be brought to an end when ‘le colonisé décide de mettre un terme à l’histoire de la colonisation, à l’histoire du pillage, pour faire exister l’histoire de la nation, l’histoire de la décolonisation’.⁶⁴² Though the end of colonisation by no means answered Fanon’s call, it is left now, as Laronde suggests, to the descendants of colonised subjects to challenge dominant Western historical narratives and finally bring to light the history of decolonisation. Reinforcing the impact of postcolonial attempts, such as through literature, to challenge the history constructed by the (former) coloniser, Laronde goes on to argue that silenced and forgotten events of the past require repetition and ‘amplification’ in order for them to become more and more visible.⁶⁴³ This idea of amplification is substantiated by the three texts analysed in this chapter, which demonstrate more explicit reference to the past depending on when they were published: the more recent the novel, the greater the engagement with the past. Indeed, Laronde underlines the need for amplification in bringing to light silenced histories by referring himself to the increasing number of texts and films dedicated to the forgotten, distorted, and truncated aspects of France’s colonial past at the turn of the century.⁶⁴⁴ The texts discussed in this chapter prefigure this culmination of anamnesis at the end of the century, which also included the French government’s official recognition of the Algerian War, and point to the need to continue such memorial work.

While this growing trend to confront France’s colonial past indicates a potential escape from the conflicts inherited from the past, in the next and final chapter of this thesis, I turn to an aspect prevalent in the primary corpus which serves to keep the characters we encounter marginalised, exiled, and condemned to a ‘no man’s land’ in between French and Algerian culture, society, and identity. Specifically, the final chapter will analyse the link between the act and memory of migration and delinquency,

⁶⁴² Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 36.

⁶⁴³ See Laronde, “Effets d’histoire”, p. 152.

⁶⁴⁴ See Laronde, “Effets d’histoire”, p. 153.

illustrating the way in which these factors combine to entrap the children of migrants on a never-ending journey with no escape or destination in sight.

Chapter 4

Errance: Wandering, Delinquency, and the Perennial Migrant

Though the entanglement of dominant and Other histories discussed in the previous chapter offers a more optimistic outlook with regard to the place of people of Algerian origin in France, there is one aspect that recurs across several of the primary texts which reinforces the protagonists' entrapment in an existence with limited prospects. The characters' apparently unpreventable attraction to a life of *errance* hinders the possibility of firmly establishing a place for themselves in French society. The term 'errance' itself appears regularly in several of the texts, and takes on a dual meaning. Primarily, it signifies a journey which is never-ending and without a specific purpose, which corresponds to the French definition of the term denoting the act of roving or wandering. Furthermore, this type of restless, perpetual wandering recalls Begag's and Chaouite's argument that the migrant becomes a 'passager de toujours',⁶⁴⁵ and over the course of this chapter I will analyse the extent to which the characters we encounter in the primary corpus fulfil the role of 'perennial migrant'. Taking Begag's and Chaouite's notion of the 'passager de toujours' as a starting point, I will go on to explore the association of the journey with delinquency, which hinders an escape from the status of 'perennial migrant'. Indeed, the meaning of *errance* in the primary texts becomes closely associated with delinquency,⁶⁴⁶ adding a further connotation to the term which, as a result, comes to also correspond to the English term 'errancy', denoting behaviour that deviates from that which is widely accepted. This chapter will examine this dual

⁶⁴⁵ See Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 43.

⁶⁴⁶ For example, in *Le Voyage des âmes*, the protagonist runs away from an orphanage after stealing from it, and commences a period during which '[il errait] dans ce Paris lourd et poisseux où tout peut arriver. Et tout arriva'. Thus, an act of theft is followed by a period of wandering aimlessly in Paris, emphasising the connection between the two meanings of the term *errance*. Furthermore, the protagonist's claim that 'tout arriva' during his wandering intimates the possibility of more crime being committed during this period, and this is confirmed by the immediate revelation that the protagonist was then detained and sent to a young offenders' institution. See Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 138.

meaning and, more specifically, the link that the term *errance* evokes between the journey and delinquency. This link is epitomised by several of the characters in the primary texts, who spend their lives wandering with no apparent purpose or end in sight, and committing acts of criminality and debauchery.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the French Republic's definition of nationhood and its hostility to ethnic difference, which play a role in the marginalisation and exclusion of people of Algerian origin from French society. In this chapter, a selection of the primary corpus will be analysed with reference to critical works on the sociology of delinquency, as well as to René Girard's *Le Bouc Émissaire* (1982), which examines the violence suffered by groups designated as scapegoats by dominant society. Though Girard's work does not relate specifically to delinquency, his argument that the scapegoat is marked out as such due to certain 'signes victimaires',⁶⁴⁷ rather than because he/she has committed an act that warrants persecution, closely recalls the argument that the delinquent is labelled as such regardless of whether or not he/she commits an act deserving of that label.⁶⁴⁸ The analysis of the primary corpus in conjunction with these critical texts will allow us to examine the extent to which France's ethnic Algerian population is marked out as always already delinquent. In this way, the present chapter develops some of the arguments made in Chapter 2, as I will argue that the fictional characters we encounter are scapegoated due to their ethnic difference, which then leads to marginalisation, itself leading to a confinement in delinquency. Indeed, the way in which Frenchness is defined as a higher culture, and is offered as a privilege to those who do not possess it, ultimately classifies other cultures as substandard. For example, in his speech at a ceremony marking the awarding of French nationality to recently graduated citizens, a 'cérémonie de remise de décrets de naturalisation' (in itself a reflection of the pedestal upon which French nationality is

⁶⁴⁷ See René Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1982), p. 37.

⁶⁴⁸ See for example Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 9.

placed), Prime Minister François Fillon asserts that ‘devenir Français, c’est s’intégrer à une culture qui a fasciné le monde et c’est s’exprimer dans une langue qui a donné à l’humanité une littérature et une pensée de premier plan’.⁶⁴⁹ Thus, graduating to the status of French citizen involves becoming a part of a culture that has proved valuable to all of humanity: Frenchness is something to be earned and, when it is, the status is a source of pride. On the other hand, failing to conform to this definition designates those who do not conform as outsiders, unworthy of belonging to this privileged group. This outsider status is one which is readily applied to migrants of North African origin in France, due to what Swamy terms ‘the yawning gap in values between them and the so-called *Français de souche*’.⁶⁵⁰ This perceived gap has led French society to ‘scapegoat the Maghrebi immigrants as “*inassimilables*”’,⁶⁵¹ illustrating the notion that North African immigrants are rejected due to certain perceived differences before they have even attempted to prove whether they can integrate or not. This notion underlines the relevance of Girard’s work in the context of the way in which dominant society marks certain groups out as scapegoats due to their ‘signes victimaires’, in this case based on ethnic difference.

The elevation of Frenchness in the present day, as evidenced above by the rhetoric used in the ‘cérémonie de remise de décrets de naturalisation’, attests to the lack of any real change regarding French policies of assimilation and integration. For instance, Simon notes that at the end of the 1980s, integration comprised the need on the part of migrants to adopt dominant cultural norms, observing furthermore that acquisition of the French language was a key factor in this process.⁶⁵² The value that Prime Minister Fillon ascribes to French culture and language is, therefore, not a novel

⁶⁴⁹ ‘Discours du Premier Ministre à la cérémonie de remise de décrets de naturalisation’, 11 March 2011 <http://www.immigration.gouv.fr/spip.php?page=discours2&id_rubrique=307&id_article=2476> [accessed 23 June 2011] (para. 8 of 31).

⁶⁵⁰ Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. 3.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵² See Simon, ‘La Stratégie de la discrimination positive’, p. 438.

aspect in offering Frenchness. Swamy further analyses the lack of evolution as regards questions of assimilation and integration, noting that ‘some of the central concerns already present even in the early 1980s have continued to be the common denominator for many immigrant communities in France in the early twenty-first century’.⁶⁵³ Indeed, while the policy directed towards migrants changed from an ‘assimilationist’ model to a model of ‘integration’ at the end of the 1980s,⁶⁵⁴ the enduring difficulty faced by many migrants to successfully assimilate or integrate suggests that, while the model may have changed in title, little concrete change has taken place. The texts discussed in this chapter – whose years of publication range from 1983 to 1999 – testify to this long-lasting elevation of Frenchness and simultaneous condemnation of non-Frenchness.

Over the course of this chapter, this positing of what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’ will be related to the sociology of deviance in order to illustrate that the delinquency in which many youths of Algerian origin find themselves is a construct created by dominant society that leads to these youths being entrapped in a life of delinquency due to their ethnic difference. The idea that it is dominant society that defines what constitutes ‘deviance’ and decides to whom the label is applied is outlined by Howard S. Becker as follows:

*Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders [...] The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.*⁶⁵⁵

Becker emphasises the notion that being designated as an outsider only ever depends on the society which singles out the ‘outsider’ in the first place: the outsider is not

⁶⁵³ Swamy, *Interpreting the Republic*, p. 4.

⁶⁵⁴ See Simon, ‘La Stratégie de la discrimination positive’, p. 438.

⁶⁵⁵ Becker, *Outsiders*, p. 9. Original’s italics.

inherently ‘wrong’, but his/her behaviour is defined as such by society. Similarly, France defines nationhood in such a way that Frenchness is elevated above other cultures, emphasised by Fillon’s further assertion in his speech that ‘la France n’est pas fondée sur les origines’,⁶⁵⁶ which underlines the Republic’s hostility to and debasement of ethnic difference. Consequently, the inability to conform to this definition will cause the person who fails to conform to be singled out as an outsider: he/she is only an outsider because of the way that nationhood is defined in the first place. Therefore, one is not an outsider because of some innate characteristic, but because one is defined as such by society, which relates to Girard’s notion that ‘les victimes sont choisies en vertu non des crimes qu’on leur attribue mais de leurs signes victimaires’.⁶⁵⁷ The presence of signs which mark one out as an outsider (such as ethnic difference) precedes any behaviour that justifies one’s designation as an outsider. Thus, the protagonists who we encounter in the primary texts discussed in this chapter (especially *Le Thé au harem*, *La Noce des fous*, and *Le Voyage des âmes*) are outsiders, and victims, before they even enter a life of delinquency, due to their ethnic difference. As this exclusion is a result of migration (which led to the installation of ethnically diverse populations in France), then a line can be traced that leads from migration to delinquency, corroborating my definition of *errance*. One of the aims of this chapter will be to demonstrate that migration and subsequent exclusion facilitate delinquency, resulting in a situation in which migrants and their children become delinquent by default, and the chapter will go on to examine the varying extent to which the protagonists are able to escape from this entrapment in a life of delinquency.

The texts under discussion in this chapter will be Charef’s *Le Thé au harem*, Mounsi’s *La Noce des fous* and *Le Voyage des âmes*, and Sebbar’s *La Seine était rouge*. The discussion of Charef’s text will focus on alienation and the *cit * as a site of

⁶⁵⁶ ‘Discours du Premier Ministre   la c r monie de remise de d crets de naturalisation’ (para. 17 of 31).

⁶⁵⁷ Girard, *Le Bouc  missaire*, p. 37.

alienation, where errance is engendered and perpetuated, exemplifying the link between migration, exclusion, and delinquency. The analysis of *La Noce des fous* will analyse in more detail the notion that errance is something that is ingrained in the migrant, as the narrator-protagonist is seemingly instinctively attracted to restless wandering and delinquency, and will go on to question the validity of this position, taking into consideration the protagonist's conscious choice to enter a life of delinquency. The discussion of *Le Voyage des âmes* will give further attention to the voyage as a factor in the errance of the narrator-protagonist since, in this text, the journey is not restricted to aimless drifting in Paris, but also refers to the narrator-protagonist's migration from Algeria to France. Furthermore, in *Le Voyage des âmes* the journey becomes both literal and psychological, as the protagonist's memory journeys back and forth between his life in France and his Algerian childhood (as was discussed in Chapter 3), but also due to the protagonist's imagined return to Algeria at the end of the novel, when he is bed-ridden and suicidal as an indirect result of his errance. Thus, in *Le Voyage des âmes*, the migration from Algeria to France, and subsequent entrapment in a vicious circle of delinquency, is revealed to have had a debilitating effect on the protagonist, and a return to Algeria is imagined as an escape from this predicament. However, as we shall see, escape from the vicious circle of delinquency does not lie in the return to the homeland. Finally, Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* will be used to provide a counterpoint to the directionless journeys of Mounsi's novels in particular, as Sebbar's protagonist is able to navigate her quest for stability, and never descends into the type of delinquency that we encounter in the other texts. In this way, Amel's journey will be posited as a successful parallel to the generally failed journeys of the other characters, and the chapter will conclude by enquiring into the reasons behind such a contrast.

Amel's journey of discovery in *La Seine était rouge* points towards the idea that, by embarking on a journey, the characters discussed in this chapter are searching for a

new stability. Amel's wandering in central Paris is, ultimately, a means of coming to terms with the past that has just been revealed to her. The notion that instability and stability complement each other is underlined by Begag and Chaouite, who argue that 'une instabilité passagère est indissociable de la recherche d'une nouvelle stabilité [...] la sédentarité ne peut être analysée hors de la mobilité'.⁶⁵⁸ The connection between instability and mobility is made apparent here, and one of the key aims of this chapter will be to analyse whether the instability and mobility of the lives led by the protagonists is a necessary phase in achieving stability or 'sédentarité'. Standing in the way of this stability is the close link that we encounter in the novels of Charef and Mounsi between the journey and delinquency, and discussion of this link will form the first part of this chapter, before the analysis turns to the possibility of escaping instability in the latter part. Specifically, I will begin with a comparative discussion of the texts by Charef, Mounsi, and Sebbar, to highlight the shared status of their protagonists as 'passagers de toujours', which is a result of their inherited memory of migration. I will then go on to explain how this status marks characters out as delinquent, even if they do not commit a delinquent act, before specifically analysing how this process of categorisation occurs in *Le Thé au harem*. The analysis will subsequently turn to *La Noce des fous*, with the discussion reinforcing and examining in further detail the inescapable link between delinquency and the journey. In particular, the extent to which the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* is a perennial traveller or a perennial criminal will be debated, taking into consideration his trial for his part in murder. During the trial, the protagonist's ethnic difference is seen to be pathologised and institutionalised, positing ethnic difference as a condition to be corrected, and designating the protagonist as delinquent by default due to his ethnicity. The significance of the memory of migration, which leads to the entrapment in delinquency

⁶⁵⁸ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 41.

in the first place, will be reprised in the discussion of *Le Voyage des âmes*, which presents the protagonist's journey from Algeria to France as the reason for his delirium at the end of the novel. The lack of any offering of an escape from the never-ending journey, inherited from the memory of migration and contributing to the protagonists' descent into delinquency, is then countered by Sebbar's protagonist's positive confrontation with history in *La Seine était rouge*. This confrontation with the past allows her to navigate through the instability of being a 'passager de toujours', and provides indications of ways in which the perennial migrant can resolve his/her entrapment in a state of transience.

'Le Passager de toujours'

To highlight the significance of the journey with regard to the protagonists encountered in the primary corpus, I return to Begag and Chaouite, who claim that the experience of migration can turn people into perpetual migrants on a seemingly endless journey, as follows: 'Pendant un temps, le voyage fait du voyageur un passager de toujours. Même s'il a cessé de bouger, l'immigré porte sur lui le souvenir du temps de sa migration'.⁶⁵⁹ Thus, it does not matter whether the migrant has apparently settled in his/her new location: even if the move is a permanent one, the memory of his/her migration will continue to burden the person who has made the move. This memory is projected onto the migrant ('l'immigré porte *sur* lui le souvenir du temps de sa migration'), and makes him/her a perennial migrant, a 'passager de toujours'. Furthermore, the memory of migration not only weighs down the person who made the journey, but is also transmitted to the younger generations, as exemplified by Begag's and Chaouite's

⁶⁵⁹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d'identité*, p. 43.

observation that ‘ce type de migration entraîne toujours de profondes répercussions, un décalage qu’on peut attribuer au temps qui passe [...] Ce décalage vécu par les parents a été transmis aux enfants’.⁶⁶⁰ Therefore, even those who have not taken part in the migration (such as the protagonists of *La Noce des fous* and *La Seine était rouge*) suffer from the displacement (‘ce décalage’) caused by the journey, due to it being transmitted to them by their parents who did make the journey. Moreover, since Begag and Chaouite attribute this sense of displacement to the passing of time, I would suggest that it is, in fact, felt more by the younger generations. If the widening of the gap between the present and the time of migration intensifies the sense of displacement, and if this displacement is transmitted to the younger generations no matter whether they made the journey or not, then the larger gap in time between migration and the lived present of the children of migration means that the displacement becomes more pronounced in these later generations. As a result, the characters in the primary corpus of this thesis allow us to study in further detail themes of displacement and exile, since they belong to the second or third generations of Algerian immigration to France.

The displacement caused by the gap, or ‘décalage’, between the present and the time of migration is further intensified by another gap – one which exists in relation to the migrant’s new place of residence. Consequently, there is a gap extending in both directions: between the current position occupied by the migrant and his/her country of origin (Algeria), and between the migrant’s current position and the extent to which he/she belongs in French society. Over the course of this thesis, it has been demonstrated that this latter gap is a considerable one, underlined by marginalisation and entrapment on the margins, and compounded by unsuccessful means of escape. Thus, distanced from their place of origin, as well as from the society of the place where

⁶⁶⁰ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d’identité*, pp. 20-21.

they now reside, the characters in the texts on which this chapter focuses find themselves banished to a ‘no man’s land’ in between Algeria and France.

I regard this no man’s land in a figurative sense, exemplified by the margins of Paris and the *cités de transit*, which are largely inhabited by people of North African origin, such as the protagonists of *La Noce des fous* and *Le Thé au harem*. The *cités* are in between France and Algeria in that they lie, literally and figuratively, on the periphery of central French society, and are populated by ethnic North Africans inhabiting a space that is not North Africa, but that is neither central French society. Having left their country of origin behind, the Franco-Algerian inhabitants of the *cités* remain excluded from French society, despite living in France: detached from their country of origin, they are not attached to their country of residence either, occupying instead a figurative no man’s land in between the two. In evoking the exclusion of the marginalised in *La Noce des fous*, Mounsi compares those who inhabit the periphery to sailors lost at sea, as follows:

Nous étions une ligne de démarcation imaginaire, un équateur sur la circonférence du monde. Des géographes parlaient de nous de temps à autre, en haut lieu, mais en vérité ils nous oublièrent comme des navigateurs perdus en pleine mer. Nos barques pourrissaient lentement dans leurs mémoires.⁶⁶¹

The notion that the marginalised themselves form ‘une ligne de démarcation imaginaire’ substantiates the idea that the inhabitants of the *cités* find themselves on neither side of the divide. They themselves are the demarcation line, either side of which lie, on the one hand, belonging to central French society, on the other, the culture of origin.

Furthermore, Mounsi’s use of a war metaphor to express this division provides another example of the legacy of oppositions inherited from colonisation and the Algerian War:

⁶⁶¹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 19.

the marginalised descendants of colonised subjects become the demarcation line which divides the two opposing armies, and the *cités* become the no man's land to which neither side lays claim.

The notion that the *cités*, and their inhabitants, do not belong to one side or the other is accentuated by the way in which Mounsi follows his comparison of the marginalised to a demarcation line with a comparison to an equator encircling the world. The inhabitants of the *cités* are not just 'une ligne de démarcation imaginaire', but 'un équateur sur la circonférence du monde'.⁶⁶² This depiction attaches a sense of movement to the demarcation line, but it is not a movement towards one side of the division or the other, towards French society or towards the culture of origin. On the contrary, the idea that the marginalised form an equator encircling the globe indicates a perpetual movement around the world, but without ever being a part of it. This perpetual circular movement recalls the notion that the protagonists who we encounter in the primary corpus are trapped in a vicious circle, and relates the notion of the vicious circle to the idea of the journey with which this chapter engages. The journey from Algeria to France, though achieved in a literal sense, is never truly fulfilled as it is halted by the entrapment in the no man's land signified by the *cités de transit*. Indeed, the *cités de transit* were so called because they were 'meant to be temporary dwellings, pending the provision of proper housing'.⁶⁶³ However, the reality that 'their "temporary" status proved to be far longer-lived than originally anticipated'⁶⁶⁴ alters the meaning of the term assigned to this form of accommodation. No longer temporary housing, the *cités de transit* become sites inhabited by people who are forever *in transit*. Thus, the journey from Algeria to France, the act of migration, only results in the initiation of a vicious circle which entraps those who have made the journey in a permanent state of transience.

⁶⁶² Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 19.

⁶⁶³ Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 15.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

The idea that the migrant embarks on a journey which is never truly fulfilled is reflected in Mounsi's depiction of the inhabitants of the *cités* as being lost at sea, on a journey gone astray. Furthermore, the association made in *La Noce des fous* between being consigned to the no man's land of the rotting *cités* and being lost at sea epitomises the 'décalage' which extends in both directions from the current position occupied by the migrant. Distanced from French society to the extent that he/she is forgotten and banished to the margins, he/she is also haunted by the initial displacement from Algeria to France which has made him/her a 'passager de toujours' who is lost at sea. The migrant has been uprooted from his/her place of origin, only to be rejected by his/her new place of residence, leaving him/her in a place of exile somewhere in between Algeria and France. Indeed, reference to the sea recalls the Mediterranean sea which geographically separates Algeria and France and, as a result, the zone which figuratively separates France and Algeria, the *cités*, is compared to the area which literally separates the two countries.⁶⁶⁵ This association emphasises the depiction of the *cités* as the demarcation line between France and Algeria, and as a zone whose inhabitants do not belong to either side of the division, but who are lost (at sea) in between the two.

In this way, migration (or the inherited experience of migration) leads to instability, upholding the claim that 'le voyage a un pouvoir déstabilisant'.⁶⁶⁶ In *Le Thé au harem*, *La Noce des fous*, *Le Voyage des âmes*, and even *La Seine était rouge*, this instability manifests itself in a seemingly instinctive tendency on the part of the protagonists to drift. It is instinctive in that the authors present this continuous drift as the natural way to exist for their protagonists. For example, in *Le Thé au harem*, Madjid's wandering is presented as the alternative to full-time work. His decision to get a job is prompted by a desire to stop wandering, as we see in his claim that 'j'en ai

⁶⁶⁵ The characterisation of the Mediterranean as 'in between' is further evident in its Arabic name, which translates as 'la mer blanche du milieu'. See Stora, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, p. 317.

⁶⁶⁶ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 41.

marre de vadrouiller',⁶⁶⁷ and his decision to quit his job, along with Pat, is followed by a return to aimless wandering, as evidenced by the following evocation of the pair's actions after they quit their jobs: 'Ils marchèrent longtemps, passant Courbevoie. Ils traversèrent Colombes [...] Ils allaient droit vers le pont d'Argenteuil, et ils ne savaient pas où après'.⁶⁶⁸ Thus, a life of work (the default way of life for the majority of people) is replaced by a life of wandering, presenting the latter as the instinctive, natural existence for Madjid, though the eventual act of burglary to which wandering leads precludes a positive depiction of such a way of life, and underlines the association of wandering with delinquency encapsulated by my definition of *errance*.

The instinctive inclination to drift is also exemplified by the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* who, on his release from the young offenders' institution (again exemplifying the association of delinquency and wandering), immediately begins to walk aimlessly, as evidenced by the following description: 'J'ai continué à marcher, sans la moindre idée de l'endroit où j'allais. Mes mouvements ne suivaient aucune direction précise si ce n'est que je poursuivais le chemin'.⁶⁶⁹ As well as a place to reform the protagonist in terms of his criminality, incarceration may be conceived as a possible escape from the perpetual movement with which that criminality is associated. However, the immobility and relative stability of prison has not altered his status as a 'passager de toujours', suggesting that the immobility of incarceration is not the positive immobility that is sought through the seemingly never-ending search for stability represented by the instinct to wander. Rather, prison is simply a hiatus or stopping-point along the vicious circle of *errance*, as the protagonist returns to a life of wandering as soon as he is released, emphasising his entrapment in this circular, endless journey for stability.

⁶⁶⁷ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 158.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁶⁶⁹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 147.

The impulse to drift is also apparent in Mounsi's *Le Voyage des âmes*, and evident in the protagonist's seeming inability to stop himself from wandering from one place to another, underlined by the following observation on the part of the protagonist: 'J'errais d'un endroit à un autre, sans séjourner nul part, en obéissant au caprice du moment, toujours à la recherche de je ne sais quoi'.⁶⁷⁰ The idea that he was following the 'caprice du moment' in his wandering emphasises the notion that leading such a life constitutes an unmeditated tendency for the protagonist. Furthermore, he states explicitly that, in his drift, he was 'toujours à la recherche de je ne sais quoi', implying that knowledge of the aim of one's quest is crucial to its success, and that lack of such knowledge is instrumental in its failure, as is ultimately the case in *Le Thé au harem*, *La Noce des fous*, and *Le Voyage des âmes*.

This implication is confirmed in *La Seine était rouge*, as Amel is aware of what she seeks and is relatively successful in her quest. Nonetheless, like the protagonists of the other texts under discussion in this chapter, she demonstrates an instinct to wander. Though Amel's narrative differs from the tales of delinquency portrayed by Charef and Mounsi, as she appears to lead a relatively stable existence, the revelation of the events of 17 October 1961 instigates a period of instability for her as she is shaken by the discovery of a history that she inherits. Amel's dramatic reaction is evidenced by her lack of contact with her family after she watches Louis's film, from which she learns of the events of 17 October 1961, and leads her mother and grandmother to worry about her whereabouts. At various intervals in the novel, we are reminded of Amel's disappearance and the concern that it causes her family,⁶⁷¹ and, towards the end of the novel, it is suggested that Louis's film was at the cause of Amel's disappearance, as follows: 'On a regardé le film ensemble avec Omer [...] Depuis, plus personne, ni Amel,

⁶⁷⁰ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 142.

⁶⁷¹ See for example Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 38, p. 61, p. 63, p. 72, p. 84.

ni Omer [...] C'est peut-être le film qui...'⁶⁷² As well as constituting another example of the way in which Sebbar truncates the narrative in *La Seine était rouge*, as discussed in Chapter 3, the unfinished sentence denoted by the ellipsis reflects the notion of the never-ending journey with which this chapter engages. While Amel is successful in 'filling in the blanks' with a particular understanding and interpretation of the history shared by France and Algeria, the characters to whom I compare her in this chapter are unable to complete their respective journeys for stability, as a result of the relative lack of direction of their quests, which continue endlessly in their circular movement. Conversely, the instability indicated by Amel's disappearance manifests itself in a journey around Paris during which she tries to come to terms with the past that has been revealed to her. Amel's journey has a clear purpose, setting it apart from the directionless journeys of Mounsi's protagonists especially, and emphasising the significant role, in a Franco-Algerian context, of uncovering silenced histories in finding the stability sought by those who embody and inherit this particular history of conflict.

The way in which instability leads to drifting in these novels is particularly evident in *La Seine était rouge*, due to the marked shift from stability to instability that we observe in Amel, and her consequent wandering around Paris. Also evident in *La Seine était rouge* is the 'décalage' caused by the experience of migration and its transmission to the younger generations. Sebbar's text depicts a moment when such a transmission occurs, as Amel's discovery of her parents' and grandparents' experiences of 17 October 1961 brings to light the deeper repercussions of Algerian immigration to France, which has led to Amel's own embodiment of Algeria and France. Through this discovery, the conflict between the two cultures that Amel embodies is made all the more clear to her, leading to a destabilising of how she perceives her identity to be

⁶⁷² Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 94.

constructed. Indeed, it is left to Omer to articulate the complexity of the composition of Amel's identity to her, which he expresses as follows: 'Je comprends aussi que tu es compliquée... un peu tordue non?'⁶⁷³ Amel's naivety with regard to the complexity of her identity is subsequently evidenced by her response: 'C'est quoi, tordue? C'est une insulte?'⁶⁷⁴ The offence she takes to Omer's comment demonstrates a lack of understanding that Omer is in fact referring to her dual, Franco-Algerian identity, which is 'tordu' in the sense that it twists, or entangles, two cultures. Furthermore, the legacy of conflict that makes up Amel's 'twisted' identity (a conflict of which Amel is only now discovering the true extent) means that this identity is not as straightforward and stable as Amel thought, but that it is in fact complex and unstable.

The depiction of Amel as 'tordue' corresponds to the protagonists of both *La Noce des fous* and *Le Voyage des âmes*, in each of which Mounsi uses the same term to describe his protagonist. In both texts, this description occurs on the protagonist's incarceration in a young offenders' institution, where 'on pensait y redresser de jeunes adolescents dévoyés, comme des arbres nés tordus au bord du précipice'.⁶⁷⁵ The simile in Mounsi's two texts has the effect of equating being 'tordu' to being delinquent. While Amel cannot be described as delinquent in the same way as the protagonists of *La Noce des fous* and *Le Voyage des âmes*, the three characters are similar in that they are all 'nés tordus'. Like Amel, the 'twisted' identity of Mounsi's protagonists is a result of their tangled (ethnic) roots. Furthermore, in *La Noce des fous* and *Le Voyage des âmes*, this genealogy is implicated in the protagonists' entry into a life of delinquency. Thus, the entwining of Algeria and France, embodied by all three of these characters, is marked out in a negative light, as something which goes against society's accepted way to be and so needs to be corrected.

⁶⁷³ Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge*, p. 90.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 111, Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 138.

In this thesis, rather than using the terms ‘deviant’ and ‘deviance’, as Becker does in his definition of the ‘deviant’ as someone ‘who cannot be trusted to live by the rules agreed on by the [social] group’,⁶⁷⁶ terms such as ‘outsider’ and ‘delinquency’ are preferred in order to present a more modern interpretation of Becker’s arguments. Such a position conforms to the terminology used by more recent critical literature on this particular topic, and helps escape the dated categorisation of certain groups as ‘deviant’ in Becker’s work.⁶⁷⁷ In this chapter, it is argued that exclusion due to ethnic difference designates this difference as contrary to the ‘rules’ of belonging in dominant French society: as a result, those who possess ethnic difference become outsiders. This notion recalls Girard’s work in *Le Bouc Émissaire*, in which he outlines the fear of the Other, stating that ‘ce n’est pas l’autre *nomos* qu’on voit dans l’autre mais l’anomalie, ce n’est pas l’autre norme, mais l’anormalité; l’infirmes se fait difforme; l’étranger devient l’*apatride*’.⁶⁷⁸ Girard’s elucidation of the apprehension with which the Other is widely viewed, and the anomaly and abnormality ascribed to the Other (reminiscent of the depiction of Amel and Mounsi’s two protagonists as ‘tordus’) allows us to examine in more detail France’s hostility to ethnic difference, which is inscribed in a more far-reaching fear of difference across time and cultures. Furthermore, the idea that ‘l’étranger devient l’*apatride*’ reveals itself to be acutely relevant to this chapter, a preoccupation of which is the statelessness and exile of the characters in the primary texts, who are denied a country of their own. Indeed, ‘l’*apatride*’ can be equated to the ‘passager de toujours’, further underlining the relevance of Girard’s work to the prevailing notions under discussion in this chapter.

The conception of difference as anomaly and as an infraction of the rules of dominant French society corresponds to the notion that recognising ethnic difference

⁶⁷⁶ Becker, *Outsiders*, p. 1.

⁶⁷⁷ The labelling of homosexuals as ‘deviant’ in Becker’s work is particularly uncomfortable. See for example Becker, *Outsiders*, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁸ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, pp. 34-35.

contradicts one of the underlying criteria on which the French Republic is based, that of unity by uniformity. As a result of such a conception of nationhood, people of Algerian origin are outsiders by default since they do not and, as was discussed in Chapter 2, cannot conform to such a definition due to their ethnicity, their ‘signes victimaires’.⁶⁷⁹ By rejecting ethnic difference, French society labels Algerian migrants and their children as outsiders, even before they do or do not enter a life of delinquency. This exclusion then forms the basis on which migrants are eventually termed as delinquent, and can be related to Erikson’s following explanation of the way in which society defines the outsider:

The main organisational drift of a system [...] acts to draw the behaviour of actors toward those centres in social space where the core values of the group are figuratively located, bringing them within range of basic norms. Any conduct which is neither attracted toward this nerve centre by the rewards of conformity nor compelled toward it by other social pressures is considered “out of control”, which is to say, deviant.⁶⁸⁰

Before the possible entry of people of Algerian origin into delinquency (that is to say, ‘conduct which is neither attracted toward this nerve centre by the rewards of conformity nor compelled toward it by other social pressures’), their outsider status already excludes them from ‘those centres in social space where the core values of the group are figuratively located’. Therefore, they are already ‘out of control’, or delinquent, possibly without having committed an act which could be described as such: indeed, their first act of ‘delinquency’ is to possess ethnic difference.

If ethnic difference is seen as always already delinquent, then it can be noted how migration becomes gradually infused with connotations of delinquency. Expanding this idea, if the experience and memory of migration becomes ingrained in the migrant,

⁶⁷⁹ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 37.

⁶⁸⁰ Kai T. Erikson, ‘Notes on the Sociology of Deviance’, in *The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance*, ed. by Howard S. Becker (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp. 9-21 (pp. 12-13).

making him/her into a 'passager de toujours', then there appears a link between the journey and delinquency: a link which encapsulates the dual meaning of *errance* which is explored in this chapter. Both the journey and delinquency are branded onto the migrant and, as will be evidenced in the subsequent analysis, the two work in tandem, with the effect of hindering the search for stability of the protagonists in the novels to be discussed.

Delinquent by Default

The confluence of the journey and delinquency occurs in the exclusion and alienation with which the migrant is faced having undergone the displacement of migration. Begag and Chaouite underline the potential destabilising, alienating effect of the act of migration as follows:

Le voyage a un pouvoir déstabilisant. Il déforme et reforme. Il conduit à une réorganisation psychologique de la personnalité de celui qui part. Réorganisation qui peut être enrichissante quand elle contribue au développement de l'autonomie de l'individu mais qui peut aussi devenir aliénante quand la synthèse des différents apports s'avère impossible, quand le choc est trop brutal'.⁶⁸¹

As well as signalling the positive effects that the act of migration may have on the person making the journey, Begag and Chaouite affirm that the journey may also have severely negative consequences, leading to an alienating and brutally shocking rupture of the migrant's consciousness. Recalling Girard's argument that 'ce n'est pas l'autre *nomos* qu'on voit dans l'autre mais l'anomalie, ce n'est pas l'autre norme, mais

⁶⁸¹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d'identité*, pp. 41-42.

l'anormalité; l'infirme se fait difforme; l'étranger devient l'*apatride*',⁶⁸² Begag and Chaouite state that the journey has the potential to deform, emphasising the distorting effect that the act of migration can have on the person who embodies the memory of migration, and again reflecting the depiction of Amel and Mounsi's protagonists as 'tordus'. However, this parallel between the potential of the journey to deform and Girard's argument that the Other becomes deformed in the eyes of dominant society does not go as far as justifying dominant society's consideration of the Other as 'deformed'. Rather, Begag's and Chaouite's idea that the journey deforms testifies to the destabilising, alienating effect that the act of migration can have on the migrant's consciousness, which consequently facilitates the construction by dominant society of the image of the migrant as 'deformed'. For example, the alienation brought about by the act of migration may lead to the migrant being unwilling to seek acceptance in dominant society, as he/she prefers to retreat into the familiarity of the periphery, where he/she encounters people in the same situation as him/herself, thus fulfilling to an extent dominant society's construction of the image of the migrant as an outsider who is both unwanted and does not want to be accepted.

Indeed, it was common in France for Algerian migrants to be grouped together with other migrants from the same Algerian region or village,⁶⁸³ and these groupings afforded migrants a sense of security in their new circumstances. For example, Begag and Chaouite argue that the *bidonvilles* 'jouèrent une fonction de sas, assurant le temps d'adaptation à la nouvelle vie, dans un milieu protégé',⁶⁸⁴ suggesting that settling in areas with others who were going through the same process of migration and alienation facilitated the adaptation to this new life. Therefore, a voluntary isolation from dominant society is added to the imposed isolation suffered by migrants. The peripheral location (in a literal sense) of the *bidonvilles*, and the *cités de transit* and HLM blocks

⁶⁸² Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, pp. 34-35.

⁶⁸³ See Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 39.

⁶⁸⁴ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 39.

which succeeded them, meant that the desire to alleviate the alienation of displacement by settling in the same areas as other Algerian migrants automatically led to outsider status, outlining a path from the journey and act of migration to exclusion. In turn, this exclusion from dominant, central society marks the migrant out as delinquent because he/she is not ‘attracted toward [the] nerve centre’,⁶⁸⁵ due to the desire to remain in the familiarity and security of the periphery, and this sustained exclusion leads to the setting-up and perpetuation of the periphery as a site of alienation and delinquency. Consequently, the perceived delinquency of the marginalised can be traced back to the ‘pouvoir déstabilisant’ of the journey, highlighting the link between the journey and delinquency encapsulated by my understanding of *errance*.

The idea that exclusion perpetuates delinquency is reinforced by Erikson, who argues that, in fact, the marginalisation of certain groups considered delinquent is facilitated by the same institutions that seek to prevent delinquency, as follows:

[The institutions built to inhibit deviation] gather marginal people into tightly segregated groups, give them an opportunity to teach one another the skills and attitudes of a deviant career, and often provoke them into employing these skills by reinforcing their sense of alienation from the rest of society.⁶⁸⁶

The *cit  de transit* that provides the principal setting for Charef’s *Le Th  au harem* fulfils this description as a site of alienation and delinquency. For instance, the link between alienation and delinquency is exemplified by the graffiti that adorns Madjid’s *cit * which, through a delinquent act, expresses cries for help, as follows: ‘Et sur les murs de b ton, des graffiti, des slogans, des appels de d tresse, des S.O.S. en forme de poing lev ’.⁶⁸⁷ In particular, Charef’s inscription of an image of violence with a cry for

⁶⁸⁵ Erikson, ‘Notes on the Sociology of Deviance’, p. 13.

⁶⁸⁶ Erikson, ‘Notes on the Sociology of Deviance’, p. 16.

⁶⁸⁷ Charef, *Le Th  au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 25.

help ('des S.O.S. en forme de poing levé') encapsulates the notion that the alienation of the inhabitants of the periphery leads to violence and delinquency.

The idea that the *cit * breeds delinquency is evidenced by the widespread criminality amongst several of its inhabitants, not only the protagonist. Encircling the depiction of Madjid's delinquent acts are tales of similar acts carried out by minor characters from the margins who are, like Madjid, destined to a life of delinquency. The collective fate and collective delinquency that resides on the periphery is illustrated in the novel by the return to the *cit * of one of its former inhabitants, Balou. This fleeting visit, we are told, is the last that the residents of Madjid's *cit * ever see of Balou: all that is heard of him from this point onwards are just rumours of his errant life, such as his alleged descent into pimping.⁶⁸⁸ Balou's implied continuation in a life of delinquency points to the fatalism of the inhabitants of the *cit *, and to the inescapability of such a fate, as evidenced by Madjid's reflection on the collective destiny reserved for the excluded, prompted by Balou's reappearance, as follows:

Il pensait au chemin parcouru par Balou. Une ligne qu'on lui avait trac e bien avant. Il n'avait plus qu'  suivre. On dirait que pour certains  tres tout est pr vu d'avance, qu'ils sont devenus ce qu'on a voulu qu'ils soient. Et que ces  tres, que  a leur soit facile ou difficile, ils finissent toujours par foncer dans le panneau, par infortune ou par vengeance.⁶⁸⁹

The path followed by Balou becomes representative of the collective fate of the residents of Madjid's *cit *, the protagonist included. This path traces the ' quateur sur la circonf rence du monde',⁶⁹⁰ which represents the never-ending, circular movement of the migrant, without ever arriving at the stability sought by the 'passager de toujours'. Furthermore, the language used by Charef reflects the notion that the marginalised are

⁶⁸⁸ See Charef, *Le Th  au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 90.

⁶⁸⁹ Charef, *Le Th  au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 90.

⁶⁹⁰ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 19.

marked out as delinquent by default. The route to delinquency is indicated by ‘une ligne [...] tracée bien avant’: it is a fate that is ‘prévu d’avance’ and cannot be resisted since ‘il n’avait plus qu’à suivre’. However, rather than attribute this delinquency to some ingrained characteristic that is inherent to people who live on the periphery (and thus to migrants and their children), Charef suggests that this delinquency is something that has been created by dominant society. The narrator asserts that those for whom a life of delinquency is ‘prévu d’avance’ become ‘ce qu’on a voulu qu’ils soient’, which recalls the notion that the status of delinquent or outsider is defined by society, and that the labelling of certain people as such can be ‘an important condition for *preserving* stability’ in society.⁶⁹¹ In other words, society wants and needs to identify and single out those who fulfil its own definition of the delinquent in order to establish and maintain its own unity. This notion is based on the idea that, by operating outside society’s boundaries through his/her actions, the delinquent ‘shows us the difference between the inside of the group and the outside’, which is essential to maintaining the ‘inner sense of identity and cohesion’ of society.⁶⁹² Thus, the delinquent helps society to define itself by demonstrating how not to act, and is therefore to some extent crucial to preserving a stable society, which is illustrated by Charef’s suggestion that his marginalised characters become ‘ce qu’on a voulu qu’ils soient’. Madjid and his fellow ‘banlieusards’ are destined to a life of delinquency not because they are inherently delinquent, but because society rejects and alienates them, facilitating the entry into, and prolongation of, a delinquent life. In turn, this entrapment in delinquency helps society to preserve its ‘inner sense of identity and cohesion’ which, in the context of French society, is based to a large degree on the principle of unity by uniformity. The confinement of minority ethnic populations to the periphery, and the delinquency ascribed to these populations that is perpetuated by this confinement, benefits dominant society in that ethnic

⁶⁹¹ Erikson, ‘Notes on the Sociology of Deviance’, p. 15. Original’s italics.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

difference is kept away from the centre, allowing dominant French society to preserve its foundation on unity by uniformity.

The Delinquent Scapegoat

The setting-up of marginalised ethnic minorities as delinquent in order to preserve the identity and cohesion of dominant society points towards the idea that ethnic minorities act as scapegoats on whom dominant society depends for its stability. Girard sheds further light on this notion in *Le Bouc Émissaire*, in which he states that ‘les membres de la foule sont toujours des persécuteurs en puissance car ils rêvent de purger la communauté des éléments impurs qui la corrompent, des traîtres qui la subvertissent’.⁶⁹³ If we equate Girard’s ‘foule’ to dominant society, and ‘des traîtres qui [subvertissent la communauté]’ to the ‘delinquent’ children of migrants, then the link between Girard’s work and that of Becker and Erikson becomes ever clearer. In the same way that Girard’s ‘foule’ wants to rid itself of any impurities which corrupt it, dominant, central society keeps those designated as delinquent outside its boundaries in order to define those boundaries and maintain the group’s ‘inner sense of identity and cohesion’. Furthermore, by equating ‘la foule’ to dominant society, dominant society in its entirety is implicated in the exclusion and purging of the allegedly impure, corrupting, treacherous elements from it. That is to say, by referring to ‘la foule’, Girard accuses not only the authorities that define the group’s boundaries and work to maintain them, but also those who passively accept this definition without challenging it. Therefore, in the context of this thesis, it is not only the French Republic and those whose job it is to maintain its values (for example, the French government) that are implicated in setting

⁶⁹³ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 26.

up a monolithic definition of Frenchness and the ethnocentric prerequisites for acceptance in central French society, but each and every member of dominant society constitutes a ‘persécuteur en puissance’, wishing to purge society of those who do not conform to its prerequisites and so corrupt and betray it.

This implication of ‘la foule’ is illustrated in the two novels by Mounsi included in the primary corpus, in which crowds of people are depicted as spectators observing the dramatic scenes before them. For example, in *La Noce des fous*, the wreckage of the car crash which leads to the deaths of the protagonist and his friend draws the attention of ‘une horde d’hurluberlus, les yeux exorbités jusqu’aux sourcils’,⁶⁹⁴ who gather at the site of the car crash, clamouring at the wreckage before them. This voyeurism is subsequently offset by the sadness of a solitary young girl on viewing the scene of the crash. In his depiction of the girl’s sadness, Mounsi allows himself to criticise the watching mob, as follows: ‘Une tristesse peu à peu la serrait à la gorge, comme si une profonde méchanceté remontait de cette foule dans l’haleine épaisse des repas’.⁶⁹⁵ By ascribing maliciousness to the crowds, who are not concerned about the loss of life but are merely (grotesquely) fascinated by the scene in a voyeuristic sense, Mounsi evokes the indifference of dominant society to the life and fate of his protagonist, who has been largely confined to the margins of society throughout his existence. Indeed, by meeting his death in the car crash, the protagonist has been purged once and for all from the society of which he has only tentatively been a part, and the crowds that surround the site of his death are unmoved by his departing.

The voyeuristic ‘foule’ makes another appearance in Mounsi’s *Le Voyage des âmes*, this time as spectators at the scene of the protagonist’s father’s death. Having fallen from a scaffold, breaking his skull, his last moments are played out in front of ‘une cohue de badauds [qui] le vit agoniser au milieu de la rue, vomissant des caillots de

⁶⁹⁴ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 244.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

sang qui le faisaient étouffer’.⁶⁹⁶ The graphic description of the man’s suffering and agony on falling to his eventual death places the reader (also implicated as a member of ‘la foule’) amongst the crowd of onlookers who, again, are drawn to the scene only because of its visual aspect (and Mounsi emphasises this through his vivid use of language) rather than to come to the man’s aid. Taking both death scenes in *Le Voyage des âmes* and *La Noce des fous*, the death of an Arab, it seems, is only to be passively observed, not to be lamented or prevented, since the death of an Arab is in keeping with the purging of the community of any ‘impure’ elements that corrupt it.

Particularly resonating with Girard’s work, which traces the victimisation of the scapegoat across time and cultures, Erikson adds the figure of the delinquent to wider representations of the outsider, as follows:

People who gather together into communities need to be able to describe and anticipate those areas of experience which lie outside the immediate compass of the group – the unseen dangers which in any culture and in any age seem to threaten its security. Traditional folklore depicting demons, devils, witches and evil spirits, may be one way to give form to these otherwise formless dangers, but the visible deviant is another kind of reminder.⁶⁹⁷

As Erikson explains, the delinquent becomes a representation of evil who is designated as such first and foremost by his/her outsider status, and not necessarily because he/she has acted in a certain way to warrant this label. The delinquent is evil because he/she is an outsider, in the same way that marginalised people of minority ethnic origin are ‘evil’ because they are ethnically different and display ‘des éléments impurs’ which corrupt the identity of dominant society. Girard underlines this victimisation due to belonging to a marginalised group as follows:

⁶⁹⁶ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 135.

⁶⁹⁷ Erikson, ‘Notes on the Sociology of Deviance’, p. 15.

Il arrive même que les crimes dont on les accuse soient réels, mais ce ne sont pas eux, même dans ce cas-là, qui jouent le premier rôle dans le choix des persécuteurs, c'est l'appartenance des victimes à certaines catégories particulièrement exposées à la persécution.⁶⁹⁸

Therefore, the person accused of a crime may well be guilty of committing it, but his/her judgment does not depend first and foremost on whether the crime is real or not: he/she will primarily be punished because he/she belongs to a victimised group. Similarly, marginalised people of minority ethnic origin are not necessarily classed as delinquent because they have committed a delinquent act, whether they have or not, but, in the first instance, because they belong to a victimised group. In this way, the scapegoat is guilty by default or, as Girard puts it, 'condamné d'avance',⁶⁹⁹ which corresponds to Madjid's observations that 'pour certains êtres tout est prévu d'avance' and that the marginalised become 'ce qu'on a voulu qu'ils soient'.⁷⁰⁰ Consequently, they are condemned to the 'wilderness', the alienation of the periphery, where they enter a self-fulfilling prophecy which dictates that they become what dominant society claimed that they were all along – delinquent, corrupt, sinful.

This exclusion helps to validate France's definition of nationhood, which is itself hostile to ethnic difference by default, and Girard's work allows us to examine this hostility in more detail. In his explanation of the fear of the Other, Girard uses the example of physical difference and disability to highlight his point, stressing that such visible difference 'terrifie parce qu'elle suggère la vérité du système, sa relativité, sa fragilité, sa mortalité'.⁷⁰¹ Visible difference unsettles the system as it displays its true dynamic, fragile nature. In parallel, the visibility of ethnic difference unsettles French society because it draws attention to the reality that, in a postcolonial, multicultural age, France is not united by uniformity. On the contrary, France is dynamic and diverse in

⁶⁹⁸ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 28.

⁶⁹⁹ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 56.

⁷⁰⁰ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 90.

⁷⁰¹ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 34.

terms of its ethnic composition, which reveals the fragility of one of the principles on which the French nation is based. The fluidity of contemporary, postcolonial French identity and nationhood is made visible by those French nationals who embody the memory of France's colonial past, representative of which are the protagonists of the primary corpus. Ironically therefore, the multifaceted identity of the Franco-Algerian characters we encounter in the primary texts corresponds to a more modern and accurate definition of French nationhood than the rigid, monolithic definition of nationality promoted by the notion of unity by uniformity. However, rather than confront this reality, the threat to the very foundations of the French Republic posed by the presence of minority ethnic populations is deemed a crisis of identity (recently exemplified by the government's ill-fated initiation of a debate on national identity in 2010),⁷⁰² which is resolved by expelling those who make the crisis evident to the periphery. This expulsion is reflected in Girard's explanation of how societies deal with crises, as he states that 'le sens de l'opération est de rejeter sur les victimes la responsabilité de cette crise et d'agir sur celle-ci en détruisant lesdites victimes ou tout au moins en les expulsant de la communauté qu'elles "polluent"'.⁷⁰³ Rather than adapting a model of citizenship to incorporate a more modern and inclusive definition of French nationhood, minority ethnic populations are deemed to be 'polluting' white hegemonic society and, by expelling them to the margins, France upholds and promotes an outdated and increasingly untenable model of citizenship. In the invisibility of the periphery, the minority ethnic Other no longer threatens the stability of society, and the foundations of the French Republic remain intact. However, this expulsion does not solve the 'crisis', but only keeps it out of sight and, by placing minority ethnic populations outside the boundaries of integrated society, the setting-up of ethnic difference as an impurity is perpetuated. Consequently, ethnic difference will continue to represent a threat to the

⁷⁰² See for example Landrin and Van Eeckhout, 'Identité nationale: M. Fillon cherche une voie de sortie'.

⁷⁰³ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, pp. 37-38.

stability of dominant society, and to be indicative of an identity crisis. Therefore, it is not the presence of minority ethnic populations but the hegemonic definition of French nationhood that perpetuates the identity crisis, by deeming ethnic difference as impure in the first instance. Thus, in the absence of a more fluid and inclusive definition of French nationhood, which recognises and accepts ethnic difference, the responsibility of the crisis, though projected onto minority ethnic populations, in reality lies in the Republic's continued rejection of ethnic difference and affirmation that 'la France n'est pas fondée sur les origines'.⁷⁰⁴

Delinquency and Entrapment in *Le Thé au harem*

The victimisation of minority ethnic populations and their expulsion to the margins facilitates the entry into a life of delinquency, which consequently sets in motion a cycle from which escape proves unlikely, recalling the never-ending, circular movement of the migrant without ever arriving at the stability sought by the 'passager de toujours'. According to Laurent Mucchielli, the path from exclusion to delinquency particularly affects France's North African population, stating that 'cette situation [d'exclusion] pèse fortement et doublement sur les jeunes issus de l'immigration, notamment maghrébine. Et elle pèse objectivement tant sur la propension à entrer dans la délinquance [...] que sur la difficulté à en sortir'.⁷⁰⁵ Thus, once a life of delinquency is commenced, escape proves challenging, and what further locks marginalised people of

⁷⁰⁴ 'Discours du Premier Ministre à la cérémonie de remise de décrets de naturalisation' (para. 17 of 31). Furthermore, Brigitte Jandey makes the point that 'French national identity can now be denied to French people whose parents came originally from former French colonies that are now independent', due to the need to ascertain whether French nationality would still be granted now to people already holding French citizenship, but whose parents were born outside France, when renewing a passport for instance. Jandey explains that 'the implication is that nationality is [...] a blood right', underlining France's hostility to ethnicities which are not 'purely' French. See Brigitte Jandey, 'Frenchness in Perspective(s)', in McCormack, Pratt, and Rolls, *Hexagonal Variations*, pp. 57-77 (pp. 58-59).

⁷⁰⁵ Mucchielli, 'Immigration et délinquance', p. 46.

North African origin into this life of delinquency is their inability to escape the categorisation of being delinquent. They are expected to behave in a certain way and compound this categorisation by proceeding to fulfil the role, as illustrated by Madjid's observation that certain people, in pursuing a life of delinquency, become 'ce qu'on a voulu qu'ils soient'.⁷⁰⁶ Erikson suggests that such a categorisation, which is determined by society's expectations and fulfilled by the delinquent him or herself, satisfies both parties, as follows:

In some respects, this may be the only way for the individual and his community to agree as to what kind of person he really is, for it often happens that the community is only able to perceive his "true colours" when he lapses momentarily into some form of deviant performance.⁷⁰⁷

Therefore, pursuing a life of delinquency satisfies the role that society has predetermined for people of North African origin. This role is not necessarily merited in that the delinquent is not inherently so, but his/her passage into delinquency satisfies the convenient models constructed by society which help society settle on the kind of person that he/she is. Once again, this categorisation exemplifies Girard's notion that scapegoats are chosen 'en vertu non des crimes qu'on leur attribue mais de leurs signes victimaires'.⁷⁰⁸ The delinquent is designated as such before he/she commits or does not commit a delinquent act, and it is this labelling which then leads to the entry into delinquency. This notion is underlined by Becker, who notes that 'treating a person as though he were generally rather than specifically deviant produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. It sets in motion several mechanisms which conspire to shape the person in

⁷⁰⁶ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 90.

⁷⁰⁷ Erikson, 'Notes on the Sociology of Deviance', p. 17.

⁷⁰⁸ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 37.

the image people have of him'.⁷⁰⁹ Thus, the categorisation of people of North African origin as delinquent initiates and maintains their entrapment in a vicious circle of delinquency.

The difficulty of escaping this categorisation is demonstrated in *Le Thé au harem* by Madjid's very brief appointment at an employment agency. Once there, he is received with an instant rejection after the employee at the agency had 'à peine ouvert le dossier de Madjid'.⁷¹⁰ The instantaneous nature of this rebuff and the lack of any consideration given to Madjid's file suggest that the employee does not need to look at his file: seeing Madjid and deducing his ethnic origin, his 'signes victimaires', is enough to confirm that there are no jobs for him. Furthermore, Madjid's reaction to this response intimates that he is used to such treatment when looking for work: as the employee lists the reasons why finding Madjid a job would be difficult, Madjid interrupts him, abruptly declaring 'J'ai compris!' before leaving the agency.⁷¹¹ Madjid's implied expectation that he was going to be confronted with such a response highlights the regularity of the difficulties that people of Madjid's ethnic origin encounter in trying to find employment and escape a life of delinquency. The rejection of Madjid satisfies the need to maintain his 'true colours', in that by keeping Madjid unemployed, his continuation in a delinquent existence is facilitated. Elucidating the link between unemployment and delinquency, Hugues Lagrange stresses that 'le chômage se situe clairement du côté des conditions qui peuvent favoriser l'entrée dans la délinquance: en réduisant les chances d'accès à un statut légal, il augmente les motifs d'actes illégaux'.⁷¹² Thus, Lagrange presents employment as an antidote to delinquency, reinforcing the idea that Madjid's inability to find employment favours the continuation of his errant life. Again, the role of dominant society in this perpetuation of a delinquent

⁷⁰⁹ Becker, *Outsiders*, p. 34.

⁷¹⁰ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 149.

⁷¹¹ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 150.

⁷¹² Hugues Lagrange, *De l'affrontement à l'esquive: violences, délinquances et usages de drogues* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte et Syros, 2001), p. 83.

existence is implied by Charef, as we are told that, after being told that there is no job for him, ‘Madjid acquiesça’.⁷¹³ The choice of verb here underlines that Madjid himself had few hopes of being told that there was work available for him. Furthermore, Madjid’s acquiescence points towards an enduring submission at the hands of dominant society, and corroborates Mucchielli’s claim that exclusion, and consequent entrapment in delinquency, weighs heavily on the children of North African migrants in particular.⁷¹⁴ Madjid has no option but to accept that there is no work available for him, despite the implied discrimination with which he is confronted at the agency. Expected to fulfil the role of delinquent due to his ethnic origin, Madjid is then prevented from escaping this categorisation due to the discrimination of dominant society. In this way, his ‘true colours’ are dictated by society: he is prevented from being ‘good’, despite his attempts, and returns to a life of delinquency.⁷¹⁵

This imposition of the delinquent label by dominant society is then compounded by the fulfilment of this categorisation by the person to whom it has been applied. In *Le Thé au harem*, a delinquent existence is presented as preferable to a conventional life of employment, offering a (false) sense of freedom to Madjid as opposed to the prison-like nature of the types of work available to him. For example, Madjid attempts to put a stop to his delinquency by getting a job at a factory, but walks out on his first day, following Pat’s example. While Madjid’s emulation of Pat could be interpreted as blind loyalty to his friend, as indeed is suggested by Pat,⁷¹⁶ Madjid’s consideration of the factory before he walks out implies that Pat’s exit awakens Madjid to the dreariness of working there, depicted as follows:

⁷¹³ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 150.

⁷¹⁴ See Mucchielli, ‘Immigration et délinquance’, p. 56.

⁷¹⁵ This is emphasised by the scene which immediately follows that in the employment agency, in which Madjid and Pat commit assault and theft. See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, pp. 150-51.

⁷¹⁶ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 170.

Madjid arrêta le boulot quand Pat passa devant lui, direction le bureau. Congédié! [...] Madjid regarda autour de lui. Ces boîtes de carton superposées par centaines, tout autour de l'atelier, qui cachaient la lumière du jour, et ces jeunes bossant sans lever la tête, sans se parler, aucune communication [...] ça faisait beaucoup!⁷¹⁷

Madjid does not blindly follow Pat in quitting his job,⁷¹⁸ but his realisation that Pat has been dismissed causes him to consider whether he genuinely wants to work at the factory, and the depressing scene that he witnesses around him at this point confirms his decision to leave. The notion that having a job is an antidote to delinquency is then highlighted by the following scene, in which the two characters break into a tennis club changing room and steal the cash that they find left there.⁷¹⁹ Having been given the opportunity to escape his delinquency by getting a job, Madjid consciously chooses to resume his errant life, and the contrast between the dull, monotonous factory and the excitement of leading a life of delinquency justifies this choice. Madjid demonstrates that he has the capability of keeping his job and being successful at it, precluding any notion that he chooses a life of delinquency because he is unsuccessful in all his attempts to lead a conventional life. However, his aptitude leads to him very soon performing his job 'comme un ancien de la taule',⁷²⁰ which underlines the comparison of the factory to a prison and recalls the entrapment suffered by Madjid. On the one hand, getting a job is presented as the antidote to delinquency, preventing Madjid from being sentenced to imprisonment but, on the other hand, the type of employment available to Madjid is itself comparable to a prison sentence. Faced with the entrapment of going from the real prison to the figurative one, which both represent stasis and a potential end to Madjid's endless wandering, a life of errance and movement presents

⁷¹⁷ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Achi Ahmed*, p. 169.

⁷¹⁸ Strictly speaking Pat is dismissed, but it is his declaration that he does not care about the work he has been given which prompts the dismissal. Therefore, he intentionally causes himself to be dismissed. See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Achi Ahmed*, p. 169.

⁷¹⁹ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Achi Ahmed*, pp. 171-72.

⁷²⁰ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Achi Ahmed*, p. 168.

itself to Madjid as the only possibility for freedom, and this impression of freedom is reinforced by the following depiction of Pat and Madjid's aimless wandering on leaving the factory: 'Ils marchèrent longtemps, passant Courbevoie. Ils traversèrent Colombes. Il faisait un petit soleil printanier qui donnait envie de flâner sur la neige fondante. Ils allaient droit vers le pont d'Argenteuil, et ils ne savaient pas où après'.⁷²¹ Charef's insertion of an image of bright winter sunshine, contrasting with the dullness of the factory, amid the evocation of Pat and Madjid drifting freely around Paris, makes this movement desirable: the sunshine 'donnait envie de flâner'. Moreover, the act of delinquency that they eventually commit brings them a rush of excitement and pleasure.⁷²² Therefore, leading a life of *errance* is not only an existence that is imposed on Madjid, but is also presented as the conscious choice of the protagonist. Such a choice contributes to the self-fulfilling prophecy, set in motion in the first place by the labelling of people of Madjid's status and ethnic origin as delinquent, which 'conspire[s] to shape the person in the image people have of him'.⁷²³

The fulfilment of this 'prophecy' is underlined by the end of Charef's novel, when Madjid's delinquent status is, in a sense, confirmed by his arrest. Having taken a trip to the beach in Jean-Marc's car, Madjid and his group of friends begin to be followed by a police van. It is not clear what crime the group has committed to find themselves followed by the police, though Pat's instinct to attempt an escape if caught suggests that a crime has been committed.⁷²⁴ Indeed, the lack of a clear crime committed by the gang, together with the impulse to run at the sight of the police, indicates that Charef does not need to specify a crime, as there is an implied acceptance on the part of both the police and the gang that the gang is guilty. As has been argued so far in this chapter, the marginalised are guilty and delinquent by default. Significantly

⁷²¹ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed*, p. 170.

⁷²² See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed*, p. 172.

⁷²³ Becker, *Outsiders*, p. 34.

⁷²⁴ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed*, p. 183.

though, Madjid's reaction to the police proceeds to set him (and, by extension, the excluded of Algerian origin) apart from the rest of his group of friends. When the van blocks the road ahead, the group follows Pat's orders to run away, except Madjid, who is too 'las, dégoûté, fatigué' to resist any more, and virtually gives himself up to be arrested.⁷²⁵ The separation of Madjid from the rest of the group underlines the specific difficulty of youths of North African origin to escape the vicious circle of exclusion and delinquency, to which Mucchielli points.⁷²⁶

By pursuing a life of delinquency, Madjid plays into the hands of those who label people of Algerian origin delinquent in the first place, fulfilling a stereotype and confirming the suspicion with which this part of the population is already viewed by dominant French society. As Mucchielli argues, the figure of the delinquent youth of North African origin 'constitue l'une des principales peurs collectives de la société française au tournant du XXI^e siècle',⁷²⁷ reinforcing the racial lines along which this process of exclusion, delinquency, and entrapment occurs. Reflecting the suspicion with which North African youths are viewed by French society, Girard argues that 'les persécuteurs finissent toujours par se convaincre qu'un petit nombre d'individus [...] peut se rendre extrêmement nuisible à la société tout entière'.⁷²⁸ Subsequently, the 'foule' that is made up of those who seek to persecute certain victimised groups proceeds to expel those groups to the margins, where they cannot corrupt the dominant group,⁷²⁹ and where images such as that of the delinquent North African youth are allowed to be perpetuated. The stigmatisation endured by marginalised youths of North

⁷²⁵ See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 184. The image that 'Madjid obéit sans un mot' when told to get into the police van recalls his acquiescence at the employment agency when told that there are no jobs for him. See Charef, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, p. 150. Thus, the submission of people of North African origin at the hands of dominant society is reinforced. Furthermore, as Madjid's submission to the police is located at the novel's end, Charef presents his defeat by dominant society as definitive.

⁷²⁶ See Mucchielli, 'Immigration et délinquance', p. 46.

⁷²⁷ Mucchielli, 'Immigration et délinquance', p. 39.

⁷²⁸ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 25.

⁷²⁹ See Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 26.

African origin ‘creates the facts which later “prove” it to be correct’,⁷³⁰ as evidenced by Madjid’s conscious pursuit of a life of delinquency. Therefore, returning to the end of *Le Thé au harem* and Charef’s omission of a specified crime committed by Madjid and his group of friends, I propose that Madjid’s ‘crime’ is, in the end, that of being ethnically different.⁷³¹ This notion of difference (ethnic or otherwise) as a basis for persecution is underlined by Girard, who notes that ‘il n’y a guère de sociétés qui ne soumettent leurs minorités, tous leurs groupes mal intégrés ou même simplement distincts, à certaines formes de discrimination sinon de persécution’.⁷³² In the same way that Charef omits a specific crime committed by Madjid’s gang at the end of *Le Thé au harem*, Girard indicates that a crime does not have to be specified, since minority populations will always be persecuted for the sole reason of being distinct or non-integrated.

Ultimately, this incrimination of minority populations due to their ethnic difference helps to validate France’s model of citizenship, based on the principle of unity by uniformity and eradication of ethnic difference. By facilitating the entry into delinquency of ethnic minorities, escape from which can prove to be impossible, French society preserves its hegemonic definition of national identity, and marks out any deviation from this definition as ‘corrupt’ and unworthy of acceptance into dominant society. By perpetuating the image of the delinquent, non-integrable youth of immigrant

⁷³⁰ Erikson, ‘Notes on the Sociology of Deviance’, p. 17.

⁷³¹ While my argument here appears to counter the argument of Jaccomard that ‘the conclusion of *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed* [...] dispels simplistic links between criminality and ethnicity’, I am in agreement with Jaccomard that Charef’s text emphasises ‘the all-important unity within a social class’. See Jaccomard, ‘*Racaille* versus *Flics?*’, p. 166. In other words, I am not saying that Pat, who joins Madjid in the police van out of solidarity, is exempt from criminal behaviour because he is white. Indeed, I would argue that Pat is more inclined to criminality than Madjid. My overarching argument in this section is that Madjid’s ethnicity marks him out as a criminal even before he has committed a crime, entrapping him in this stigmatisation so that, in the end, it does not matter whether he commits a crime or not. For dominant society, Madjid is delinquent by default, a stigmatisation challenged by Charef throughout his text, and one of the ways in which he does so is to present the reader with an ethnically diverse group of characters who all become involved in delinquent behaviour to varying degrees. In this way, Charef condemns the process by which dominant French society creates a peripheral, outsider space which becomes a breeding ground for delinquency. This idea that ‘*beur* texts are here to denounce the real criminals among us’ is the central premise of Jaccomard’s article. See Jaccomard, ‘*Racaille* versus *Flics?*’, p. 176.

⁷³² Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 29.

origin, French society creates a figure to ‘correct’ and provides an example of how not to be. Since this figure does not conform to the hegemonic definition of French citizenship, the republican model, which demands that migrants and their children renounce their ethnic difference, is upheld. According to Mucchielli, the egalitarian ‘myth’ put forward by the republican model is at the heart of the continuing conflict between dominant society and minority ethnic populations, and contradicts its perceived aims, as follows:

L’égitarisme qui sous-tend le modèle républicain de citoyenneté fonctionne en effet comme un mythe [...] qui produit bel et bien des effets de croyance et de conformisme dans la majorité de la population, mais que dénonce de façon croissante une autre partie de la population, qui fait quotidiennement l’expérience d’un double mensonge: mensonge dans la promesse d’égalité des chances de s’insérer dans la vie économique et sociale, mensonge dans la promesse d’égalité en valeur et en dignité.⁷³³

Thus, egalitarianism paradoxically sets those who are able to conform against those who are not, undermining its very definition. This breakdown of egalitarianism is highlighted by the inequality suffered by a certain portion of the population, who are excluded from ‘la vie économique et sociale’ and who are stripped of their ‘valeur et [...] dignité’ in the process. As Mucchielli goes on to note, the frustration and resentment that this conflict engenders, and the lack of hope that it indicates, will continue to breed and ascribe delinquency to ‘une partie de la population [qui] se sent de plus en plus discriminée en raison de ses “différences” d’origine’.⁷³⁴ Therefore, the egalitarian ‘myth’ of France’s republican model of citizenship perpetuates the circumstances by which those who are excluded from dominant society due to possessing ethnic difference are also classed as delinquent. In turn, the continuing nature of this classification underlines the entrapment

⁷³³ Mucchielli, ‘Immigration et délinquance’, p. 58.

⁷³⁴ Mucchielli, ‘Immigration et délinquance’, pp. 58-59.

in a vicious circle of delinquency suffered by French citizens of North African origin, and Madjid's arrest at the end of *Le Thé au harem* reflects this entrapment. In the next section, the vicious circle of errance will be analysed with reference to *La Noce des fous*. However, my discussion of Mounsi's text in the next section will examine to a greater extent the link between delinquency and the never-ending, aimless journey engendered by the memory of migration.

A Temporary Home: Port or Prison?

The prologue to *La Noce des fous* offers a link between wandering and delinquency that encapsulates the discussion of errance in this chapter, as follows: 'Ces vies, je les ai rencontrées fatalement sur mon chemin, à chaque dépôt de police devenu peu à peu un habitat familial'.⁷³⁵ Introducing the lives of the characters that he goes on to depict, with which the narrator-protagonist's own life is entangled, Mounsi traces a path with no clear purpose that passes 'fatalement' through the familiarity of police stations. Thus, the impression of fatalism and inescapability that engulfs the narrator-protagonist's existence (a feature which is shared by the characters presented in *Le Thé au harem*) is introduced at the earliest stage in the book (in the prologue), before the main narrative has even begun. Of more pertinence to the discussion of errance, the prologue presents an inescapable link between wandering and delinquency, as the encounters between the narrator-protagonist and the people that he meets in police stations occur 'fatalement sur [son] chemin', suggesting that the aimless path taken by the protagonist will inevitably bring him into contact with others in similar positions who are living outside the law

⁷³⁵ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 9.

and being regularly detained by the authorities operating to enforce the law.⁷³⁶ The aimlessness of this path and the lack of any stable place of belonging are emphasised by the depiction of the police station as becoming ‘peu à peu un habitat familial’. Lacking a permanent home, the police station is slowly becoming the closest example of one for the protagonist, which also emphasises a negative sense of belonging. The protagonist does not belong on the side of France or Algeria, but on the wrong side of both the demarcation line and the law, in the space between France and Algeria, represented figuratively here by the police station. Furthermore, the increasing familiarity with police stations indicates a lack of direction on the part of the narrator-protagonist: his wandering always leads to police stations because he has nowhere else to go. This lack of direction evokes the image of the migrant on a continuous journey with no end in sight, having left his/her origin but not yet having arrived at the intended destination. Instead, the migrant is endlessly circling the border that separates his/her past and future homes: in this case, France and Algeria. The migrant’s present consists of this never-ending circular movement, with no path leading back to Algeria, nor to acceptance in French society, but to confinement, if not in the *cités de transit* which are reserved for those who are in a permanent state of transience, then in the police station or prison which act as temporary stops before the circular journey is resumed.

This in-between state reflects the notion that ‘pendant un temps, le voyage fait du voyageur un passager de toujours. Même s’il a cessé de bouger, l’immigré porte sur lui le souvenir du temps de sa migration’.⁷³⁷ Here, Begag and Chaouite make the paradoxical observation that the migrant, despite coming to a stop, is still on the move due to the memory of migration. Though Begag and Chaouite are referring to first-generation migrants, they also state that migration causes ‘[un] décalage [qui] a été

⁷³⁶ The potential double meaning of ‘fatalement’ also suggests that the circular movement followed by the protagonist will continue endlessly until his death, creating an impression that he is mortally wounded, as well as predestined to lead a life of errance.

⁷³⁷ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 43.

transmis aux enfants'.⁷³⁸ Thus, the repercussions of migration weigh on the children of first-generation migrants as well as on their parents through the transmission of the memory of migration. Nonetheless, there is a difference in the way that first and second generations experience this status as a 'passager de toujours'. Begag and Chaouite note that, for the first generation, this migration to France was always intended to be temporary and that, once in a better financial position, a return to Algeria was envisaged. However, they explain that migration proved to be less temporary than first thought, as follows:

[Les parents] débarquaient dans les grandes villes de la métropole comme dans un port qui devait leur servir d'escale pour faire le plein avant de s'en retourner. Mais le pouvoir du temps les a surpris. Les jours d'escale sont devenus des années, le port est devenu leur domicile.⁷³⁹

In the realisation that the move to France was becoming less and less temporary, the return to Algeria became a vision that was passed on to the children of migrants, reflecting the transmission of the memory of migration through the generations. As Begag and Chaouite go on to observe, 'la plupart de ces *anciens* ont rêvé ou rêvent encore de voir leurs descendants réaliser le projet qu'eux n'ont pu accomplir, rentrer au pays avec une bonne situation "économique"'.⁷⁴⁰ However, this vision to return to Algeria goes missing to an extent in the transmission from first to second generations. For the second generation, born or brought up from a young age in France, a return to Algeria is not a return to the homeland in the sense that it is for their parents, in the same way that they are not migrants in the sense that their parents are. As Hargreaves notes, many children of first-generation migrants did not strictly migrate from one

⁷³⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷³⁹ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité*, p. 20.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 21. Original's italics.

country to another at all.⁷⁴¹ Elucidating this crucial difference between first and second-generation Algerian migrants, Begag and Chaouite argue that ‘les parents sont *partis* de leur pays dans les années quarante et cinquante et, en fait, ils n’ont jamais été nulle part. Mais leurs enfants sont *là*’.⁷⁴² The intention to return to Algeria for the first generation meant that they were always going to be ‘nulle part’, in that ‘no man’s land’ which is neither their homeland nor full integration in French society. On the other hand, the second generation are categorically ‘*là*’. They do not intend to return to Algeria, as France is, or should be, their home, where they can lay roots and find permanence.

However, a reading of novels by Charef and Mounsi (both second-generation Algerian migrants) suggests that France does not represent a stable home for the second generation. While it may be true that certain aspects of migration are lost or distorted in the transmission of the memory of migration, I would argue that the second generation has inherited the status of being ‘nulle part’ from the first generation. Furthermore, I propose that the status of being a ‘passager de toujours’ is, in fact, felt more intensely by the second generation and results in a more acute sense of uncertainty in relation to one’s belonging in the world. To illustrate the dislocation of the first generation, Begag and Chaouite liken their migration to ‘un mouvement presque de même nature que celui de la pomme qui tombe de son arbre: dès l’instant où elle est tombée, elle ne retournera jamais à son attache originelle’.⁷⁴³ Extending this simile to the second generation, I would argue that there is no tree on which to be attached in the first place, apart from the family tree from which the second generation inherits the status of being ‘nulle part’. Even if first-generation migrants never return to Algeria, which is often the case, an attachment to the homeland remains, demonstrated by the vision of the return (however mythical this return may be). Indeed, a tangible connection of sorts to the homeland was always kept by the first generation in the form of postal orders sent back

⁷⁴¹ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 1.

⁷⁴² Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 20. Original’s italics.

⁷⁴³ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 20.

to Algeria,⁷⁴⁴ which was typical of the first wave of migrants to France, whose families remained in Algeria.⁷⁴⁵ Even after those who formed this first wave of migration were joined by their families, or when entire families migrated to France, this economically-based connection with the homeland was often maintained by ‘la maison qu’ils ont fait construire au pays [...] la maison qui devait accueillir tous les membres de la famille lors du grand retour’.⁷⁴⁶ Thus, the vision of the return remains alive in the consciousness of the first generation and, together with money sent back to Algeria in anticipation of retiring to the house built after years of work in France, maintains an attachment to the homeland, and a trajectory that leads back there. This attachment and trajectory is not transmitted to the second generation, who do not intend to return to Algeria. Therefore, while the first generation’s experience of migration always maintains a route back to Algeria, if not a route to acceptance in French society, for the second generation neither route exists: they are born into a ‘no man’s land’ out of which there is no escape. They inherit the status of being a ‘passager de toujours’, but their constant movement is a circular one with no destination in sight, and no origin to which to return. Indeed, their origin is the ‘no man’s land’. In novels such as *La Noce des fous*, this inherited and aggravated experience of migration is reflected in the aimless wandering of the protagonist, which is invariably associated with delinquency. This association leads me to posit a reworking of Begag’s and Chaouite’s image of the port as temporary home for the first generation: with regard to the second generation of immigration, the port is replaced by the prison, or the ‘dépôt de police devenu peu à peu un habitat familial’.⁷⁴⁷ The inherited experience of migration, which transmits the status of perennial migrant but cuts off any possibility of attachment to an origin or a destination, weighs heavily

⁷⁴⁴ See Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 37.

⁷⁴⁵ See Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 9.

⁷⁴⁶ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 21.

⁷⁴⁷ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 9.

on the children of first-generation migrants, and results in a perpetual, circular, aimless journey in which a life of crime appears as a predestined existence.

Perennial Criminal or Perennial Traveller?

From its very outset, *La Noce des fous* emphasises the predetermined nature of the life of crime led by the narrator-protagonist. Mirroring the suggestion in *Le Thé au harem* that the marginalised become ‘ce qu’on a voulu qu’ils soient’,⁷⁴⁸ the narrator of *La Noce des fous* also states that ‘je fus ce que l’on voulut que je sois’.⁷⁴⁹ Thus, the role of society in ascribing delinquency to certain groups, who then proceed to fulfil the label, is reprised in *La Noce des fous*, in which the protagonist fulfils the prediction made of him at an early age: ‘tu finiras mal’.⁷⁵⁰ Subsequently, the life of crime that the protagonist goes on to lead becomes closely associated with his aimless wandering around Paris, as evidenced by his immediate return to a life of errance on his release from the young offenders’ institution. The instinct to wander that he demonstrates on his release brings us back to the idea that the protagonist is on a never-ending, circular journey with no destination in sight, with incarceration acting as a hiatus or stopping-point. This lack of direction is emphasised as soon as the protagonist exits the young offenders’ institution, as follows: ‘J’ai continué à marcher, sans la moindre idée de l’endroit où j’allais. Mes mouvements ne suivaient aucune direction précise si ce n’est que je poursuivais le chemin’.⁷⁵¹ The protagonist does not choose a precise path to follow, but continues on an unknown route towards no place in particular. His drift from one residential home to another sets in motion an itinerant existence, indicative of his

⁷⁴⁸ Charef, *Le Thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed*, p. 90.

⁷⁴⁹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 13.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁵¹ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 147.

status as a 'passager de toujours' who has no permanent home, and Mounsi again evokes the never-ending circle to underline this existence, as follows:

La ronde incessante des foyers, la vie au quotidien sans lendemain, exténué, lassé d'attendre je ne sais quoi qui ne vient jamais. J'errais, dans ce Paris lourd et poisseux où tout peut arriver, où tout arriva. Mes jours glissaient comme des barques au fil de l'eau, emportés à la dérive.⁷⁵²

Having been released from prison, the protagonist continues on his endless circular movement (indicated above by the 'ronde incessante des foyers') which has no specific purpose or destination ('lassé d'attendre je ne sais quoi qui ne vient jamais').

Furthermore, the comparison of his life to a boat adrift at sea continues Mounsi's preoccupation throughout *La Noce des fous* with the representation of being lost at sea.

The recurrence of maritime images in this way serves to inscribe the protagonist's directionless urban drift with the memory of a more significant movement: that which brought him (or his parents) to France in the first place. Though, in practical terms, this journey across the sea that separates Algeria and France has been accomplished, the returning image of being lost at sea underlines the notion that the experience of migration has stayed with the protagonist, who has become a 'passager de toujours'.

This status leads to his endless circular movement around the 'équateur sur la circonférence du monde',⁷⁵³ which manifests itself in his directionless drift in Paris and indicates his lack of belonging both to his former homeland and to French society, as illustrated by the notion that he is lost in the sea that separates France and Algeria.

This connection between the protagonist's wandering and the memory of migration is subsequently extended to encompass the protagonist's attraction to criminality. The depiction of his nomadic existence after his release from the young offenders' institution is closely followed by his first encounter with Malou, with whom

⁷⁵² Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, pp. 150-51.

⁷⁵³ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 19.

the protagonist enters a life of violence, crime, and other clandestine activity.⁷⁵⁴ This encounter with Malou occurs ‘un soir [qu’il errait] sans but’,⁷⁵⁵ during the protagonist’s aimless drift, reinforcing the notion that the endless and aimless wandering of the protagonist, linked to the memory of migration, inevitably leads to delinquency. Having left the young offenders’ institution, a stopping-point in his errant existence, the protagonist immediately resumes his directionless path, which eventually only directs him back to a life of criminality. This sequence reflects the never-ending, circular movement followed by the protagonist, and underlines the association between delinquency and the journey, both that which the protagonist takes aimlessly around Paris and that which brought him to France in the first place. Thus, the status of being a ‘passager de toujours’ and the status of being a ‘perennial criminal’ become somewhat blurred with one another and, to an extent, interchangeable. This interchangeability is evident in the protagonist’s trial, before he is sent to the young offenders’ institution, during which it is unclear whether the protagonist is being condemned for having committed a crime, or for deviating from the accepted path, both in the sense that he is ‘anomalous’ and ‘abnormal’, and in the sense that he did not and continues not to follow the same trajectory as dominant society.

Specifically, the protagonist is diagnosed as ‘abnormal’ during the psychiatrist’s evaluation of him, which claims that he demonstrates ‘de nombreux signes de confusion mentale et de désorientation affective’ and ‘des signes d’anomalie émotionnelle’.⁷⁵⁶ Therefore, in this case, the protagonist’s ‘signes victimaires’, which contribute to his conviction as a delinquent, are his disorientation from the norm, his anomalous nature. The pathological nature of the assessment is then emphasised by the psychiatrist’s conclusions ‘qui parlaient de schizophrénie, de névrose, de fabulation’,⁷⁵⁷ ascribing

⁷⁵⁴ See Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, pp. 155-66.

⁷⁵⁵ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 155.

⁷⁵⁶ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 129.

⁷⁵⁷ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 128.

psychiatric disease to the protagonist in order to explain his actions, and ultimately also contributing to his guilty verdict. The link between undesired ethnic difference and disease is made evident by Girard, who states that ‘lorsqu’un groupe humain a pris l’habitude de choisir ses victimes dans une certaine catégorie sociale, ethnique, religieuse, il tend à lui attribuer les infirmités ou les difformités qui renforceraient la polarisation victimaire si elles étaient réelles’.⁷⁵⁸ Thus, ascribing physical (or psychological in the case of the protagonist of *La Noce des fous*) abnormality to the victim makes it easier to condemn him/her. Girard makes the point that the infirmity or deformity is not real, but is ascribed to the victim all the same to reinforce the polarisation, which suggests that this labelling as physically or psychologically abnormal is done to mask the stigmatisation of the victim due to other characteristics, such as ethnic difference. Like the blurring of perennial traveller and perennial criminal, the stigmatisation due to infirmity or deformity becomes blurred with the stigmatisation due to ethnic difference. Furthermore, these separate cases of confusion themselves become interchangeable when we consider that the psychological ‘abnormality’ of the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* contributes to his conviction as a criminal, and that this pathological assessment hides a stigmatisation due to ethnic difference, or being the descendant of migration. Therefore, it is unclear whether the protagonist is being condemned for having committed a crime, or for being psychologically and ethnically different from the norm.

Underlining this uncertainty, the crime for which the protagonist is being tried is not mentioned during the trial. We know that he is being tried for his part in murder: however, we also know that the protagonist did not himself commit the murder, as it was Bako who stabbed the man whose house the gang had infiltrated.⁷⁵⁹ This absence of a specific crime, caused by the knowledge that the protagonist did not commit murder

⁷⁵⁸ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁵⁹ See Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 87.

and by the ambiguity regarding the exact charges against him, recalls the final scene of *Le Thé au harem*, in which Madjid and his gang are pursued by the police for no specific reason mentioned. With regard to *Le Thé au harem*, I suggested that the lack of a specified crime advanced the notion that Madjid's 'crime' was that of being ethnically different. This evaluation applies to *La Noce des fous* as well, in that the protagonist's 'crime' is also that of being ethnically different, but this conclusion is reached through an implicit association between ethnic difference and the ways in which the protagonist deviates from the norm. The lack of a specific crime in *La Noce des fous* allows for certain other 'abnormalities', such as psychiatric illness, in the behaviour of the protagonist (which do not seem to amount to criminal offences) to become the focus of his trial, creating the impression that he is being condemned for deviating from the norm rather than for murder, burglary, or any other offence which would normally lead to imprisonment.

This condemnation for being different is exemplified when the protagonist is asked why he had strangled the victim, to which he innocently replies, 'parce qu'il était mort'.⁷⁶⁰ This ingenuous and seemingly innocuous reply is immediately attacked by the prosecutor, who deems this particular act to which the protagonist so openly admits 'une vérité infâme' and evidence that the protagonist is 'capable d'étrangler de ses mains le souffle dernier d'un pauvre homme, sans un soupçon de regret ou de repentir'.⁷⁶¹ Thus, the protagonist is condemned for a seemingly inoffensive act: strangling an already dead man. The honesty of his answer suggests that the protagonist himself considers such an act insignificant, but he is vilified for his response by the prosecutor, who deceitfully interprets it as a cold, remorseless attempt to ensure the

⁷⁶⁰ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 127. No explicit reason explaining why the protagonist strangles the dead body is provided. However, the act is immediately preceded by an evocation of the ill fate awaiting the protagonist as a consequence of the murder. The protagonist proceeds to jump on the body, strangle it, and repeatedly knock the dead man's head on the floor as he weeps. See Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 90. I interpret the protagonist's behaviour as an act of desperation as he comes to comprehend the consequences of the events which have just unfolded.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

death of the victim.⁷⁶² Significantly, it is the ability of the prosecutor to depict the protagonist as a murderer which helps to condemn him. The protagonist is not being condemned for strangling the last breath out of the victim, but for being capable of doing so. Therefore, it is the contrast in the ways in which the prosecutor and the protagonist express themselves that contributes to the protagonist's conviction. The protagonist's naive, honest remark that he strangled the body 'parce qu'il était mort' is turned into proof of his guilt by the cunning and deception of the way in which the remark is interpreted by the prosecutor, who represents a formalisation of society's judgment of the protagonist. Consequently, the protagonist is condemned for not having the verbal and intellectual means by which to defend himself and, over the course of the trial, the narrator alludes further to his lack of education – an example of his deviation from the majority – as a handicap to his ability to disprove his guilt.

The trial begins with a presentation of the charges which, as outlined above, remain ambiguous, and this ambiguity is underlined by the protagonist's lack of understanding of what is being discussed during the trial. Though he recognises the names and places specified in the indictment, this is all he is able to understand, and he states that 'plus tard, je ne compris ni les questions posées à mon avocat, ni celles posées au procureur. Ils s'exprimaient avec des phrases dont j'ignorais le sens'.⁷⁶³ This lack of understanding of his own trial prefigures the protagonist's condemnation for his lack of education, his inability to express himself in such a way as to defend his actions (strangling the dead man), as opposed to the prosecutor's ability to manipulate language

⁷⁶² The reason the protagonist gives for strangling the dead man, 'parce qu'il était mort', is reminiscent of Meursault's attempt to explain his shooting of his Arab victim in his own trial in Albert Camus's *L'Étranger*; 'c'était à cause du soleil'. Albert Camus, *L'Étranger*, 2nd edn ([Paris]: Éditions Gallimard, 1996), p. 103. Both responses indicate the inability of the respective protagonists to defend themselves. Indeed, there are other elements of comparison between the two trials. While it is not within the scope of this study to compare these in depth, it is worth noting that, according to Patrick Day, Meursault's 'guilt is established by behaviours preceding the murder itself' and that he 'deviates from society's norms and must be punished for it'. See Patrick Day, 'A Comparative Study of Crime and Punishment in Ousmane Sembène's *Le Docker Noir* and Albert Camus's *L'Étranger*', *Africa Today*, 52.3 (2006), 83-96. Original's italics. Thus, both Meursault and the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* are condemned for factors other than the crime for which they are officially put on trial.

⁷⁶³ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 126.

in such a way as to condemn the protagonist. His lack of understanding is aggravated by the venom in the prosecutor's language, leading to the protagonist being completely silenced and incapable of expressing himself, as follows:

Il y avait une telle force dans l'intonation dramatique de sa voix que j'en fus effrayé [...] Il chargeait ses mots de je ne sais quel poids d'irrévocable sous lequel je me sentis vaciller [...] J'aurais voulu lever la tête vers le juge, lui expliquer pourquoi j'avais fait cela, mais mes yeux restaient fixés au plancher. Ma terreur me fit perdre l'usage de la parole.⁷⁶⁴

The protagonist buckles under the weight of the prosecutor's words, and the idea that the words themselves are irrevocable emphasises the idea that it is linguistic difference, itself linked to social status, which contributes to the protagonist's condemnation. He is unable to reverse what is being said due to his own failure to find the right words, underlined by his desire to explain himself to the judge but finding this impossible due to being stripped of 'l'usage de la parole'. Furthermore, reference to a criminal offence which would normally lead to imprisonment is bypassed in favour of a focus on the protagonist's inability to express himself in order to defend his actions, pointing towards his lack of a conventional education and upbringing, which themselves become the crime. Indeed, the response of the protagonist's lawyer to this silence is to call for 'la chance d'une rééducation',⁷⁶⁵ underlining further that the protagonist needs to be rehabilitated by being provided with the 'correct' education. In this context, rehabilitation amounts to assimilation into the system and becoming like the majority, as reflected by the French government's organisation of 'cérémonies de remise de décrets de naturalisation' to formalise the offering and according of French values to foreigners. The protagonist of *La Noce des fous* is judged as delinquent not because he has committed a crime that would normally lead to imprisonment (though the

⁷⁶⁴ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 127.

⁷⁶⁵ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 128.

prosecutor says he has), but because he deviates from the norm, in this instance because he has not received a 'normal' education and upbringing. He is 'uncivilised', as he has not been able to master the French language, which was so crucial to colonialism's 'civilising mission', and this linguistic deficiency contributes to his condemnation.⁷⁶⁶

The association of delinquency with the lack of a conventional background, educational or otherwise, underlines the entrapment of French youths of Algerian origin in a vicious circle. As their inevitable difference is deemed delinquent, this classification leads them to fulfil the role reserved for them which, in turn, prevents them from being able to follow a conventional path. Furthermore, whether the prosecutor is justified or not in his condemnation of the protagonist for strangling a dead body does not matter. The protagonist's correspondence to certain characteristics which mark him out as 'anomalous' precedes the reality or not of the crime, reflecting Girard's observation that 'il arrive même que les crimes soient réels, mais ce ne sont pas eux [...] qui jouent le premier rôle dans le choix des persécuteurs, c'est l'appartenance des victimes à certaines catégories particulièrement exposées à la persécution'.⁷⁶⁷ In *La Noce des fous*, whether we deem strangling a dead body a crime or not, the protagonist's offence is real because he has participated in burglary which, albeit unintentionally, led to murder. However, this offence is hardly mentioned during his trial, which instead focuses on his psychiatric disorder and lack of education – the ways in which the protagonist deviates from the norm – reflecting Girard's assertion that it is the person's conformity to certain characteristics marking him/her out as a victim which primarily leads to his/her persecution, before the reality of any crimes that he/she may have committed.

⁷⁶⁶ In this condemnation due to an inability to master the French language, there can be detected a reversal of the linguistic proficiency of Begag's characters, which prefigures Begag's own success both professionally and in becoming a fully integrated French citizen.

⁷⁶⁷ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 28.

Institutionalising Ethnic Difference

Underlying the condemnation of the protagonist to silence and due to silence (he is unable to defend himself because he cannot find the right words, the resulting conviction keeps him silent and, moreover, anything he does say can be manipulated and used against him) is his ethnicity and personal and collective history. Having been vilified for stating that he strangled the victim because he was already dead, he is again asked why he did so. This time, the protagonist remains silent, telling the reader that, in order to answer the question, he would have to narrate his entire life until that point, as follows:

Mais comment lui dire le morne et interminable cours des jours et des nuits qui m'avait entraîné jusque-là, et toutes les choses qu'il ne connaîtrait jamais? Il m'eût fallu remonter l'aiguille du temps jusqu'à la seconde où je suis né. Je me tenais devant lui, l'esprit tendu à se rompre, tentant de ramasser dans ma mémoire les morceaux qui formaient mon existence, mille souvenirs que je désirais ardemment oublier.⁷⁶⁸

In order to explain the act for which he is being condemned, the protagonist suggests that he would have to 'remonter l'aiguille du temps jusqu'à la seconde où [il est] né' and recount his entire personal history to the court. Thus, the protagonist's crime is traced back to his birth, which extends the reasons for his criminality to the circumstances which led to his birth as well as the path which his life has taken since his birth. Furthermore, the evocation of the protagonist's birth suggests that he was judged at birth and that the trial now taking place has, in a sense, already taken place, reflecting

⁷⁶⁸ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 128.

Girard's argument that 'la victime est condamné d'avance, sans doute, elle ne peut se défendre, son procès est toujours déjà fait'.⁷⁶⁹

In turn, this pre-judgment underlines the notion that, like Madjid, the protagonist's crime in *La Noce des fous* is that he is ethnically different, the descendant of a collective story of migration. This collective history in which the protagonist's personal history is embedded itself deviates from the dominant French historical narrative, as discussed in Chapter 3, suggesting furthermore that the protagonist is judged as delinquent because his history deviates from the dominant version of history. Reinforcing this notion, the protagonist suggests that the court would never understand his history, which is made up of 'toutes les choses qu'il[s] ne connaîtra[ent] jamais': the protagonist's history deviates from the dominant version to the extent that it is incomprehensible to majority society. Moreover, there is doubt about the protagonist's own ability to recall his history, suggesting that, just as he is silenced, so is his history. He attempts to remember, but is unable to do so as his existence is made up of 'morceaux', scraps of memories,⁷⁷⁰ and because he wishes to forget the fragments of memory that he does possess. The seemingly paradoxical idea that the protagonist simultaneously possesses a thousand memories ('mille souvenirs que je désirais ardemment oublier') and a few scraps of memory is significant in that it attests to the richness and weight of the protagonist's history, while also suggesting that it is a silenced, fragmented history which the protagonist wants to forget because it is too traumatic to recall. According to Sebbar, memory loss, along with other types of loss, is inevitable when one's personal history is embedded in a history of conflict or crisis, stating that 'si on se déplace dans une situation de crise ou de guerre, ce qui est souvent

⁷⁶⁹ Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 56.

⁷⁷⁰ The idea that the protagonist's history is made up of fragments resonates with the depiction of the past shared by France and Algeria as a history of 'gaps and blanks', discussed at length in Chapter 3, especially with reference to Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. Thus, the fragmentation of this past, and its memory, can be detected across different texts of the primary corpus, attesting to a wider inability to piece together the memory of Franco-Algerian history, in which the migration of Algerian populations to France is imbricated.

le cas, on se déplace dans la perte [...] Perte de la mémoire, de la langue, de l'histoire, du milieu familial'.⁷⁷¹ Therefore, the personal story of the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* can once again be related to a collective history of war, migration ('déplacement'), and consequent memory loss or fragmentation, itself exacerbated by France's historical forgetting of the Algerian War. The silencing of the protagonist's history, together with his own desire to forget, leads to his inability to discern his own existence, evidenced as follows: 'Mais, ma vie, j'avais la conviction profonde de ne pas la connaître, et cela depuis que j'étais né'.⁷⁷² Ultimately, this concurrent silencing and forgetting works to condemn the protagonist. He cannot articulate his history because it is itself silenced, and this inability contributes to his conviction as a delinquent.

Therefore, the protagonist of *La Noce des fous* is condemned due to his personal history, which cannot be articulated because it is embedded in a traumatic collective history of conflict, and which is, furthermore, incomprehensible to dominant society due to the silence that has characterised this history. In addition, he is condemned for the path that his life has taken, which deviates from the accepted path. Thus, he is, in effect, convicted for being of Algerian origin and for being a migrant. His silence on being asked for the second time why he had strangled the dead man is due to not knowing how to explain the path which has led him to this point in his life, as follows: 'Mais comment lui dire le morne et interminable cours des jours et des nuits qui m'avait entraîné jusque-là[?]',⁷⁷³ The rhetorical question posed by the narrator-protagonist evokes his status as a 'passager de toujours' who has inherited the experience of migration and is consequently trapped in an interminable, circular movement on the 'équateur sur la circonférence du monde'.⁷⁷⁴ However, his inability to explain this experience of migration to the court – indeed, it cannot be explained since it is an

⁷⁷¹ Hiddleston, 'Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l'oubli', p. 11.

⁷⁷² Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 129.

⁷⁷³ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 128.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

experience which deviates from the trajectory assumed by the majority and so is incomprehensible to the majority – prevents the protagonist from defending himself, contributing to his guilty sentence. Furthermore, his evocation of his status as a ‘passager de toujours’ in his explanation of how this status has led him to delinquency reinforces the association between migration and delinquency, and the potential blurring of perennial traveller with perennial criminal. Significantly though, the protagonist’s trial in *La Noce des fous* highlights that it is the experience of migration which comes before a life of delinquency. Not only does the narrator allude to this idea by evoking his trajectory as (the son of) a migrant, but the notion that he is being condemned for certain ‘abnormalities’ (his diagnosis as a schizophrenic, his lack of education, his ethnicity and personal and collective history)⁷⁷⁵ rather than a real crime (highlighted by the ambiguity with regard to what he is being tried for) underlines the protagonist’s condemnation for the ways in which he deviates from what is accepted in dominant society. He is not condemned for being delinquent, but he is convicted as delinquent because of his ‘signes victimaires’, which can be traced back to the collective experience of Algerian migration to France: an experience that turned migrants and their children into perennial travellers due to the enduring burden of the memory of migration, their estrangement from their culture of origin, and their marginalisation from the culture to which they have been displaced.

Breaking the Cycle?

The link between (the act of) migration and delinquency is reprised by Mounsi in *Le Voyage des âmes*. In this case, Mounsi not only emphasises the life of crime brought

⁷⁷⁵ The misconception of difference as abnormality is made evident by Girard, who states that ‘ce n’est pas l’autre *nomos* qu’on voit dans l’autre mais l’anomalie, ce n’est pas l’autre norme, mais l’anormalité’. Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 34.

about by the endless and aimless wandering of the ‘passager de toujours’, but also draws attention to the debilitating effect of displacement and the journey. The very title of the novel evokes a journey, providing a multifaceted outlook with regard to those embarking on the journey. The more human image of the journey of the souls contrasts to the soulless image of a migrating mass of people, recalling Sebbar’s attention to representing the intimate and the personal in the experience of war, as follows: ‘Ce qui m’intéresse d’une certaine manière ce n’est pas le sens de la guerre. C’est l’intimité de la guerre, et l’intimité, c’est le singulier’.⁷⁷⁶ Like Sebbar, Mounsi signals his intention to examine the particular, lived experience of migration, rather than migration as a sociological phenomenon for instance, by providing a subtle reminder in the title of *Le Voyage des âmes* that migration involves human experience with all its fluctuating emotions, and is not an impersonal act that is accomplished straightforwardly. This attention to the personal suggests that the experience being depicted is not necessarily representative of all other experiences of war or migration, but does allow for the depiction of experiences that are symptomatic of the difficulties endured by those who go through such upheaval. Conversely, the ‘voyage of the souls’ at the same time dehumanises those embarking on the journey by suggesting that migrants *become* souls, in the sense that they enter a state in between life and death, as opposed to calling attention to the fact that migrants *have* souls. Such an interpretation points towards the potential debilitating impact of migration, which uproots the migrant from his/her homeland without providing a new sense of belonging in the migrant’s adopted land. This debilitation – of becoming a lost soul – is the state in which we find the narrator-protagonist at the end of *Le Voyage des âmes*.

⁷⁷⁶ Hiddleston, ‘Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l’oubli’, p. 13. While Sebbar is specifically referring to war, and the Algerian War in particular, the journey undertaken by the protagonist of *Le Voyage des âmes* from Algeria to France, which occurs during the war, can be regarded as inextricably linked to the war. Underlining this link, Hargreaves notes that ‘a wave of Algerian families settled in France during the war of independence, carrying the total from 6,000 at its inception to 30,000 when the conflict ended in 1962’. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*, p. 12. Thus, the legacy of the war is conveyed through the migration of Algerian populations to France during the war.

Bed-stricken, delirious, and suicidal – a result of his errance⁷⁷⁷ – the protagonist dreams of a ship waiting to take him back to Algeria, which provides a symmetrical correspondence to the beginning of the novel, extending the cause of his affliction to his initial displacement from Algeria. The forbidding nature of the ship at the end of the narrative – ‘Il a quelque chose d’inquiétant, très noir, sans port d’attache, ni chiffre, ni nom, sans pavillon’⁷⁷⁸ – reinforces the correspondence with the ship that takes the young protagonist from Algeria to France at the beginning of the text. Referring to the day of his departure from Algeria, the narrator-protagonist retrospectively suggests that the ship which took him away from Algeria is now dilapidated and run aground, as follows: ‘À la pointe d’un port, le navire où j’ai embarqué ce jour-là est peut-être couché dans la vase maintenant, tout à fait semblable à la carcasse d’un monstre marin’.⁷⁷⁹ Therefore, there is an implication that it is this particular ship which has come to take him back to Algeria at the end of the novel. Left to rot since the protagonist’s departure from Algeria, it has been waiting to take him back to his homeland. However, this return cannot be realised since the ship is not functional, and emphasises that the return to Algeria is only an illusion. According to Begag and Chaouite, the ‘myth of the return’ constitutes a common theme in Franco-Algerian writing, which they explain as follows:

⁷⁷⁷ The pages preceding the final two chapters of the novel, in which we find the narrator-protagonist bed-stricken, provide an intensified depiction of his wandering and delinquency, functioning as a kind of confession in which he admits committing ‘quelques actes sordides’, before moving on to recount his state of debilitation in the final pages of the novel. By following this depiction of errance with a portrayal of the narrator-protagonist’s torment, Mounsi attributes the debilitation of his protagonist to the errance which precedes it. See Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, pp. 141-45. Furthermore, by succumbing to his errance in this way, the protagonist also succumbs to society’s desire to pathologise him, corroborating the notion that ‘tout individu qui éprouve des difficultés d’adaptation [...] est plus ou moins interchangeable avec l’infirme’. Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 29. The protagonist is thus punished for being Other by contracting illness.

⁷⁷⁸ Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 153.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Autant la dénonciation de leur vécu douloureux en France émerge avec véhémence de ces écrits, autant l'impossible réancrage dans le pays des parents est souligné avec force à travers des voyages de déception. C'est la confrontation avec l'illusion du mythe du retour.⁷⁸⁰

Begag and Chaouite argue that the deceptive nature of the return is reinforced as writers seek to emphasise their (largely autobiographical) characters' unhappy existence in France. Correspondingly, in *Le Voyage des âmes*, the narrator-protagonist evokes the impossibility of a return to Algeria at the moment when he is at his weakest, when the consequences of his errance – itself a reflection and a consequence of his unhappy existence in France – have taken their toll. In turn, this confrontation with the illusion of the 'mythe du retour' emphasises the entrapment of the 'passager de toujours' in his/her endless and aimless circular journey. As the realisation of the mythical nature of a return to Algeria occurs at the same time as the realisation of their exclusion from French society (acceptance in French society also becoming mythical), the notion that the children of Algerian migrants are situated in a 'no man's land' in between France and Algeria, with no path leading to either, is underlined. Instead, they are condemned to follow the circular, destination-less journey of the 'passager de toujours', as it becomes apparent that both the return to Algeria and acceptance in French society are mythical and illusory.

By using the image of the ship to mark the beginning and end of *Le Voyage des âmes*, Mounsi implies that what has occurred in between is a result of the displacement set in motion by the ship's uprooting of the protagonist from his homeland. Having brought about the protagonist's rupture from Algeria, the ship arrives to alleviate it by taking him back. However, the journey back is an illusion, indicating that the protagonist remains exiled from both France, where he cannot find stability, and Algeria, to where he cannot return: he remains in the 'no man's land' in between the

⁷⁸⁰ Begag and Chaouite, *Écartés d'identité*, p. 100.

two. Indeed, an image of a ‘no man’s land’ also appears at the end of *Le Voyage des âmes*, in a dream in which the protagonist finds himself in a desert. There is no explicit indication that the desert is in Algeria, though such a setting does imply that an imaginary transportation back to Algeria has taken place. However, the dream is not a positive one, indicating that a return to the land of the protagonist’s birth would not solve the delirium that he is suffering as a result of his migration to France. In fact, the dream reinforces the protagonist’s debilitation, as he has lost his ability to speak and can hardly move.⁷⁸¹ Therefore, the image of a positive return to Algeria is rejected in favour of the implication that a return is not possible, nor desirable (also indicated by the ominous appearance of the ship waiting to take him back), suggesting that the protagonist’s exile will not be resolved by a return to his homeland. Furthermore, such a solution would play into the hands of those who wish to ‘purger la communauté des éléments impurs qui la corrompent’.⁷⁸² Like being banished to the margins, returning to Algeria does not break the cycle of migration, delinquency, and permanent transience, but only ignores it in the misguided hope that it will disappear.

While Mounsi depicts migration as the cause of his protagonists’ delinquency, marginalisation, and sense of exile, taking into consideration both *La Noce des fous* and *Le Voyage des âmes*, a way out of the endless, circular movement followed by his protagonists is not offered. This lack of escape is underlined by the symmetry of *Le Voyage des âmes*, which links the end of the text to the beginning, creating a cyclic effect which reflects the protagonist’s entrapment in his never-ending, circular movement with no destination in sight, and corroborates Mounsi’s depiction in *La Noce des fous* that his protagonist personifies ‘un équateur sur la circonférence du monde’.⁷⁸³ Furthermore, the lack of resolution in *Le Voyage des âmes* is emphasised by the way in

⁷⁸¹ See Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes*, p. 161.

⁷⁸² Girard, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, p. 26.

⁷⁸³ Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, p. 19.

which the narrative ends with a question, reinforcing the endlessness of the vicious circle in which the protagonist is trapped, as opposed to offering any escape from it.

On the other hand, Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* does point towards a means of escape. Though she does not enter a life of delinquency, the instability into which Amel is thrown on discovering the gravity of the events of 17 October 1961, and how her personal history and identity are destabilised by their imbrication in a collective history of violence suffered, leads to a certain degree of errance. She shares with the protagonists of *Le Thé au harem*, *La Noce des fous*, and *Le Voyage des âmes* a level of errance in the sense that she enters a state of wandering. However, what sets Amel apart is that her wandering has a specific goal: to piece together the events of 17 October 1961. Unlike the circular movement followed by the other characters, Amel's journey is straight and fixed in its purpose.⁷⁸⁴ Her newfound awareness of the past, and her desire to discover it even before it was revealed to her, allow her to seek to re-establish the stability that the transmission of the memory of 17 October 1961, a historical event specific to the experience and memory of Algerian migration to France, has temporarily taken away from her. As has been indicated throughout this thesis, in no other text included in the primary corpus is history confronted to such an extent as in *La Seine était rouge*. While in *Le Voyage des âmes* the past is explicitly referenced in the narrator-protagonist's recollection of his experiences during the Algerian War, these memories haunt him and contribute to his sense of rupture and exile, as evidenced by the disjointed narrative caused by the narrator's eliciting of memories from his Algerian childhood, which creates a constant shift between Algeria and France. Rather than help him to escape his status as a 'passager de toujours', memories of the past in fact

⁷⁸⁴ This positive representation of movement in *La Seine était rouge*, which allows for reconciliation with the past, is reflected in the other text by Sebbar included in the primary corpus, *Fatima*, in which the protagonist, Dalila, challenges the stasis to which she is confined at home by leaving her family in order to assert her own subjectivity. Thus, the role of Sebbar as a counterpoint to the three other, male authors included in the primary corpus is further underlined. While the perpetual movement of the male characters we encounter in Mounsi's texts for instance indicates their permanent entrapment, the movement of Sebbar's female characters points towards transcending such entrapment.

exacerbate this condition. Conversely, in *La Seine était rouge*, the past is confronted in a positive manner: it is used as a tool which can help navigate the ‘passager de toujours’ and potentially bring an end to his/her seemingly endless, directionless journey.

In confronting history, a temporary instability is possible, as evidenced by the state of wandering entered by Amel as she attempts to piece together the events of 17 October 1961. However, in *La Seine était rouge*, this instability is presented as a necessary stage in the search to establish a new stability, reflecting Begag’s and Chaouite’s argument that ‘une instabilité passagère est indissociable de la recherche d’une nouvelle stabilité [...] la sédentarité ne peut être analysée hors de la mobilité’.⁷⁸⁵ The confrontation with history in order to establish a new stability instigates ‘une instabilité passagère’, which manifests itself in various ways. For Amel, it causes a destabilising of identity but, taking into account also the wider confrontation with its colonial past that French society needs to undertake, both Rosello and McCormack point out that confronting the past can lead to the reopening of unhealed wounds which, in turn, produces and exacerbates conflicts of memory in the public sphere. Rosello includes writing, film, but also official ceremonies and new legal measures as having the potential to participate in this reviving of past conflicts, stating that such factors ‘tantôt apaisent et tantôt ravivent des blessures des uns ou des autres en exacerbant le souvenir des conflits entre la France et ses anciennes colonies ou protectorats’.⁷⁸⁶ Thus, as well as having the potential to appease historical conflicts, confronting the past may also bring about a degree of instability by aggravating conflicts which, the majority of the time, remain beneath the surface of French society. Furthermore, in analysing the media’s confrontation with the memory of the Algerian War at the turn of the twenty-first century, McCormack notes that ‘the same issues as at the time of the Algerian War

⁷⁸⁵ Begag and Chaouite, *Écarts d’identité*, p. 41.

⁷⁸⁶ Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, p. 12.

seem once more to have been rehearsed, with little “new” material’,⁷⁸⁷ indicating a repetition of past conflicts without any progress in coming to terms with this past. As regards the ‘passager de toujours’, this replaying of the same issues hinders any possibility of rethinking this permanently transient status. However, McCormack also argues that ‘this “work of memory” is important in forcing French society to address issues that it would rather forget’,⁷⁸⁸ pointing towards the necessity of the albeit potentially inflammatory process of confronting the past if a more inclusive historical narrative is to be constructed. As *La Seine était rouge* indicates, confronting the past can be destabilising, but this is a necessary instability that can lead to coming to terms with the past and establishing a sense of reconciliation. Out of this phase of instability set in motion by confronting the past can emerge the possibility of finally reconsidering the status of the ‘passager de toujours’, and the potential signalling of a phase in which he/she may come to the end of his/her so far seemingly endless circular journey. Indeed, if *Le Voyage des âmes* indicates the instability to which confronting the past can lead, then *La Seine était rouge* points towards an end to that instability, and a potential end to the condition of being a ‘passager de toujours’. Thus, Sebbar’s distinct position in relation to the other three authors in the primary corpus is highlighted: by confronting history to the greatest extent, her texts emphasise the importance of engaging with the past in order to create a present and future in which those who inherit the legacy of this past can negotiate a space for themselves within dominant French society.

In this chapter, we have seen that delinquency in the work of Mounsi and Charef is inextricably linked to restless, endless wandering, and I have argued that this errance can be traced back to the experience and memory of migration, which makes the migrant, or the person onto whom this memory has been projected, a ‘passager de toujours’. This status of being permanently in transit prevents both acceptance into

⁷⁸⁷ McCormack, *Collective Memory*, p. 160.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

French society and a return to Algeria (therefore only permitting existence on the margins, the ‘no man’s land’ in between the two) and, furthermore, designates the migrant as always already delinquent since he/she is always situated outside the dominant group, ‘the nerve centre’.⁷⁸⁹ This link between social exclusion and delinquency is compounded by France’s republican conception of nationhood, based on the principle of unity by uniformity and the invisibility of ethnic difference, which marks out any signs of possessing Algerian ethnic origin as incompatible with dominant society. Thus, dominant society defines its boundaries in such a way as to keep those who do not conform, those who display particular ‘signes victimaires’ – in this case based on ethnicity – excluded. This exclusion designates ethnic difference as a sign of delinquency, and sets in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy by which the outsider enters a life of crime as this is the role assigned to him/her by society. Consequently, the texts by Charef and Mounsi analysed in this chapter reflect Jaccomard’s argument that, while ‘a prevalence of delinquency and crime in this type of texts could lend itself to the charge of reinforcing prejudices’,⁷⁹⁰ they in fact have the principal effect of drawing attention to the ways in which hegemonic powers maintain their dominance over certain victimised groups of society.⁷⁹¹ By linking delinquency to restless wandering, and extending this link to the imposition of the memory and experience of migration, Charef and Mounsi highlight that their characters are not delinquent by default, as society’s rules for acceptance might suggest. Rather, their delinquency is a result of France’s continued hostility to ethnic difference, which keeps migrants and their children trapped in a permanent state of transience, itself a consequence of the inherited memory and experience of migration. This argument supports the conclusions of the second chapter, in which I discussed the impossible prerequisite dictating that minority ethnic

⁷⁸⁹ See Erikson, ‘Notes on the Sociology of Deviance’, p. 13.

⁷⁹⁰ Jaccomard, ‘*Racaille versus Flics?*’, p. 159.

⁷⁹¹ Jaccomard also asserts that ‘*beur* texts are here to denounce the real criminals among us’. Jaccomard, ‘*Racaille versus Flics?*’, p. 176.

populations eradicate references to their origins and assume the characteristics of the majority ethnic population in order to be accepted in dominant French society. Furthermore, at the end of this chapter, we saw that the potentially painful confrontation with history can allow for the re-evaluation of the status of the 'passager de toujours', and a potential escape from this permanent transience, as highlighted by Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. Though no such escape is offered by the other texts analysed in this chapter (even when, in the case of *Le Voyage des âmes*, the past is explicitly confronted), *La Seine était rouge* underlines the need to continue the process of remembering and rethinking the past, and the necessity, as discussed in the third chapter, to bring to light an alternative, Other historical narrative, one which considers the experience of France's sizeable Algerian population. The coinciding of the publication of Sebbar's novel in 1999 with the year in which the French government officially acknowledged the Algerian War suggests that a new phase has already been signalled. However, whether this official recognition of the war at the turn of the century marks the phase of stability sought by the 'passager de toujours', and provides a wider resolution to the conflicts engendered by the lack of confrontation with France's colonial past and the Algerian War, remains to be seen.

Conclusion: Remembering Franco-Algerian History in the Twenty-First Century

Through analysing the work of four Franco-Algerian authors, this thesis has examined the legacy of the Algerian War of Independence and its continuing impact on contemporary French society. Having focused over the course of the thesis on the period beginning with the emergence of the first Beur writers on the French literary scene in the early 1980s, up until the official recognition of the Algerian War by the French government in 1999, I will conclude by considering some of the developments regarding the memory of the Algerian War since 1999. In so doing, I will analyse the extent to which the official recognition of the war has brought a definitive end to the silence that has historically characterised the memory of the war. More specifically, I will question whether the state-sponsored breaking of the silence has signalled a phase of acceptance with regard to France's colonial past, which precludes any further confrontation with the past. One of the aims of this thesis has been to demonstrate that 1999 does not, in fact, signal the end of a phase of remembrance, but the continuation of a phase of confronting and rewriting history, which the official recognition of the Algerian War should accelerate rather than bring to an end. In this way, the thesis conforms with Donadey's argument that we are currently situated in the third phase of the 'syndrome d'Algérie', which consists of 'la ré-écriture de cette histoire'.⁷⁹² I have also argued that fiction contributes to the rewriting of the history shared by France and Algeria – which comprises a history of colonisation and immigration as well as the Algerian War – as Donadey herself argues with reference to Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*.⁷⁹³ Therefore, in order to further examine the memory of the Algerian War post-

⁷⁹² Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire', pp. 188-89. As Donadey outlines, the first phase of the Algeria syndrome consists of a period of mourning with regard to the war, which is quickly superseded by a second phase consisting of the suppression of the memory of the war, which lasts until the beginning of the 1990s. See Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire', p. 188. See also Donadey, "'Une certaine idée de la France'".

⁷⁹³ See Donadey, 'Retour sur mémoire', p. 189.

1999, I will turn to some of the works of literature by the four authors studied in this thesis published after the French government's official recognition of the war, with the aim of outlining the ways in which these more recent texts relate to and develop the concerns highlighted in the texts that I have analysed over the course of the thesis. In particular, I will consider the extent to which the post-1999 works can be inscribed in the phase, highlighted by Donadey, of rewriting the history of the Algerian War, and the degree to which these texts suggest that the war continues to permeate and impact upon contemporary French society.

The End of Repentance and Historical Silence?

The official recognition by the French government in 1999 that a war took place over Algerian independence, as well as the unveiling of the plaque on the Pont Saint-Michel in 2001 commemorating the victims of 17 October 1961, suggest that the wave of remembrance regarding the Algerian War reached a peak at the turn of the century. However, while the silence with regard to the war and to moments of illegal violence perpetrated during it was 'officially' broken, House and MacMaster observe that 'state responsibility for specific aspects of the war such as the use of illegal violence has not been officially recognized'.⁷⁹⁴ Thus, the French government, despite acknowledging the Algerian War and 17 October 1961, continues to minimise its own role during the war, reflecting House's and MacMaster's argument that 'while the 10 June 1999 law had recognized a "war" situation in Algeria during 1954-62, it did not allow for any reflection on the notion of state responsibility'.⁷⁹⁵ This hesitation to acknowledge state responsibility was most recently apparent during the fiftieth anniversary

⁷⁹⁴ House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 315.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

commemorations of 17 October 1961, during which renewed calls for the government to accept its responsibility in the violence continued to be met with resistance, as evidenced by Minister of the Interior Claude Guéant's comment that France 'doit faire face à son passé [mais] ne doit certainement pas présenter des excuses'.⁷⁹⁶ Furthermore, the mayor of the Neuilly suburb of Paris, Christophe Fromantin, refused to attend a commemoration ceremony on the 17 October 2011 which took place at the Pont de Neuilly, a significant landmark of the 1961 demonstration marking the most direct gateway into Paris used by the protestors.⁷⁹⁷ Explaining his absence, Fromantin pointed to the absence of 17 October from 'le calendrier officiel des commémorations patriotiques tel qu'arrêté par le gouvernement de la République'.⁷⁹⁸ Therefore, the lack of governmental acknowledgment of 17 October as an official date of commemoration is revealed to filter down to local levels of government, which themselves refuse to recognise 17 October as a date worthy of commemoration, exacerbating and repeating the silence that has historically characterised the Algerian War rather than opening up avenues towards acknowledging atrocities of the colonial past. Such hesitation to recognise state responsibility during the war works against the 'official' breaking of the silence at the turn of the century,⁷⁹⁹ and underlines the idea that this official recognition did not mark an end to the historical silence and to the need to confront history. On the contrary, such initiatives of remembrance should accelerate memory work rather than bring it to a halt.

The very fact that dates such as the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of 17 October 1961 provide an opportunity to open up debates on the Algerian War and French colonialism more generally indicates a greater readiness to confront the past,

⁷⁹⁶ '17 Octobre 1961: des manifestations pour la reconnaissance d'un "crime d'Etat"' [accessed 5 January 2012] (para. 3 of 14).

⁷⁹⁷ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 117.

⁷⁹⁸ '17 Octobre 1961: des manifestations pour la reconnaissance d'un "crime d'Etat"', para. 12 of 14.

⁷⁹⁹ As well as overlooking state responsibility with regard to the repression of 17 October 1961, the government also rejected calls to acknowledge and condemn the use of torture during the war. See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 316.

which marks a degree of progress even since 2001, when the plaque commemorating the victims of 17 October was unveiled. On that occasion, the unveiling ceremony was not attended by any representative of government,⁸⁰⁰ while the fiftieth anniversary commemoration included, as well as a ceremony at the Pont Saint-Michel, the inauguration of another plaque on the Pont de Clichy, where the Socialist candidate for the 2012 presidential election, François Hollande, laid a wreath in memory of the victims of the repression.⁸⁰¹ To further commemorate the repression in 2011, a book entitled *Le 17 Octobre 1961 par les textes de l'époque* was published, comprising a collection of documents relating to 17 October 1961, including a communiqué from Papon preceding the police repression and the appeal from the FLN for Algerians living in Paris to demonstrate.⁸⁰² Two conferences were also organised in memory of the demonstration, including one at the Assemblée Nationale. Thus, commemoration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of 17 October 1961 did not only comprise ceremonial remembrance, but attempted to facilitate discussion on the past and diffuse hitherto inaccessible information (for example, Jacques Panijel's film *Octobre à Paris*, censored at the time of the Algerian War, was finally shown on screen).⁸⁰³ Continuing this trend, *Le Monde's* contribution to the commemoration included an interactive documentary of 17 October 1961,⁸⁰⁴ consisting of witness accounts of the demonstration; interviews with and information on various actors in the Algerian War, such as Papon and Ali Haroun, who occupied a senior position within the FLN at the

⁸⁰⁰ See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 319.

⁸⁰¹ See Chemin, 'Au pont de Clichy, Hollande rend hommage aux Algériens morts en 1961', [accessed 5 January 2012]

⁸⁰² For further details on the contents of the book, see the official website of the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration <<http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/magazine/2011/10/le-17-octobre-1961-par-les-textes-de-l-epoque>> [accessed 5 January 2012]

⁸⁰³ Information about Panijel's film, the conferences, and the book published as part of the fiftieth anniversary commemorations of 17 October 1961 was gained through e-mail correspondence with Henri Pouillot, representative of the Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples and member of the Collectif 17 octobre, a group of memory activists that campaigns against forgetting 17 October 1961 (see <<http://www.17octobre61.org/?lang=fr>> for details [accessed 5 January 2012]).

⁸⁰⁴ See <http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/visuel/2011/10/17/la-nuit-oubliee_1587567_3224.html#ens_id=1586465> [accessed 5 January 2012]

time of 17 October; wider information on the war and its broader context, including a timeline, video footage, and a section dedicated to instances of violence other than 17 October, such as the Sétif massacre on 8 May 1945; and clips from an interview with Jean-Luc Einaudi, whose groundbreaking work *Le Bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* played a crucial role in bringing the events of the demonstration to public attention in the 1990s.⁸⁰⁵ Consisting, furthermore, of a map of the routes followed by the demonstrators on 17 October, a glossary of key terms relating to the Algerian War, and a substantial bibliography of further resources on 17 October and the war, this interactive documentary testifies to an abundance of information on this particular period of France's history that has not been available to such an extent in the past. The approaching fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Algerian War will undoubtedly provide further occasion for the opening-up of debates regarding France's colonial past.

While the commemorative initiatives put in place in 2011 with regard to 17 October suggest that the 'official' remembrance at the turn of the century has led to an acceleration of memory work, other events since the government's recognition of the Algerian War in 1999 indicate that any such increase in French society's willingness to confront the past continues to find resistance. Significantly, this resistance appears to derive from the state, as evidenced by the government's hesitation to accept responsibility for its role as oppressor during the Algerian War. Other examples of the apparent resistance on the part of the French government to follow up its own steps towards confronting the past at the turn of the century include the passing of the law of 23 February 2005 promoting the positive role of France's overseas presence, and the inauguration in 2003 and 2005 of memorials dedicated to the OAS, the pro-French Algeria organisation which perpetrated a number of murders during the Algerian

⁸⁰⁵ See Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La Bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991). See also House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, pp. 7-8.

War.⁸⁰⁶ By passing a law that seeks to justify colonisation, and by permitting the commemoration of an organisation that played a significant role (along with the FLN) in perpetuating illegal violence during the war, the French government contradicts its own attempts to come to terms with the colonial past through recognising the Algerian War and 17 October 1961. Such inconsistency calls into question the underlying reasons for the government's 'official' commemoration at the turn of the century. As opposed to representing an opportunity to open up avenues towards accepting past atrocities and coming to terms with history, the contradicting narratives espoused by the state since 1999 suggest that the 'official' recognition at the turn of the century represented, on the contrary, an opportunity for the state to appease the demands of a certain portion of the population. House and MacMaster make a similar observation with regard to the 2001 plaque commemorating the victims of 17 October, which has come to be suspiciously viewed as 'the pretext by which to bury demands for French state recognition' of the repression.⁸⁰⁷

France's change in president in 2007, when Nicolas Sarkozy took over the position at the head of government from Jacques Chirac, seems to have played a role in this regression in the state's stance towards remembering the more unsavoury moments in French history, as evidenced by the incumbent's declaration soon after his accession that it was time to 'en finir avec la répentance'.⁸⁰⁸ Thus, after the wave of memory of the 1990s, which reached a peak at the turn of the century, the new French president quite explicitly states his intention to reverse this trend of 'repentance', as Sarkozy himself calls it. As opposed to continuing the trend to repent, in his first speech after his election Sarkozy signals his intention to 'remettre à l'honneur la nation et l'identité

⁸⁰⁶ See Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", pp. 140-41.

⁸⁰⁷ House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 319.

⁸⁰⁸ See for example Jean-Pierre Tuquoi, 'Le Chef de l'État se rendra prochainement en Algérie, en Tunisie et au Maroc', *Le Monde*, 23 June 2007, p. 5.

nationale [et] rendre aux Français la fierté de la France’,⁸⁰⁹ setting up repentance for France’s past role as oppressor as incompatible with forming a strong national identity. Indeed, the question of national identity has been one of the major themes of Sarkozy’s electoral campaign and presidency,⁸¹⁰ as evidenced by his (largely unsuccessful) initiation of a debate on national identity in 2010.⁸¹¹ If the French president considers confronting France’s past role as oppressor as a hindrance to building national identity, his insistence on the question of national identity during and after his accession to the presidency further indicates his desire to reverse the trend of commemoration that led to the official recognition of the Algerian War at the end of the 1990s.

Given this apparent wish to construct and maintain a singular, homogenising conception of national identity, and the concurrent reluctance to build on the state-sponsored acts of remembrance at the turn of the century, it emerges that the themes with which I have engaged over the course of this thesis remain pertinent beyond the period on which I have focused. The monolithic conception of French national identity put forward by President Sarkozy continues to overlook the complexity and multiethnic composition of contemporary French society, which is highlighted by the Franco-Algerian authors whose work I have studied in this thesis, whose characters struggle to negotiate their dual Franco-Algerian identity. Furthermore, the reluctance on the part of the state to accept responsibility for its former role as oppressor indicates that the official recognition of the Algerian War in 1999 did not mark the definitive end to the history of silence which has characterised the memory of the war. On the contrary, this official recognition more accurately indicates that we are currently still in the early stages of the phase of rewriting history: a phase that, judging by the stance of the

⁸⁰⁹ For the whole of Nicolas Sarkozy’s first speech after his election as president, see ‘La France a choisi le changement. Je le mettrai en oeuvre (...) dans un esprit d’union et de fraternité’, *Le Monde*, 8 May 2007, p. 4.

⁸¹⁰ See Cordélia Bonal and Laure Équy, ‘L’Identité Nationale selon Sarkozy’, *Libération*, 2 November 2009 <<http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/0101600818-l-identite-nationale-selon-sarkozy>> [accessed 9 January 2012]

⁸¹¹ See Landrin and Van Eeckhout, ‘Identité nationale: M. Fillon cherche une voie de sortie’, p. 9.

current French government, may prove extensive. As a result, this thesis intervenes at a time when the ongoing narrative of commemoration with regard to the Algerian War continues to prove relevant and, by contributing to this wider body of commemorative work on the Algerian War, seeks to open up the possibility for the continuation of studies such as this. Since recognising the Algerian War as a war constitutes an initial step in a wider confrontation with France's colonial past, further work on this topic is needed (and has already been undertaken) in order to continue the phase of confronting and rewriting the history constructed by the coloniser, and in order to challenge initiatives, such as those espoused by the French government in recent years, which seek to construct a monolithic historical narrative and homogeneous conception of national identity. As Sebbar demonstrates in *La Seine était rouge*, the writer is able to take up this challenge, and in the next section I will discuss the extent to which the four authors on whom I have focused in this thesis continue to rewrite the distorted history put forward by the (former) coloniser, with reference to a selection of their works published after 1999.

Conflict and Remembrance post-1999

Since the success of *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni* in the 1980s, Azouz Begag has perhaps become the best-known Franco-Algerian author of his generation – certainly of the four studied in this thesis – aided by the study of his texts in schools and by his albeit brief and turbulent stint in government, which led to the publication of his governmental memoirs, *Un mouton dans la baignoire* (2007) and *La Guerre des moutons* (2008). As well as these two works detailing his experiences as Minister for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity, Begag has also published a considerable body of

work over the course of his research career as a sociologist. As a writer of fiction, he has published numerous children's books as well as novels inspired by his ethnic background, such as the two analysed in this thesis. Of his works published since 1999, two relate particularly closely to the concerns of this study: *Ahmed de Bourgogne* (2001), written with Ahmed Beneddif, whose oral testimony Begag turns into a literary account; and *Le Marteau pique-cœur* (2004), in which Begag resumes the autobiographical persona we meet in his first two novels, but this time as an adult.

Over the course of this thesis, I have alluded to Begag's relative success in making himself visible in dominant French society, through his literary works penetrating the mainstream and his election to government. I have also suggested that, rather than prove the success of the French system of integration, Begag's successes make him the 'exception that proves the rule', and Begag himself engages with this notion in *Ahmed de Bourgogne*. As Samia Mehrez outlines, the text presents 'the meeting of opposites' as Begag, a success story of the 'Beur' generation, puts into writing the oral testimony of Ahmed Beneddif, who is living in France illegally.⁸¹² Despite both belonging to the same 'Beur' generation, having been born in France to Algerian migrant parents, Begag holds French nationality while Beneddif does not, and Begag's achievements are offset by Beneddif's life of criminality.⁸¹³ Therefore, through this collaborative work, Begag writes 'his other possible life story',⁸¹⁴ that of illegality, deprivation, and *errance* (Beneddif spends much of his life 'in prison cells and clandestine camps all over Europe and the Mediterranean basin').⁸¹⁵ As we have seen throughout this thesis, and especially through the analysis of texts by Charef and Mounsi, such an existence is one with which France's ethnic Algerian population is

⁸¹² See Samia Mehrez, 'Ahmed de Bourgogne: The Impossible Autobiography of a *Clandestine*', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 22 (2002), 36-71 (p. 36). In this conclusion, I only briefly analyse this collaborative work for the purposes of outlining the development in the work of the writers whose literary output I have analysed in this thesis. For a more detailed analysis of *Ahmed de Bourgogne*, see the above article by Mehrez.

⁸¹³ See Mehrez, 'Ahmed de Bourgogne: The Impossible Autobiography of a *Clandestine*', p. 36.

⁸¹⁴ Mehrez, 'Ahmed de Bourgogne: The Impossible Autobiography of a *Clandestine*', p. 41.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

closely associated and, by recognising the path his life could have taken in his articulation of Beneddif's experiences, Begag acknowledges that his own 'success story' should not hide the continuing difficulties faced by the majority of France's Algerian population.

Published in 2004, *Le Marteau pique-coeur* is Begag's most recent fictional text (apart from the children's book *Dites-moi bonjour*) and comprises an autobiographical account of Begag's return to Algeria after the death of his father. This return to the homeland of his parents to lay his father to rest provides Begag with the opportunity to reflect on his father's experience of migrating to France, where he joined the throng of Algerian labourers who sacrificed themselves for a better future for their children. In this way, *Le Marteau pique-coeur* demonstrates a preoccupation with the history of immigration that ties France and Algeria, and which has been transmitted to the author. Such a confrontation with history represents a digression from the concerns raised in *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Béni*, which were seminal texts in the emergent 'Beur' literature of the 1980s and engaged more closely with questions of integration and exclusion rather than history (although the backdrop of history cannot be ignored when considering the presence of ethnic Algerian populations in French society). This development in Begag's literary output reflects the greater preoccupation with history demonstrated over the course of the 1990s, as evidenced in Mounsi's *Le Voyage des âmes* (1997) and Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999). Indeed, Begag's shift towards considering the past that entwines and entangles France and Algeria in a text published after the French government's official recognition of the Algerian War suggests that Franco-Algerian writers have continued to seek to articulate this history, of which the history of Algerian immigration to France is an integral part. In turn, such continuing trends to confront history in the early part of the twenty-first century indicate that, for a certain part of French society at least, official recognition of the Algerian War should

instigate further memory work, rather than signal the end to repentance and remembrance as intimated by President Sarkozy.

Mehdi Charef's most recent novel, *À bras-le-cœur* (2006), is his most autobiographical, and is reminiscent of Mounsi's *Le Voyage des âmes* as it outlines the narrator-protagonist's childhood in Algeria during the colonial era. Charef's text diverges from Mounsi's in that the protagonist remains in Algeria into his adolescent years and experiences the euphoria of independence, before eventually migrating to France with the rest of his family to join his father in a Paris *bidonville*. At the end of the narrative, the reader is left with the protagonist's sense of disillusionment at having exchanged Algeria for the cold, muddy, destitute *bidonville* on the outskirts of Paris. Thus, in a similar manner to Begag, more than two decades after his influential first novel, *Le Thé au harem* (1983), which paved the way for the emergence of 'Beur' literature, Charef's most recent text constitutes a departure from the preoccupations of 1980s 'Beur' literature, resembling more closely the work of Mounsi, who in *Le Voyage des âmes* outlines the rupture of his fictional persona caused by his migration from Algeria to France. Such a shift towards confronting history demonstrated by two of the most influential authors of the 'Beur' movement testifies to the significance of the phase of rewriting history in which we are currently involved. Having articulated and made visible the experience of the children of Algerian migrants in French society over the course of the 1980s, the next step in this process of bringing to light the history shared by France and Algeria, as argued by this thesis, constitutes a more explicit confrontation with this past and the many and diverse ways in which it has impacted on French society. By engaging in such a confrontation in their more recent works, published after the state recognition of the Algerian War in 1999, writers such as Begag and Charef exemplify the need to continue and accelerate the work of memory and rewriting history after the government's official recognition of the war, rather than inhibit such work. As

evidenced by Charef's reconstruction of his Algerian childhood during French colonial rule, his experience of Algerian independence, and his subsequent migration to France in a text published seven years after the state recognition of the war, such state-sponsored recognition paves the way for further accounts of the past, not an end to memory work. As Laronde argues, this repetition is what is needed to combat silence and bring forgotten histories into greater prominence.⁸¹⁶ Underlining this point, Laronde points towards the increasing number of texts and films dedicated to France's colonial past at the turn of the century,⁸¹⁷ of which *À bras-le-cœur* provides a clear example.

Of the four authors studied in this thesis, Mounsi has been the least active in terms of his literary output since 1999. Apart from his reworking of *Le Voyage des âmes* into a more linear narrative in an attempt to make it more accessible, published as *Les Jours Infinis* in 2000, Mounsi's only post-1999 fictional works are appended to Clerc's and Cruveiller's 2009 critical work on Mounsi's literary oeuvre, *Parole de banlieue: Mounsi*. The first of these texts, entitled 'L'Archipel d'Outre-Seine' and recalling especially his autobiographical essay *Territoire d'outre-ville* (1995), is an essay in which Mounsi reprises several of the themes prevalent in his previous work, many of which have been outlined over the course of this thesis. There is not scope in this conclusion to outline all the themes of Mounsi's work which recur in 'L'Archipel d'Outre-Seine', but it is noteworthy that the essay demonstrates a distinct preoccupation with a broad notion of History, a major theme throughout Mounsi's literary output. In 'L'Archipel d'Outre-Seine', this focus on History is evident in the way in which the writer makes reference to antiquity in conjunction with his own personal history, as follows: 'La Seine n'est pas aussi diaphane que la mer qui baigne les Cyclades. Les fonds n'y sont pas aussi limpides. Mon père ce vieil homme courbé sur les chaînes de

⁸¹⁶ See Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 152.

⁸¹⁷ See Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 153.

montage des temps modernes n'était pas Héraclès'.⁸¹⁸ References to Ancient Greece are intertwined with references closer to Mounsi's personal experience, as the narrator's father is compared to Hercules, and the Seine, a Parisian site of significance to France's Algerian population due to the events of 17 October 1961, is compared to the Aegean Sea (the sea that surrounds the Cyclades). Of course, making these comparisons allows Mounsi to (re-)state that his personal history is not situated in the realm of legend: the Seine is not as clear and transparent as the Aegean Sea, tainted as it has been by the Algerian bodies thrown into it by the Parisian police in 1961, and the narrator's father does not possess the legendary strength of Hercules. Nonetheless, while the story of Algerian immigration to France is not as recognised and renowned as that of Hercules and other Ancient Greek myths, it is a story that Mounsi himself claims is worthy of such status, as follows: 'Qui dira les gestes cent fois répétés et l'héroïsme quotidien qui valent bien des légendes?'⁸¹⁹ The story of an Algerian migrant coming to France to work in the car factories of Paris, where he commences 'les gestes cent fois répétés', may appear a monotonous and mundane one, as so many migrant lives followed the same pattern, but for Mounsi this story is as heroic and as worthy of legend as the tales of Ancient Greece, and consequently deserves to be articulated rather than condemned to silence. In the end therefore, by entwining references to antiquity and legend with allusions to the Franco-Algerian past, Mounsi continues the process of breaking the silence with regard to the (hi)story of Algerian immigration to France and turns it into legend. Furthermore, his unceasing preoccupation with the history shared by France and Algeria, which spans his literary output before 1999 and persists ten years later in 'L'Archipel d'Outre-Seine', exemplifies a desire to continue repeating this story, in the same way that myths are repeated across time. This repetition reflects Laronde's argument that 'l'effet de l'anamnèse est d'amplification' and that forgotten

⁸¹⁸ Mounsi, 'L'Archipel d'Outre-Seine', in Clerc and Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue*, pp. 77-93 (p. 81).

⁸¹⁹ Mounsi, 'L'Archipel d'Outre-Seine', p. 81.

events of the past require repetition in order for them to fully emerge from the silence to which they have been subjected.⁸²⁰ Accordingly, state recognition of silenced histories should instigate this amplification and acceleration of memory, rather than inhibit it as the French government has threatened to do in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The other text by Mounsi appended to Clerc's and Cruveiller's book, a short story entitled 'La Prophétie du serpent', indicates a certain shift in the author's work. Unlike the significantly autobiographical nature of his previous output, the short story recounts the narrator's brother's religious awakening and decision to join the jihad in Iraq, for the cause of which he sacrifices himself. Thus, Mounsi turns his attention to the 'war on terror', as opposed to the delinquency and marginalised existence on the outskirts of Paris led by the characters in his previous work. However, while 'La Prophétie du serpent' appears to denote a shift in Mounsi's preoccupations, viewing the two short texts appended to Clerc's and Cruveiller's book collectively allows us to draw parallels between the concerns brought to light in the majority of Mounsi's work and this most recent reflection on the 'war on terror'. If 'L'Archipel d'Outre-Seine', by revisiting the issues that have permeated the literary output of Mounsi and other Franco-Algerian writers, testifies to the lack of resolution of these issues post-1999, then 'La Prophétie du serpent' underlines this lack of resolution by presenting an Arab character who conforms to the stereotype of being a terrorist. Of course, the text does not suggest that all Arabs are terrorists, but its engagement with such issues highlights the continuing suspicion and mistrust ascribed to people of Arab origin in the post-9/11 era. In this way, a collective reading of Mounsi's two short texts suggests that the image of the Arab as a potential scapegoat, an image that I discussed at length in Chapter 4, persists and perpetuates the outsider status of Arab populations. Furthermore, analysing

⁸²⁰ Laronde, "Effets d'histoire", p. 152.

‘L’Archipel d’Outre-Seine’ and ‘La Prophétie du serpent’ together creates a link between contemporary events, such as the ‘war on terror’, and past events, such as the Algerian War, as the image of the Arab as a threat to Western society can be seen to endure over time. By setting up this link between the past shared by France and Algeria and the ‘war on terror’, Mounsi underlines the contemporary relevance of the Algerian War and the period of (de)colonisation more generally.

Of the four authors whose work I have analysed in this thesis, Leïla Sebbar is by far the most prolific. Her publications since 1999 are too numerous to outline in this conclusion,⁸²¹ but a selection of these exemplify the ongoing need to confront the past that is also evident in the post-1999 texts by the other authors included in this thesis. Mirroring to an extent Charef’s *À bras-le-cœur* (2006), Sebbar’s autobiographical work *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (2003) constitutes an attempt on the part of the author to reconstruct her experiences of life in French Algeria, and those of her family, especially her father. Thus, again we find an author whose work has been analysed in this thesis remembering and returning to Algeria in a text published since the official recognition of the Algerian War in 1999, testifying to the persistence of memory work in early twenty-first century Franco-Algerian literature. Indeed, Sebbar’s prolificacy suggests that the need to confront the past is never-ending. Her sense of exile from Algeria, reflected in the title of *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*, which evokes her loss of Algeria through never being taught Arabic, manifests itself in a quest to recuperate Algeria. This quest is further evidenced in her *Algéries en France* trilogy, which combines text and image in an attempt to ‘uncover a lost Algerian history in France’,⁸²² and further represents the inexorable link or entanglement between Algeria

⁸²¹ For a complete list of Sebbar’s published works, see her official website <http://clinet.swarthmore.edu/leila_sebbar/>

⁸²² Helen Vassallo, ‘Re-mapping Algeria(s) in France: Leïla Sebbar’s *Mes Algéries en France* and *Journal de mes Algéries en France*’, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 19.2 (2011), 129-45 (p. 130).

and France.⁸²³ However, this attempt to recapture Algeria through literature proves ever elusive, as Sebbar herself admits: ‘Je construis ma propre mémoire à travers les personnages que je mets en scène, et la fiction m’aide à retrouver l’Algérie, parce que je sais que dans la réalité je ne la retrouverai pas complètement’.⁸²⁴ The line that Sebbar draws between fiction and reality is significant, as fiction allows her to ‘fill in the blanks’ with regard to her sense of loss and exile, as we saw in *La Seine était rouge*, while in her autobiographical work, Algeria remains elusive, as evidenced by the repetition of a single line at the beginning of each chapter of *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* to express her inability to speak Arabic.⁸²⁵ Her resignation that Algeria will always remain elusive is then encapsulated by the opening sentence to the final chapter, which definitively states: ‘Je n’apprendrai pas la langue de mon père’.⁸²⁶ Similarly, in the *Algéries en France* trilogy, which forms part of Sebbar’s autobiographical work, Algeria is presented as a place to which Sebbar cannot return – echoed in her comment cited above that ‘dans la réalité je ne [...] retrouverai pas complètement [l’Algérie]’ – and as somewhere that is always liable to ‘turn to dust’ if she approaches it too closely.⁸²⁷ The idea that Algeria may ‘turn to dust’ underlines the difficulty and potential impossibility faced by Sebbar of ever recovering her homeland, which remains fragile and beyond reach. Therefore, while *La Seine était rouge* succeeded in filling in the blanks with more gaps and further silence, representing an inevitably fragmented history, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* and the *Algéries en France* trilogy suggest that Sebbar, like many of the protagonists of the primary corpus, is also a ‘passager de toujours’. Moreover, Sebbar’s permanently transient state is reflected in the epithet of *Mes Algéries en France*, which is ‘carnet de voyages’, and in the ‘voyage’

⁸²³ Sebbar’s *Algéries en France* trilogy is made up of *Mes Algéries en France* (2004), *Journal de mes Algéries en France* (2007), and *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* (2008). For more detailed discussion of the two earlier texts of the trilogy, see Vassallo, ‘Re-mapping Algeria(s) in France’.

⁸²⁴ Hiddleston, ‘Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l’oubli’, p. 12.

⁸²⁵ See Sebbar, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*, p. 11, p. 33, p. 49, p. 59, p. 79, p. 105.

⁸²⁶ Sebbar, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*, p. 125.

⁸²⁷ Vassallo, ‘Re-mapping Algeria(s) in France’, p. 139.

in the title of *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre*, further indicating her seemingly endless quest to come to terms with the experience of being exiled from Algeria. In her fiction, she is able to negotiate this exile through characters such as Amel and Shérazade,⁸²⁸ but overcoming her own personal exile remains elusive, as evidenced by her continuous attempts to recuperate a lost Algerian past in her autobiographical work. Sebbar's sense of exile and parallel need to negotiate her exile through writing reinforces the idea that Franco-Algerian writing requires repetition. By continuing to articulate the (inherited) experience and memory of colonisation, war, and migration, Franco-Algerian authors are able to open up a clearer understanding and acceptance of this past that entangles France and Algeria and continues to impact upon contemporary French society, for the benefit of migrants and their children themselves as well as of dominant French society.

An overview of some of the work by the authors studied in this thesis published after 1999 suggests that the questions with which the thesis has engaged remain pertinent since the French government's belated recognition of the Algerian War. Reiterating this observation, events such as the 2005 riots and initiatives to pass a law on the positive role of colonialism, also in 2005, intimate that the 'official' recognition of 1999 represented, if not merely a token gesture, then a peak in the wave of memory of the period that has since waned. As a result, the concerns raised by the primary corpus, and which have been discussed at length in this thesis, do not meet their resolution in 1999, but persist in their contemporary relevance. Taking this lack of resolution into account, it is at the same time also necessary to accept that France, as well as other former colonial powers, is still in an early phase of coming to terms with the end of colonisation. As such, it is more realistic to view the French government's official recognition of the Algerian War in 1999 as a positive step in the overall phase of

⁸²⁸ See Reeck, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond*, p. 79.

coming to terms with the end of empire, rather than the end of a phase of memory. Indeed, if we consider that France is only just coming to terms with its role in the Second World War and collaboration with Nazi Germany,⁸²⁹ it is perhaps inevitable that the ‘syndrome d’Algérie’, as Donadey terms it, continues to be situated in an earlier phase of confronting and re-writing history.⁸³⁰ After all, the fight for Algerian independence only began when the Second World War ended, encapsulated by the demonstration for Algerian independence on VE Day that led to the Sétif massacre.⁸³¹ The idea that we are still in the midst of a phase of confronting the colonial past ascribes all the more significance to memory work, such as that which can be conducted through fiction, since silenced histories require amplification in order for them to become firmly established in the dominant historical narrative,⁸³² as key components in that narrative rather than being subsumed within it. The texts analysed in this thesis form part of an incipient body of literature that began to confront the history of colonisation, war, and immigration shared by France and Algeria. Prefiguring the official recognition of the Algerian War in 1999, as well as foreshadowing, and in some cases forming part of, the wave of memory with regard to the Algerian War that spread through France in the 1990s, these texts articulate some of the far-reaching consequences of France’s historical hesitation to confront its colonial past. Furthermore, they open up the possibility, and necessity, of additional memory work, in literature as well as in other forms of expression, to continue the task of confronting the history shared by France and Algeria. As we enter the fiftieth year since the end of the Algerian War, the extent to which memory work before and since the state’s recognition of the war in 1999 has reflected and shaped remembrance of the war in France becomes ever more critical and

⁸²⁹ See Donadey, ‘Retour sur mémoire’, p. 188.

⁸³⁰ For a brief comparison between Donadey’s concept of ‘le syndrome d’Algérie’ and Henry Rousso’s concept of ‘le syndrome de Vichy’, see Donadey, ‘Retour sur mémoire’, pp. 188-89.

⁸³¹ Though the Algerian War is widely acknowledged to have taken place from 1954 to 1962, the Sétif massacre has been cited as a precursor to the war. For example, House and MacMaster refer to the events of Sétif as part of the ‘long’ Algerian War, which lasted from 1945 to 1962. See House and MacMaster, *Paris 1961*, p. 36.

⁸³² See Laronde, “‘Effets d’histoire’”, p. 152.

worthy of consideration. This thesis contributes to this ongoing memory work: while conclusions such as those outlined above can be drawn at this stage, they are not definitive. Rather, they form part of a continuous trajectory towards remembrance and reconciliation which has been at play for several decades already, and which is sure to gain momentum throughout the commemorative year in 2012. Thus, the imperative to consider works such as these within a contemporary context remains relevant, locating my thesis within an ongoing dialogue of conflict and remembrance.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Begag, Azouz, *Béni ou le paradis privé* (Paris: Seuil, 1989)
- Begag, Azouz, *Le Gone du Chaâba* (Paris: Seuil, 1986)
- Charef, Mehdi, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1983)
- Mounsi, *La Noce des fous*, 2nd edn (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Aube, 2003)
- Mounsi, *Le Voyage des âmes* (Paris: Stock, 1997)
- Sebbar, Leïla, *La Seine était rouge: Paris, octobre 1961*, 2nd edn ([Paris]: Thierry Magnier, 2003)
- Sebbar, Leïla, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (Paris: Stock, 1981)

Secondary Sources

- Aïchoune, Farid, *Nés en banlieue* (Paris: Ramsay, 1991)
- Alexander, Martin S., and J. F. V. Keiger, eds, *France and the Algerian War 1954-62: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy* (London: Frank Cass, 2002)
- Asibong, Andrew, 'Travel Sickness: Marie NDiaye, Hervé Guibert and the Liquidation of the White Fantasy-Subject', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 12.1 (2009), 109-25
- Association Sortir du colonialisme, *Le 17 Octobre 1961 par les textes de l'époque* ([Paris]: Les Petits Mains, 2011)
- Balibar, Etienne, and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verson, 1991)
- Bancel, Nicolas, Pascal Blanchard, and Françoise Vergès, *La Colonisation Française* (Toulouse: Éditions Milan, 2007)
- Becker, Howard S., ed., *The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964)
- Becker, Howard S., *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963)
- Begag, Azouz, *La Guerre des moutons* ([Paris]: Fayard, 2008)

- Begag, Azouz, *Un mouton dans la baignoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2007)
- Begag, Azouz, *Le Marteau pique-cœur* (Paris: Seuil, 2004)
- Begag, Azouz, and Ahmed Beneddif, *Ahmed de Bourgogne* (Paris: Seuil, 2001)
- Begag, Azouz, and Christian Delorme, 'Energumènes ou energ-humaines?', *Le Monde*, 13 October 2001
- Begag, Azouz, and Abdellatif Chaouite, *Écarts d'identité* (Paris: Seuil, 1990)
- Blanchard, Pascal, and Nicolas Bancel, *De l'indigène à l'immigré*, 2nd edn ([Paris: Gallimard, 2002)
- Bonal, Cordélia, and Laure Équy, 'L'Identité Nationale selon Sarkozy', *Libération*, 2 November 2009
- Bonn, Charles, *Anthologie de la littérature algérienne, 1950-1987* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1990)
- Bouraoui, Nina, *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Stock, 2000)
- Branche, Raphaëlle, *La Guerre d'Algérie: une histoire apaisée?* (Paris: Seuil, 2005)
- Camus, Albert, *L'Étranger*, 2nd edn ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1996)
- Charef, Mehdi, *À bras-le-cœur* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2006)
- Chemin, Anne, 'Au pont de Clichy, Hollande rend hommage aux Algériens morts en 1961', *Le Monde*, 17 October 2011
- Clerc, Jeanne-Marie, and Fabien Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue: Mounsi* (Montpellier: CERS, 2009)
- Cole, Joshua, 'Massacres and their Historians: Recent Histories of State Violence in France and Algeria in the Twentieth Century', *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 28.1 (2010), 106-26
- Day, Patrick, 'A Comparative Study of Crime and Punishment in Ousmane Sembène's *Le Docker Noir* and Albert Camus's *L'Étranger*', *Africa Today*, 52.3 (2006), 83-96
- Dine, Philip, 'Decolonizing the Republic', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 12.2 (2008) 173-81
- Dine, Philip, *Images of the Algerian War: French Fiction and Film, 1954-1992* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)
- Donadey, Anne, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing between Worlds* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001).
- Einaudi, Jean-Luc, *La Bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1991)

- Elia, Nada, 'In the Making: Beur Fiction and Identity Construction', *World Literature Today*, 71.1 (1997) 47-54
- Evans, Martin, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (Oxford: Berg, 1997)
- Fanon, Frantz, *Les Damnés de la terre*, rev. edn (Paris: La Découverte, 1987)
- Fanon, Frantz, *Peau Noire Masques Blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952)
- Forsdick, Charles, and David Murphy, eds, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Arnold, 2003)
- Ghoualmi, Mohamed, 'France-Algérie: match révélateur', *Le Monde*, 13 October 2001
- Girard, René, *Le Bouc Émissaire* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1982)
- Guénif-Souilamas, Nacira, ed., *La République mise à nu par son immigration* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2006)
- Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992)
- Harbi, Mohammed, and Benjamin Stora, eds, *La Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2004)
- Hargreaves, Alec G., *Immigration and Identity in Beur fiction: Voices from the North African Community in France*, rev. edn (Oxford: Berg, 1997)
- Hiddleston, Jane, 'Deux écrivains entre la mémoire et l'oubli: entretiens avec Leïla Sebbar et Azouz Begag', *Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literatures in French Bulletin*, 22 (2001), 6-29
- House, Jim, and Neil McMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Huston, Nancy, and Leïla Sebbar, *Lettres parisiennes: histoires d'exil* (Paris: Bertrand Barrault, 1986)
- Kettane, Nacer, *Le Sourire de Brahim* (Paris: Denoël, 1985)
- Kiwan, Nadia, 'Editorial Introduction Alterity and Identity in Contemporary Francophone Cultures: From Organic Hybridity to Politicized Difference', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 12.1 (2009), 9-17
- Lagrange, Hugues, *De l'affrontement à l'esquive: violences, délinquances et usages de drogues* (Paris: La Découverte et Syros, 2001)
- Landrin, Sophie, and Laetitia Van Eeckhout, 'Identité nationale: M. Fillon cherche une voie de sortie', *Le Monde*, 9 February 2010

- Laronde, Michel, “‘Effets d’histoire”. Représenter l’Histoire coloniale forclosée’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 10.1+2 (2007), 139-55
- Laronde, Michel, ed., *Leïla Sebbar* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003)
- Lay-Chenchabi, Kathryn, and Bernadette Dejean de la Batie, ‘Mounsi: From Oblivion to Remembrance of the Self through Writing’, *French Cultural Studies*, 11 (2000), 249-68
- Lazreg, Marnia, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994)
- Lebrun, Barbara, and Jill Lovecy, eds, *Une et Divisible? Plural Identities in Modern France* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010)
- Le Goaziou, Véronique, and Laurent Mucchielli, eds, *Quand les banlieues brûlent... Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006)
- Lorcin, Patricia M. E., ed., *Algeria & France 1800 – 2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006)
- McCormack, Jo, Murray Pratt, and Alistair Rolls, eds, *Hexagonal Variations: Diversity, Plurality and Reinvention in Contemporary France* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011)
- McCormack, Jo, *Collective Memory: France and the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007)
- Mehrez, Samia, ‘Ahmed de Bourgogne: The Impossible Autobiography of a Clandestine’, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 22 (2002), 36-71
- Merini, Rafika, *Two Major Francophone Women Writers, Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar: A Thematic Study of their Works* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999)
- Mounsi, ‘L’Archipel d’Outre-Seine’, in Jeanne-Marie Clerc and Fabien Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue: Mounsi* (Montpellier: CERS, 2009), pp. 77-93
- Mounsi, ‘La Prophétie du serpent’, in Jeanne-Marie Clerc and Fabien Cruveiller, *Parole de banlieue: Mounsi* (Montpellier: CERS, 2009), pp. 95-117
- Mounsi, *Les Jours Infinis* ([La Tour d’Aigues: L’Aube, 2000)
- Mounsi, *Territoire d’outre-ville* (Paris: Stock, 1995)
- Ndiaye, Pap, *La Condition Noire: essai sur une minorité française* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008)
- Nora, Pierre, ‘Lettre ouverte à Frédéric Mitterrand sur la Maison de l’histoire de France’, *Le Monde*, 11 November 2010
- Nora, Pierre, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, rev. edn, 3 vols ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1997)

- Reeck, Laura, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011)
- Rosello, Mireille, 'Guerre des mémoires ou "parallèles dangereux" dans *Le Village de L'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 18.2 (2010) 193-211
- Rosello, Mireille, *Encontres méditerranéennes: littératures et cultures France-Maghreb* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006)
- Rothberg, Michael, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009)
- Said, Edward W., *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004)
- Sansal, Boualem, *Le Village de l'Allemand: ou, le journal des frères Schiller* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008)
- Sarkozy, Nicolas, 'La France a choisi le changement. Je le mettrai en oeuvre (...) dans un esprit d'union et de fraternité', *Le Monde*, 8 May 2007
- Sebbar, Leïla, *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: Bleu autour, 2008)
- Sebbar, Leïla, *Journal de mes Algéries en France* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: Bleu autour, 2007)
- Sebbar, Leïla, *Mes Algéries en France* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: Bleu autour, 2004)
- Sebbar, Leïla, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (Paris: Juillard, 2003)
- Shepard, Todd, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006)
- Simon, Patrick, 'La Stratégie de la discrimination positive: Sarkozy et le débat français sur l'égalité', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 17.4 (2009) 435-50
- Stora, Benjamin, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie*, 2nd edn (Paris: La Découverte, 1998)
- Stora, Benjamin, 'La Guerre d'Algérie quarante ans après: connaissances et reconnaissance', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 2.2 (1994), 131-39
- Swamy, Vinay, *Interpreting the Republic: Marginalization and Belonging in Contemporary French Novels and Films* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011)
- Talbott, John, *The War Without A Name: France in Algeria, 1954-1962*, 2nd edn (London: Faber And Faber, 1981)
- Touabti, Hocine, *L'Amour quand même* (Paris: P. Belfond, 1981)

- Tribalat, Michèle, *Faire France: une grande enquête sur les immigrés et leurs enfants* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995)
- Tuquois, Jean-Pierre, 'Le Chef de l'État se rendra prochainement en Algérie, en Tunisie et au Maroc', *Le Monde*, 23 June 2007
- Ungar, Steven, and Tom Conley, eds, *Identity Papers: Contested Nationhood in Twentieth-Century France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)
- Van Eeckhout, Laetitia, 'Des historiens fustigent une loi prônant un enseignement positif de la colonisation', *Le Monde*, 15 April 2005
- Vassallo, Helen, 'Re-mapping Algeria(s) in France: Leïla Sebbar's *Mes Algéries en France* and *Journal de mes Algéries en France*', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 19.2 (2011), 129-45
- Vassallo, Helen, 'Embodied Memory: War and the Remembrance of Wounds in Nina Bouraoui and Leïla Sebbar', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1.2 (2008), 189-200
- Young, James E., *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993)

Films

Hors la loi, Dir. Rachid Bouchareb. Studio Canal. 2010

La Haine, Dir. Mathieu Kassovitz. Studio Canal. 1995

Internet Sources with No Acknowledged Author

<<http://www.17octobre61.org/?lang=fr> [accessed 5 January 2012]

<http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/visuel/2011/10/17/la-nuit-oubliee_1587567_3224.html#ens_id=1586465> [accessed 5 January 2012]

<<http://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/17-octobre-1961/article/121011/appele-pour-la-reconnaissance-officielle-de-la-tragedie-d>> [accessed 22 November 2011]

'17 Octobre 1961: des manifestations pour la reconnaissance d'un "crime d'Etat"', *Libération*, 17 October 2011
<<http://www.liberation.fr/societe/01012366176-17-octobre-1961-des-manifestations-pour-la-reconnaissance-d-un-crime-d-etat>> [accessed 22 November 2011]

- ‘Succès d'une pétition pour la reconnaissance de la tragédie du 17 octobre 1961’, *Le Point*, 16 October 2011 <http://www.lepoint.fr/societe/succes-d-une-petition-pour-la-reconnaissance-de-la-tragedie-du-17-octobre-1961-16-10-2011-1385109_23.php> [accessed 22 November 2011]
- ‘Répartition des immigrés par pays de naissance’, *Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* (2007)
<http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=immigrespaysnais> [accessed 11 July 2011]