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.
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