

Writing on the 'unhealable rift': Exile and (be)longing in Leïla Sebbar and Darina Al Joundi

Abstract

This article draws together questions of longing and belonging, identity, community, and citizenship, in a discussion of two Francophone women writing about the divisiveness of historical conflict. It proposes that experiences of conflict silence these women, exile them and leave them without community. The analysis focuses on Franco-Algerian writer Leïla Sebbar and Lebanese author and actor Darina Al Joundi, and suggests that, despite different backgrounds, contexts, approaches and genres, the need to belong is processed in their work so that the texts they create through this longing help to recover not only a sense of self, but also a sense of community, or belonging. Taking Edward Said's essay 'Reflections on Exile' as its starting point, the article explores how both Sebbar and Al Joundi exemplify characteristics that Said posits as common to the experience of exile. The analysis is offered in three parts: the first looks at experiences of exile, and how these create or deny identity. It then moves on to consider how Sebbar and Al Joundi attempt to 'reconstitute' lives that have been broken by war or a legacy of war, before working towards the subject of the final section, life writing as a method of creating community and territory in the text.

Keywords

Exile, longing, community, war, Darina Al Joundi, Leïla Sebbar, Lebanon, Algeria

Exile, belonging, and 'the luminousness of things being what they are'

In narratives of war, the voices of women authors are distinct and can be overlooked: as Eliza Griswold recently wrote, 'Since Odysseus paddled home to Ithaca, most of the world's great war stories have belonged to men. Men have written them and men have starred in them, because, for the most part, male soldiers have occupied the frontlines from Sparta to Verdun.'¹ This article proposes that although the experiences that Leïla Sebbar and Darina Al Joundi have of war may not be of front line battle, they offer a valuable perspective on the way in which conflict can wound beyond the physical. I shall approach my analysis through the lens of exile: Edward Said's seminal essay 'Reflections on Exile' will be a core part of this approach, and I shall use it to open up selected life writings by Sebbar and Al Joundi and show how they can contribute to an understanding – and re-thinking – of the experience of exile. I shall use critical theory with care, however, as I draw on Said's essay in conjunction with Susan Sontag's 'Against Interpretation', in which Sontag argues that trying to disclose the 'true meaning' of a text alters it, tames it, and impoverishes it, and that we do this to make texts more manageable to us. Claiming that '[r]eal art has the capacity to make us nervous',² Sontag proposes that we should aim for what she calls 'transparence', which will allow us to experience 'the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are'.³ With this in mind, I aim to offer a reading that does not stipulate how these texts should be understood or read, and does not attempt to pigeon-hole them as narratives of wounding, or even acts of memory. Rather, my analysis sets its cap at transparence, an attempt to show how the texts are what they are, rather than trying to explain what they mean. According to Sontag, this should make these works more real to us, rather than less real: therefore, by drawing out textual engagements with the theme of exile, I seek to offer an analysis that does not destroy as it excavates,⁴ and that does not

attempt to make the texts 'manageable', but embraces Sontag's paraphrasing of the Aristotelian position that art 'arouses and purges dangerous emotions',⁵ rather than trying to imprison the textual manifestations of these emotions in what they *mean*.

The two authors on whom this article focuses are Leïla Sebbar and Darina Al Joundi; their work diverges in many ways, but by approaching selected life writings from the dual perspective of exile and (be)longing, useful connections can be identified to extend Said's work on exile. Leïla Sebbar was born in Algeria in 1941, and is a prolific writer of fiction, non-fiction, letters, essays, photo journals, and autobiography. Born of a French mother and Algerian father, she has used her literary oeuvre to attempt to come to terms with an identity that is always defined by what it is not. The texts under consideration here are from *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, a volume that brings together short texts written over a thirty-year period which all focus on Sebbar's childhood in Algeria, and which evoke an Arabic language that is both haunting and elusive.⁶ I shall also make reference to her short essay 'L'Orient, ma rêverie', which reprises key issues of exile and longing set out in *L'arabe comme un chant secret*.⁷ Darina Al Joundi is a Lebanese actor and author whose first play, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*, debuted in 2007 to critical acclaim. The play, from which a novel has stemmed and which was also published separately as a manuscript, details the coming of age of her narrative alter ego, Noun, during the Lebanese civil war.⁸ I shall draw on both this manuscript and its sequel, *Ma Marseillaise*, the story of Al Joundi's protagonist's struggle to gain French citizenship and find a community in which she will be safe from the threats that overshadow *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*.⁹ All of the chosen texts are based on the authors' own lives, and all deal with different experiences of exile.

The cultural contexts from which Sebbar and Al Joundi write are very different, and I certainly do not wish to suggest that their experience can be homogenised or made 'manageable' because it exemplifies aspects of Said's reflections on exile. Rather, I propose that we can use this to help us better understand the work of each author, and establish methods used to process, palliate and transform their experiences. Indeed, by selecting authors who do not seem at first glance to have much in common, I hope to avoid the risk of fixing their identity through my discussion of their encounters with exile or, as Sontag puts it, fixing meaning by making them 'conformable'.¹⁰ There are, of course, some basic similarities: both Sebbar and Al Joundi lived through a war in the country of their birth (the Algerian War of Independence for Sebbar, the Lebanese civil war for Al Joundi); both sought refuge in France (though with varying degrees of necessity); both have a need for a relationship with their dead father and write in some ways 'for' or 'to' the father, and both turn to female communities. There are also, however, plenty of differences: Sebbar cannot speak Arabic, which is at the heart of her need to write, whereas Arabic is Al Joundi's mother tongue; the two are from different generations; Sebbar has had a prolific writing career whereas Al Joundi's oeuvre is quantitatively more modest; Al Joundi writes of traumatic experiences such as rape, death, beating and incarceration, whereas the traumatic experiences recounted by Sebbar are more located in the everyday.¹¹ Finally, and crucially, they deal differently with the question of autobiography. Al Joundi explains that 'je mélange ma fiction et ma réalité ensemble, je prends de moi et des autres, il n'y a que moi qui peux savoir les limites, les barrières entre ma fiction et ma réalité',¹² claiming a kind of 'auto-fiction' for her work (though she does describe Noun's story as 'ma vraie histoire' on her official website).¹³ Sebbar often writes explicitly and consciously about her life and the people in it: the various short stories refer in their titles to 'ma mère', 'mon père', and other family members, the subject of the stories is Leïla Sebbar, and the publisher's blurb describes *L'arabe comme un chant*

secret as '[I]'un de ses livres les plus personnels et émouvants'.¹⁴ The personal background of each writer is, therefore, instrumental to the creation of the texts under discussion, and so the analysis begins by setting up this connection between life and writing.

Negotiating the 'unhealable rift': from exile to elsewhere

Both Sebbar and Al Joundi have a reasonably privileged background, and in different ways this has been at the root of their need to create. Sebbar's parents were school teachers in French Algeria, and her childhood was not a typical Algerian one: in the abstract for 'L'Orient, ma rêverie', she raises a point made in various ways throughout *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, explaining that '[I]a colonisation française en Algérie, le silence de la langue de mon père, l'arabe, m'interdisent l'Orient. Je vis dans une petite France, séparée. L'imaginaire de l'Orient sera ma rêverie littéraire et je serai écrivaine'.¹⁵ The separation she experiences from her Arab past owing to the imposition of a middle-class French childhood is, she claims, her impetus for writing. As for Al Joundi, she is the daughter of a notorious journalist, professor and thinker, has lived a relatively bourgeois life in Beirut (despite her father's frequent absence owing to political exile) and has been an actress since the age of eight. In *Ma Marseillaise*, Noun notes that '[v]ous savez, je ne suis pas pauvre: classe moyenne... même aisée!'¹⁶ and Al Joundi's artistic career offered her possibilities for writing that allow her to perform and reflect on her own experiences through her work. Sebbar's writing evokes both explicitly and implicitly the Algerian war of independence: the fact of coming from a union between France and Algeria that was unacceptable in both pre- and post-independent Algeria haunts her oeuvre, and the war aligns Sebbar's personal experience with a wider historical one. Though Sebbar lived through the war, she does not write of any direct experience of it, and her work is more representative of living through war in what Griswold terms 'its quieter, but no less insidious edges'.¹⁷ Al Joundi, on the other hand, writes first-hand of her experiences on the dangerous streets of war-torn Beirut, 'smack in the middle' of battle, to cite Griswold again, crossing demarcation lines and dodging bullets even as her friends and family were killed in crossfire.¹⁸ Sebbar's experience of war, like her experience of life, was one that left her with no community, no group of people with whom she shared common ground. Al Joundi's, on the other hand, was one in which a community was created out of the shared experience of life's precariousness, but which itself was a precarious bond, as after the war she was rejected and sanctioned by those who she had thought to be her friends and allies.¹⁹

Both authors moved to France in their adult life: Sebbar for her university studies in 1961, and Al Joundi more recently in 2003, when her position in Beirut became so restricted that she feared for her safety there. Both describe their Parisian life as a kind of 'exile': Sebbar's much-quoted letters to Nancy Huston refer to her situation as an 'exil doré',²⁰ and Al Joundi says of her protagonist, Noun, that '[c]'est le côté que la société ne me permet plus de sortir. Même ici. [...] Donc ce que la vie, la société, le pays ne me permet plus de sortir, Noun me le permet sur scène'.²¹ This quotation leads me to one of the main thrusts of my argument: that it is in the space of the text that 'exile' – real or figurative, political or social – can be revoked. However, before anticipating a conclusion too early, I shall also posit at this juncture that both Sebbar and Al Joundi did indeed experience a kind of exile in the country in which they grew up, which can only be revoked in the country they have chosen. So it is not that I wish to claim writing as a healing practice to come to terms with the pain of loss, or as

'scriptotherapy', to use Suzette Henke's term,²² but rather suggest that both authors use the space of the text to create a sense of belonging 'elsewhere'.

Said's 'Reflections on Exile' provides a useful definition to set up this discussion: he describes exile as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home', and goes on to claim that 'its essential sadness can never be surmounted'.²³ Crucially, Said refers here to a 'native place', which would be Algeria for Sebbar and Lebanon for Al Joundi, and he furthermore defines this native place as a 'true home'. Both Sebbar and Al Joundi exist in a state of exile from their homeland, even if this exile has, ostensibly, been chosen. From the outset, then, this seems to go against Said's assertion that '[e]xile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you'.²⁴ Though on the face of it Sebbar and Al Joundi have both chosen a life in Paris, the reality is that they are not accepted in the country of their birth and need to make their 'true home' elsewhere. The experience of their Paris life as a lesser state of exile increases the 'essential sadness' of an 'unhealable rift' which cannot, for Said, be surmounted, lending weight to the suggestion that scriptotherapy is not possible. So what Said terms 'the perilous territory of not-belonging'²⁵ can become positively invested as an 'elsewhere' that the authors themselves work to create. Said writes of exiled poets and writers who 'lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity – to deny an identity to people',²⁶ and it is the lack of any fixed or stable identity that haunts Sebbar's work: she describes herself as 'SNP: Sans nom patronymique', and explains that 'Je n'étais pas française puisque j'avais un nom arabe'.²⁷ Not fitting in anywhere, Sebbar cannot fully identify with any aspect of her heritage, and consciously describes her work as an attempt to come to terms with this, to 'lend dignity' to her doubly negated identity by attempting to create affiliations where filiations were denied and thus negotiate 'the perilous territory of not-belonging' through her art, 'arous[ing] and purg[ing] dangerous emotions' in order to find a sense of community.²⁸ She writes of being an outsider in her childhood, an exile imposed on her not simply because of her maternal filiation but also her paternal affiliation, lamenting that

[m]a naissance dans l'Algérie coloniale, recluse dans la petite République française, laïque, idéale, de l'école de mon père, instituteur indigène de garçons indigènes, m'a tenue loin des signes apparents de cet Orient, or, rouge et vert, dont j'ignore longtemps la couleur. Je me demande ce qui aurait fait de l'Orient dans l'enfance de la petite France où je vis, dans la langue de ma mère, le français, la seule langue réelle et mythologique que mon père me transmet sur sa propre terre, arabe, berbère, ottomane, musulmane, dont je ne sais rien, séparée.²⁹

Her literary oeuvre thus becomes a quest to recover 'cet Orient' not from 'la petite France', the childhood site of 'not-belonging', but through her literary, artistic and personal trajectories in the France of her adulthood. In so doing, Sebbar moves from a 'perilous territory of not-belonging' to an inclusive community of belonging through both literal journeys and an imagined plurality of Algerias.

Al Joundi focuses on gender identity rather than cultural identity: her fight to lend dignity to the 'femme libre', a concept totally dismissed by those around Noun in *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*, offers a new perspective on Said's comments, as she fights against the female condition as one 'legislated to deny dignity' in her country. Noun links the impossibility of freedom to the Lebanese system of confessionalism, exclaiming to her father that 'Je ne pouvais pas être libre toute seule au milieu de millions d'aliénés. [...] À force de rêver sur ma liberté tu n'as pas vu comment notre pays perdait la sienne'.³⁰ In this section of the monologue, Noun acknowledges that no real freedom is possible in her home country, and indeed at this point mentions that just before his

death her father begged her to flee to Paris. Paris is thus posited as a place of freedom, though the reality described in *Ma Marseillaise* refutes this, and shows how problems of alienation persist even in the land where she seeks to find her place. Said's words take on a sinister overtone when considered in the light of Al Joundi's quest to gain French citizenship, narrated by Noun in *Ma Marseillaise*: he claims that '[n]ationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and by so doing it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages'.³¹ The nationalism evoked in Al Joundi's questioning of the lyrics of 'La Marseillaise' – performed as a refrain throughout the monologue – is posited as negative, as no better than the 'language, culture and customs' she has escaped in Lebanon, and the choice she puts forward is an impossible one: 'J'ai besoin de ces papiers, j'ai besoin de ce passeport. Je vais renier mes origines. [...] Noun, arrête de parler. Noun, arrête de penser. Noun, arrête de provoquer. Sinon, tu vas te retrouver dans la rue battue et enfermée, comme là-bas'.³² Sontag's plea for 'transparence' in criticism is, then, facilitated by an authorial desire for transparence in the text, and in representations of identity: Al Joundi shows how the 'ravages' of exile are not necessarily fended off by acceptance in the host community, because in reality she would have to be other than she is, an exile to herself, if she were to be accepted and offered the 'nationalism' described by Said. Thus, both authors challenge a static notion of what 'choosing' exile is: their exile may not be a legal or political one, but in Sebbar's case we can see that she was nonetheless, to quote Said, 'born into it', and in Al Joundi's that, paraphrasing Said, it 'happened to her'. So from this state of exile, both women must re-build a life for themselves, a process to which the analysis will now turn.

Reconstituting broken lives: 'homecoming is out of the question'

For both Al Joundi and Sebbar, 'exile' means living with the loss of their homeland. If we turn to Said again, we learn that 'what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both'.³³ Politically and administratively, both women could return to their homeland, but, for Sebbar, loss is indeed inherent in the existence of both home and love of home, as she is denied an Algerian experience even when living in Algeria. In Al Joundi's case, her home and love of home are revealed to be a sham, and this is the loss she experiences, as Beirut becomes reduced to the asylum in which she is imprisoned after her transgressions.³⁴ In this respect, Al Joundi in particular exemplifies Said's assertion that '[e]xile is sometimes better than staying behind or not getting out',³⁵ for if she had stayed in Lebanon, she would have been at risk of further restriction and humiliation.³⁶ While any desire to return to Algeria would not generate the same danger for Sebbar, nor would staying behind have given her the community she longed for as she is always distant both linguistically and culturally distanced from 'les femmes du peuple de mon père'.³⁷ So both authors experience exile on Said's terms in this respect, since 'homecoming is out of the question'.³⁸

For Sebbar, this exile began with her father, who she describes at the end of his life as being 'en exil dans le pays de ma mère et de la langue qu'il aime',³⁹ but though her father chose this exile, for Sebbar it is imposed on her, as she claims that 'je sais, aujourd'hui, que l'exil se transmet, que je suis en exil de moi-même'.⁴⁰ This fundamental exile, not just from cultural affiliation but from herself, corresponds to Said's description of exile as 'a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from

their roots, their land, their past. [...] Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people'.⁴¹ Sebbar attempts to negotiate the 'discontinuous state of being' by publishing a series of 'discontinuous' reflections in one volume, creating a narrative that can certainly be viewed as an attempt to 'reconstitute a broken life'. So for Sebbar, exile is not a political experience that began when she moved to France, but started even in the homeland itself – she was cut off even in Algeria from her Algerian roots, land and past: 'Mon père m'a placée volontairement du côté de ma mère, du côté du vainqueur, du dominant, du côté de la France en Algérie, de l'Algérie française'; Oui, mon père à préservé, en la rendant inaccessible, sa langue et, avec elle, tout de l'Algérie où je suis née'.⁴² Linguistic exile is denoted as the root of the experience of exile more generally, and this exiled Sebbar in France even from within Algeria. Her 'roots, land and past' are 'inaccessible' to her, and it is from this place of exile that she must reconstitute herself – but not, as Said suggests, 'as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people', for being on the side of 'le vainqueur, le dominant' is, for Sebbar, precisely the root of her exile.

Al Joundi's exile is more a cutting off from a life she was only able to live under the protection of her father and the circumstances of war. Conversely to Sebbar, she was able to experience a kinship or community *because of* her father, and the freedoms that he allowed her. This, however, ended with his death, and so where Al Joundi's narrative trajectory begins to coincide with Sebbar's in this respect is in the creation of another community after the death of the father. Like Sebbar, Al Joundi does not conform to Said's description of the exile's need to 'see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people', but for different reasons: Al Joundi has been naturalised (though *Ma Marseillaise* ends on a rejection of Noun's application, an ending which Al Joundi has deliberately not altered since receiving her own citizenship),⁴³ but still struggles with her new 'belonging' to the 'triumphant ideology' described by Said. In an imaginary conversation with the administrator dealing with her application for 'naturalisation' just before it was refused, Noun says: 'Monsieur, j'ai bien rempli tous les papiers, j'ai signé et certifié tous les documents. Je paie mes impôts, je connais la France-France comme ma poche, je n'ai jamais eu de contraventions, je parle français-français. Je suis l'immigration choisie. Je connais par cœur *La Marseillaise*, je sais qui est Bouillé, mais je vous demande de me signer un papier et de me garantir que la République restera républicaine, libre, juste, égale et laïque'.⁴⁴ The inadequacy of the 'triumphant ideology' is, in Sontag's terms, 'transparent' here, as citizenship in itself cannot necessarily protect either Al Joundi or Noun. Together they reject conformity with the 'triumphant ideology' as a way of reconstituting a broken life, in a move towards 'the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are'⁴⁵ (in this case, 'républicaine, libre, juste, égale et laïque'). Both authors, then, offer responses to Said's question regarding how 'one surmount[s] the loneliness of exile without falling into the encompassing and thumping language of national pride, collective sentiments, group passions',⁴⁶ as the solitude they experience outside the group prompts them to create new communities through their writing, rather than wishing to be assimilated into mainstream ones.

Earlier I made reference to Al Joundi's claim that only she knows where the barriers between her reality and her fiction lie, and this explanation of her work makes a more compelling case for using the theme of exile to open it up, as Said claims that '[b]orders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience'.⁴⁷ By refusing to demarcate

these borders in her work, Al Joundi is able to break through barriers of thought and experience, offering her work as art rather than as life or, as Sontag advocates, she does not 'turn *the* world into *this* world'.⁴⁸ Though not adopting a narrative alter ego, in different ways Sebbar challenges these barriers too: by aligning her personal story with a wider context in an attempt to create affiliations, she blurs boundaries between individual and community and challenges the 'carapace' of the dominant French language and culture through her attempts to recover 'Algerias in France' in both her works and those of others,⁴⁹ explaining that 'Le paysage de l'enfance algérienne, je ne sais pas, alors, qu'il a migré sur les toiles et les photographies des artistes, en désir d'Orient'.⁵⁰ This movement from the internal (Sebbar's own feelings and experiences) to the external (the art of others) is a manifestation of her desire to establish a connection with her Arab heritage, and is reprised in *L'arabe comme un chant secret* in references to reading Arabic books translated into French, recovering the history and culture of her father through the language of her mother, and understanding Arabic through French.⁵¹ However, there is no simplistic 'overcoming' of the absence of Arabic; indeed, as Jane Hiddleston points out, 'any putative overcoming of [the separation between French and Arabic] would deny the context of [Sebbar's] upbringing'.⁵² Similarly, Al Joundi writes to break a silence that conditioned her in Lebanon, but does not present France as a place in which to overturn a state of exile. As such, their writings are not simply the product of exile, but also its perpetual state: they represent a call to community *in the context* of exile, not an overcoming of exile. Both authors thus put their 'oriental' heritage at the foreground of the works they create, publish and perform in a western context, crossing borders in artistic terms if not geographical ones: if 'homecoming is out of the question', then they must negotiate it through art, and through community.

Life writing and community, or the longing to belong

So far we have seen that both Sebbar and Al Joundi exemplify characteristics that Said claims as integral to the *experience* of exile, though they may not conform to his definition of 'the exile', and this section now turns to the question of community, and the process of establishing a sense of belonging through life writing. This approach continues to distance itself from the notion of 'scriptotherapy', that is to say writing as healing; since both authors reject this reading of their work, it would go against my espousal of Sontag's criticism of interpretation to suggest here that they attempt to negotiate some kind of healing through their literary and artistic work.⁵³ Rather, as Mildred Mortimer writes of Sebbar, 'autobiographical reflections [...] allow the exiled writer to transform rupture into connection',⁵⁴ and thus the autobiographical acts in themselves become the driving force behind this connection. The transformation of rupture into connection that Mortimer identifies corresponds to Said's notion of writing as a means of responding to 'the crippling sorrow of estrangement':⁵⁵ rather than attempting to cure, anesthetise or move 'beyond' the pain of exile, Sebbar and Al Joundi use this pain, and the writing that emerges from it, as a means of creating connections where previously they had been denied.

Both authors identify a need to connect or re-connect with their dead father through their work, and this can be posited as the first of the attempts to establish community. Sebbar refers to herself as 'le scribe de mon père',⁵⁶ and Al Joundi both evokes her father in the first line of her play ('Mon père est mort le jour où il a cru qu'il n'avait plus d'histoires à me raconter') and consciously presents

it as an open letter to him ('Mon cher papa, Je t'écris dans l'air').⁵⁷ However, Al Joundi extends her affiliations further in *Ma Marseillaise*, inscribing herself into a community of women freedom fighters.⁵⁸ Her protagonist says that 'Je me souviens de toutes ces femmes qui m'ont aidée à garder la tête haute',⁵⁹ explicitly evoking a notional community of women fighting against oppression. Alongside these she mentions women she has met whose lives are ravaged by laws destined to 'deny dignity' to women.⁶⁰ Such community connections were denied her in her home country, as Noun explains towards the end of *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter* and at the start of *Ma Marseillaise*. Recounting a brutal episode that directly preceded her internment in the asylum, she explains that she had gone out to a nightclub and requested the music of Nina Simone, and lifted up her t-shirt as she danced. Al Joundi writes in *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*: 'J'ai senti une main m'agripper par les cheveux. C'était mon beau-frère. Il m'a fait faire trois fois le tour de la piste en me traînant par terre. Les gens faisaient semblant de ne pas me voir, ils m'enjambaient et continuaient à danser sur la musique de Nina Simone. Certains applaudissaient'.⁶¹ The same event is referenced more obliquely in *Ma Marseillaise*, where Noun tells us that 'Ils m'ont tous lâchée. Les gens que j'ai connus, ils m'ont tous lâchée. Tous, ils ont détourné la tête. Tous, ils ont applaudi celui qui m'a frappée'.⁶² Noun is rejected by her home community, and denied dignity in brutal ways, aligning her condition with that of Said's exile as she experiences 'the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation'.⁶³ Though at this stage she is still in Beirut, the 'communal habitation' is seen to be an ideological space and not simply a physical one: she is deprived of her civil liberties by being incarcerated in a mental asylum, but also deprived of any sense of community or belonging. Years later, in Paris, Al Joundi found an alternative community with a group of like-minded women: she was one of the 'Femen Hexagonales' which followed the original movement from Ukraine in 2012.⁶⁴ In her writing she also moves from her personal story of freedom and oppression to more universal ones, paying homage in *Ma Marseillaise* to other women who have stood up against female subordination because of religion or custom and, as well as reaching back to women who lived before her, reaching forward to those she may be in a position to help through her own fighting. Her overcoming of this condition comes through a community of women that is, then, also ideological as well as physical, and her 'communal habitation' is, far more than the secular context of contemporary France, the sense of community and belonging that was stripped from her in her homeland.

This community of women has given Al Joundi the strength to carry on and move away, as Noun explains: 'Elles me donnent la force de rester debout, de me battre, de partir...'⁶⁵ And so both Al Joundi and Noun move to France, a land where they hope to achieve not only a sense of belonging, but also one of safety: 'le pays le plus laïc, le pays où on... où je serai protégée. France, "Me voici!"'⁶⁶ However, Noun's attempt to request citizenship in France is soon beset with administrative difficulties of monumental proportions that she describes as a 'chemin de croix',⁶⁷ and she is left without community as her application is turned down. Nonetheless, she defies Said's claim regarding the exile's need to create affiliations that focus on national pride: Said writes of 'the pressure on the exile to join – parties, national movements, the state. The exile is offered a new set of affiliations and develops new loyalties'.⁶⁸ Al Joundi resolutely refuses to give in to this temptation, and if there is a new set of affiliations which she wishes to nurture, they are not offered to her by the state, but rather by the possibility of finding community with other women like herself. As well as Al Joundi's participation in the Femen movement, Noun voices her desire to create a 'club des "Putes et fières"',⁶⁹ then laments that 'Je veux être traitée comme les femmes d'ici',⁷⁰ all of which recalls Said's

question about the experience of exile, '[w]hat is it like to be born in a place, to stay and live there, to know that you are of it, more or less forever?'⁷¹ This is an experience that neither Al Joundi nor Noun will ever have, and this lack is one of the driving forces behind Al Joundi's need to write and perform. Upholding Sontag's claim that '[r]eal art has the capacity to make us nervous',⁷² Al Joundi resists convention, censorship and Said's depiction of 'thumping nationalism', to the extent that the tour of *Ma Marseillaise* was cut short in France in 2016 following the *Charlie Hebdo* terror attacks, owing to its potentially controversial content. This refusal to engage with the 'nervousness' created by art, a state that resists attempts to make it 'manageable' or 'conformable',⁷³ thus denied Al Joundi a community by denying her a voice.

Sebbar too lacks this sense of community and affiliation, of 'knowing that she is of' a place, and when she emerges from the 'carapace' of the 'petite France' of her childhood, she too tries to find a place within a community of writers, or a community of women: 'Le Mouvement de Libération des Femmes. J'ai su que je m'appelle Leïla. J'ai parlé. De moi. [...] Je suis revenue à moi. C'était long. C'était difficile'.⁷⁴ The sense of belonging gives her a sense of identity, naming herself explicitly rather than in the oblique ways she refers to her name elsewhere in the text: 'Quand j'entendais le nom de mon père dit par un Arabe, je ne savais plus que c'était aussi le mien. Et lorsqu'un Français le prononçait, il prenait tout de suite une sonorité française où je me reconnaissais, moi, avec ce nom-là'; 'Mon nom même, prénom et patronyme, annonce que je suis la fille de mon père, un Arabe, un ennemi de la France'.⁷⁵ Sebbar does not suggest that her new sense of belonging to a multi-cultural political movement represented a facile resolution to the crisis of linguistic and cultural identity outlined in these last two quotations, but acknowledges that her 'return to herself', the only 'homecoming' she can negotiate, has been 'long' and 'difficile'. Her need to belong is outlined in 'L'Orient, ma rêverie' in the following terms:

J'aurais pu naître à la langue arabe, la langue de l'Orient méditerranéen, à l'islam, la religion de la mère de mon père, la sienne, celle de son peuple (de quel peuple je suis?) Je croirai appartenir, un jour, au peuple de la Révolution et au peuple des Femmes, à l'Orient, non. Et pourtant.⁷⁶

The hope that one day she might 'appartenir, un jour', to a group of people is not realised in her imagined 'Orient', but rather in the 'exil doré' of her Parisian life: collective movements allow her to forget her individual condition and suffering, as she explains in the following extended quotation: 'Ces luttes, ces protestations collectives m'enchantent. Je pense qu'elles sont justes et je ne suis pas une individuue, je suis toutes les femmes, tous les exclus, tous les colonisés de l'Empire et de l'intérieur. C'est exaltant. Je ne suis pas une personne particulière. Je n'ai pas de famille, ni père, ni mère, pas de pays. On ne me demande pas qui je suis, de qui je suis la fille, d'où je viens, quelle est ma place dans la société. Je suis citoyenne d'une génération spontanée, je ne suis pas seule'.⁷⁷ Finding common ground that has nothing to do with cultural identity but which celebrates 'otherness' is Sebbar's 'homecoming' or return to herself: her claim that 'je suis toutes les femmes' prefigures Al Joundi's move from the personal story to the collective one, and the subsequent statement that 'je ne suis pas seule' sets up the importance of community and belonging. Moving away from the trend denounced by Sontag, which favours 'digging behind the text to find a subtext that is the true one',⁷⁸ Sebbar's authorial intention is transparent: a sense of belonging creates a sense of self and a sense of home that is located *within herself* and not in a geographical space. Thus, for both writers, there is no 'restored people' with whom they find an affiliation, but rather a new community of marginalised people: they become 'citoyennes' of a group or movement rather

than of a nation. Their attempts to 'map territories of experience',⁷⁹ to borrow Said's terms, focus on the plurality implied here by Said. However, they do not 'look at non-exiles with resentment', or exhibit 'a passionate hostility to outsiders',⁸⁰ characteristics of the exile that Said warns against, but rather try to find connections and communications via alternative modes of community, espousing the view voiced by Noun that 'ma communauté, c'est l'humanité entière'.⁸¹ Neither Sebbar nor Al Joundi moulds her texts into some monolithic experience or 'truth' (or, to paraphrase Sontag, they do not turn '*the world*' into '*this world*'),⁸² but instead they offer personal narratives of longing that invite a collective sense of belonging.

Conclusion: constructing new worlds?

In the introduction to this article, I quoted Griswold, who claimed that '[s]ince Odysseus paddled home to Ithaca, most of the world's great war stories have belonged to men'. These writings by Sebbar and Al Joundi might not, in the strictest sense, be 'great war stories', but they offer a fresh perspective on themes of exile and displacement that are the results of war. To bring this back to the key premise of Said's exile, he also evokes Odysseus, but in the sense that epic novels do not have the possibility of creating an 'other' world, only the one we have. However, he makes a distinction between the classical epic and the European novel, claiming that the latter is 'grounded in precisely the opposite experience, that of a changing society in which an itinerant and disinherited middle-class hero or heroine seeks to construct a new world that somewhat resembles an old one left behind forever'.⁸³ So by eschewing the male-dominated or classical narratives, embodied in both Said and Griswold by the tale of Odysseus, these writers move forwards to the tantalising possibility of an 'other' place, or an 'elsewhere'. Sebbar and Al Joundi can, certainly, be described as 'middle class heroines' of their own life narratives, and their European life allows them to write about an exile from their homeland. However, in writing about their own lives rather than by allegory, they do something more revolutionary than Said's description of the construction of 'a new world that somewhat resembles an old one left behind forever'. Sebbar does not seek to create a 'new world' through the itinerant journeys she terms her 'Algerias in France', and nor does she want to return to or re-create an 'old one left behind forever'. Rather, she seeks to identify – and identify with – one that already exists on the margins of mainstream culture and which might lead her to an alternative community. If she is 'itinerant', it is not literally in the search for a home, but rather in the desire to locate a *homeland* in the country where her 'exil doré' is lived out, which she does through her obsessive need to trace 'routes algériennes dans la France'.⁸⁴ That she brings these shifting physical spaces into the space of the text suggests that through her writing she aims to identify or create other modes of community that extend beyond Said's notion of exiles embracing nationalism or becoming intransigent. If Al Joundi is itinerant, it is not in an attempt to return to a 'lost homeland', but rather in the touring through the towns and villages of France, where she takes her play and performs her story. The tour then becomes a call to community in itself, as Al Joundi explains: 'Que des belles rencontres aussi avec un public curieux et intéressé qui m'a offert tant d'amour au cours de chaque représentation!'⁸⁵ So rather than constructing the old world, she offers it as an artistic experience, just as Sebbar offers her 'Algerias in France' as an artistic experience, and through these shared experiences they construct new communities within and beyond the texts they create.

Said also, and crucially for this conclusion, describes literary exiles as 'disinherited'. We can understand Sebbar to have been 'disinherited' from the first: she explains that '[q]uant à moi, séparée depuis le premier cri au monde, division irréductible, je ne dis pas les miens, ni d'un côté ni de l'autre',⁸⁶ thus indicating both the division that defines her identity and the desire to identify 'les siens'. Al Joundi, on the other hand, is 'disinherited' in the sense that all autonomy is taken from her in her homeland as her family signs her internment papers, and so after her release she has to leave Lebanon in order to continue living freely. Al Joundi does not wish to reconstruct her homeland in France – on the contrary, she criticises France for accepting and perpetuating the very things that restricted her in Lebanon.⁸⁷ So what she aims to do is, rather, to fight for a France that is what it claims to be – secular and multi-cultural. She rejects notions of creating communities of exiles and, echoing Hiddleston's analysis of Sebbar's utopian approach to her Algerian past, Al Joundi proposes a utopian – and global – future community where she is not 'out of place' but 'of it, more or less forever'.⁸⁸

Je rêve qu'un jour... toutes les femmes ne portent plus ni voile, ni perruque, ni burqa, ni rien pour se cacher. Pas par la loi ou par la force, mais par conviction, par choix. Je rêve qu'un jour... toutes les femmes aient le droit à l'éducation, à la culture, au travail. Je rêve qu'un jour... plus aucune femme ne meure sous les coups du mari, du père, du frère. Je rêve qu'un jour... il n'y ait plus deux poids deux mesures.⁸⁹

Noun's vision of the future is inclusive, breaking 'barriers of thought and experience',⁹⁰ and extends Sebbar's work towards creating a community *within* the text by voicing a desire to create a community *beyond* the text. Describing her protagonist, Noun, as 'une moi que j'aime et que la vie, la vraie, et la société ne supportent plus, qui ne lui permettent plus de crier haut et fort ce qu'elle pense, alors qu'au théâtre on l'applaudit',⁹¹ Al Joundi directs us towards what her work *is*: a cry for freedom in this changing society, not an attempt to construct a new world that resembles an old one left behind. As Sontag insists, '[t]he function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*',⁹² and so to attempt to mould these texts into this part of Said's definition would be to impoverish them by fixing them in an interpretation that ignores what they *are*: highly personal narratives of longing. Where they do uphold Said's depiction is in his statement that '[e]xile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure'.⁹³ this is what keeps Sebbar and Al Joundi writing, and what makes their work so engaging, and so valuable. It is the state of perpetual longing (of never being satisfied), and never belonging (never being placid or secure) that prompts them to write, not a desire to construct a new world. So while I do not want to fix these works in a critical framework that is not porous and only offers one possible reading, neither do I wish to dismiss the usefulness of theory in helping us to strip back literary works to better understand them. I hope to have shown how one particular theory of exile can help us to see these texts for, to paraphrase Sontag, 'what they are' and not 'what they mean',⁹⁴ or what one reader thinks they mean. Sebbar and Al Joundi both uphold and problematise Said's notion of exile and 'the exile', offering new perspectives on a much-studied debate. While the texts discussed here may not be stories of fighting war, they are nonetheless stories of fighting for personal freedom beyond the boundaries set out by historical and cultural conflict. As Al Joundi explains, 'Je me bats par l'art, avec l'art, pour la vie'.⁹⁵ art thus becomes its own driving force, and by creating their texts, both Sebbar and Al Joundi construct not a 'new world' or a re-creation of a lost homeland, but an 'elsewhere' in the existing world. If Said's claim that 'homecoming is out of the question' refers only to the 'old world' left behind, then Sebbar and Al Joundi go beyond these limits. 'Home' no longer

means the old world, but nor is it a new world. Rather than a geographical space, 'home' becomes an 'elsewhere' created in the text.

¹ Eliza Griswold, 'Women, Writing War', in *Words Without Borders* April 2016 <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/april-2016-women-write-war-introduction-eliza-griswold#ixzz44wSN4bQr> [last accessed 7 June 2016].

² Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), pp. 3-14 (8).

³ Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 13.

⁴ See Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 6.

⁵ Sontag, 'Against interpretation', p. 4.

⁶ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: bleu autour, 2012), p. 51.

⁷ Leïla Sebbar, 'L'Orient, ma rêverie', in *Sigila* no.13 (printemps-été 2004), pp. 55-59.

⁸ Darina Al Joundi, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter* (Mayenne: L'avant-scène theatre 2012); Darina Al Joundi, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2008). It is worth noting that the narrator of the novel is not Noun, but Darina Al Joundi. The novel is more explicitly autobiographical than the play, in which Al Joundi takes some distance from her experiences. She uses a protagonist whose name, Noun, is an Arabic letter that feminises nouns, and thus opens up a more universal notion of female suffering.

⁹ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise* (Mayenne: L'avant-scène theatre, 2012).

¹⁰ Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 8.

¹¹ For further discussion of the 'writing out' of trauma in Sebbar, see Jane Hiddleston, "'Le silence de l'écriture": Arabic and its Absence in the Works of Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar', *Fixxion: Revue Critique de Fixxion Française Contemporaine* (2011), see <http://www.revue-critique-de-fixxion-francaise-contemporaine.org/rcffc/article/view/fx03.04/531>, p. 10, p. 15 [Last accessed 4 February 2017].

¹² Darina Al Joundi, 'Interview with Helen Vassallo, Paris 2012': <http://modernlanguages.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Research%20Centres/CCWW/Darina%20Al-Joundi%20Interview%20%28June%202012%29%29.pdf>, pp. 1-8 (p. 4). I use the term 'auto-fiction' in the sense outlined by Serge Doubrovsky in *Autobiographiques: de Corneille à Sartre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988).

¹³ <http://www.lejourouninasimoneacessedechanter.com/> [last accessed 7 June 2016].

¹⁴ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, quatrième de couverture.

¹⁵ Leïla Sebbar, introduction to 'L'Orient, ma rêverie', accessed online at <http://www.sigila.msh-paris.fr/-rubrique23-.html> [last accessed 23 May 2016].

¹⁶ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 21.

¹⁷ <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/april-2016-women-write-war-introduction-eliza-griswold#ixzz44wSkZjLK> [last accessed 7 June 2016].

¹⁸ <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/april-2016-women-write-war-introduction-eliza-griswold#ixzz44wSkZjLK> [last accessed 7 June 2016].

¹⁹ For discussion of this, see Helen Vassallo, "'Nous n'avions ni communauté ni confession": the alienation of "liberation" in Darina Al Joundi's *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*', *International Journal of Francophone Studies* vol. 4 no. 14 (2012), pp. 435-451, an article which focuses on Al Joundi's more overtly autobiographical novel rather than the manuscript which is the focus of this study. Though the tension between author and narrator is not examined in detail, the analysis of community and rejection can provide a starting point for discussions of exile in Al Joundi's oeuvre.

²⁰ Leïla Sebbar and Nancy Huston, *Lettres parisiennes: Histoires d'exil* (Paris: Bernard Barrault 1986), p. 133.

²¹ Darina Al Joundi, 'Interview with Helen Vassallo, Paris 2012', p. 3.

²² Henke, Suzette, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000).

²³ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), pp. 173-186 (173).

²⁴ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 184.

²⁵ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 177.

²⁶ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 175.

²⁷ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 24, p. 14.

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- ²⁸ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 4. For a more in-depth analysis of the filiations and affiliations in Sebbar's text, see Carine Bourget, 'Language, Filiation and Affiliation in Leïla Sebbar's Autobiographical Narratives', *Research in African Literatures* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2006), pp. 121-135.
- ²⁹ Leïla Sebbar, 'L'Orient, ma rêverie', accessed online at: http://clicnet.swarthmore.edu/leila_sebbar/virtuel/orient.html [last accessed 31/05/2016].
- ³⁰ Darina Al Joundi, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*, p. 48.
- ³¹ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 176.
- ³² Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 57.
- ³³ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 185.
- ³⁴ In the novel, Al Joundi writes: 'Je regardais la ville qui me semblait une vaste prison'. Darina Al Joundi, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter* (2008), p. 157.
- ³⁵ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 178.
- ³⁶ Again in the novel, we are given more information about this: Al Joundi explains that 'toute personne qui est passée par le couvent fait l'objet d'un certificat d'internement, à n'importe quel moment et jusqu'à la fin de sa vie, n'importe quel membre de sa famille peut alerter la police sur sa conduite et la personne sera de nouveau internée'. *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter* (2008), pp. 156-157.
- ³⁷ See Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, pp. 36-37.
- ³⁸ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 179. Said is specifically referring to a poem by Mahmoud Darwish.
- ³⁹ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 65.
- ⁴⁰ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 76.
- ⁴¹ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 177.
- ⁴² Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 85; p. 87.
- ⁴³ In the afterword to *Ma Marseillaise*, Al Joundi explains how, after the play debuted in Avignon, an article written about it in *Le Monde* resulted in the Interior Ministry's office calling her at the theatre where she was performing, to inform her that they would process her application and give her French citizenship. She has not changed the ending of *Ma Marseillaise*, as for Noun the reality at that point was the rejection of her application. Nathaniel Herzberg, 'Aux armes, citoyens dont je ne suis pas!', *Le Monde*, 20 July 2012. Accessed online at http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2012/07/20/aux-armes-citoyens-dont-je-ne-suis-pas_1736363_3246.html [last accessed 10 August 2016].
- ⁴⁴ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, pp. 57-58. The reference to Bouillé comes from a questioning of the lyrics of 'La Marseillaise': "'Mais ce despote sanguinaire! Mais ces complices de Bouillé!'" (*Aparté*) C'est qui ce Bouillé?' Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, pp. 39-40. There are frequent comments on or questions about the lyrics of the French national anthem throughout the play, and so the quotation 'Je sais qui est Bouillé' refers to Noun's research for her citizenship test, research shown to be unnecessary by the reality of patronising questions that she describes as 'une insulte à mon intelligence'. Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 55.
- ⁴⁵ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 13.
- ⁴⁶ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 177.
- ⁴⁷ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 185.
- ⁴⁸ Susan Sontag, 'Against interpretation', p. 7.
- ⁴⁹ The term 'Algerias in France' refers to Sebbar's 'Algéries en France' trilogy: Leïla Sebbar, *Mes Algéries en France* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: bleu autour, 2004), *Journal de mes Algéries en France* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: bleu autour, 2007), *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: bleu autour, 2008).
- ⁵⁰ Leïla Sebbar, 'L'Orient, ma rêverie' [last accessed 31 May 2016].
- ⁵¹ See Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 67.
- ⁵² Jane Hiddleston, "'Le silence de l'écriture'", p. 6.
- ⁵³ Sebbar stated in an unpublished interview I conducted with her in 2008 that '[j]e n'ai pas besoin de guérir, je ne suis pas malade!', and Al Joundi says of *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter* that '[c]ette pièce n'est en aucun cas une psychanalyse à travers le théâtre'. Darina Al Joundi, 'Préface: Noun est une de mes Moi', in *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*, pp. 7-9 (p. 8).
- ⁵⁴ Mildred Mortimer, 'Afterword: Arabic as a secret song' in Leïla Sebbar, *Arabic as a secret song*, trans. by Skyler Artes (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2015), pp. 85-105 (p. 104).
- ⁵⁵ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 173.
- ⁵⁶ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 87.
- ⁵⁷ Darina Al Joundi, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*, p. 12, p. 50.
- ⁵⁸ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 16, p. 17, p. 49.

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- ⁵⁹ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 16
- ⁶⁰ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, pp. 22-23; pp. 25-26.
- ⁶¹ Darina Al Joundi, *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter*, p. 51.
- ⁶² Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 15.
- ⁶³ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 177.
- ⁶⁴ <http://o.nouvelobs.com/pop-life/20120919.OBS2875/femen-hexagonales.html> [last accessed 5 October 2016]. The women attended events naked from the waist up, and with slogans written across their torsos claiming their bodies for their own. In *Ma Marseillaise* this position is presented slightly differently: rather than positing nudity as a marker of freedom, Al Joundi focuses on not covering up with veils, burqas or hidjabs as being the true freedom – though the two things are of course not unrelated.
- ⁶⁵ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 26. In particular, Al Joundi carried out research into feminist pioneer May Ziadé, and posits this research into the life of a woman who lived in a different time but had similar experiences as being the thing that kept her going in the three years between her release from the asylum and her move to France. Al Joundi has now written a novel about Ziadé's life, *Prisonnière du levant* (Paris: Grasset, 2017). Other female freedom fighters she mentions are Huda Sharawi, Nabawya Moussa, Djemila Benhabib, Fadwa Suleiman, lawyer Laure Mughaizel and author Taslima Nasreen. She also refers to women whose life story she has told or portrayed on film, who have been stoned, have lost their daughters to circumcision, or have suffered some other mode of violent cultural and sexual restriction.
- ⁶⁶ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 26.
- ⁶⁷ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 35.
- ⁶⁸ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 183.
- ⁶⁹ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 37. 'Pute et fière' was the original title of *Ma Marseillaise*, and points to an important contextual element of Al Joundi's work: throughout her life, her efforts to be a 'free woman' have led to her being labelled a 'pute'. In the end, Noun concludes that 'j'ai tellement été traitée de pute que j'ai compris: dans mes pays, je dois être fière d'être appelée pute. Il faudrait même changer le sens du mot. Dans le dictionnaire, au mot "pute", on devrait inscrire: "Femme libre, indépendante financièrement, intellectuellement et professionnellement". J'ai fini par comprendre: à chaque fois qu'on m'appelle pute, je réponds: "Oui je le suis et j'en suis fière"'. Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 24.
- ⁷⁰ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 51.
- ⁷¹ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', pp. 180-181.
- ⁷² Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 8.
- ⁷³ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 8.
- ⁷⁴ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 24.
- ⁷⁵ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 19, p. 66.
- ⁷⁶ Leïla Sebbar, 'L'Orient, ma rêverie', http://clinet.swarthmore.edu/leila_sebbar/virtuel/orient.html [last accessed 31 May 2016].
- ⁷⁷ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, pp. 77-78.
- ⁷⁸ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 6.
- ⁷⁹ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 175.
- ⁸⁰ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 180, p. 178.
- ⁸¹ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 49. Noun is quoting journalist and writer Djemila Benhabib.
- ⁸² Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 7.
- ⁸³ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 181.
- ⁸⁴ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 68.
- ⁸⁵ Darina Al Joundi, 'Préface: Noun est une de mes Moi', p. 9.
- ⁸⁶ Leïla Sebbar, *L'arabe comme un chant secret*, p. 111.
- ⁸⁷ 'Alors imaginez que toutes ces femmes arrivent ici et se fassent rattraper par les mêmes lois que dans leur pays d'origine... condamnées à recommencer le même combat'. Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 50.
- ⁸⁸ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 180, p. 181.
- ⁸⁹ Darina Al Joundi, *Ma Marseillaise*, p. 53.
- ⁹⁰ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 185.
- ⁹¹ Darina Al Joundi, 'Préface: Noun est une de mes Moi', p. 8. The distinction between Al Joundi and Noun can also usefully be applied to Sebbar's fictional work, in which she blends her own experiences, observations, historical research and imagined histories.
- ⁹² Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 14.
- ⁹³ Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 186.

⁹⁴ Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 14.

⁹⁵ Darina Al Joundi, 'Interview with Helen Vassallo, Paris 2012', p. 7.