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Remembering Bodies: Gender, Race, and Nationality in the French-Algerian War

by

Christine Lisa Quinan

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and the Designated Emphasis

in

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Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Lucey, Chair

Professor Ann Smock

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Abstract

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by

Christine Lisa Quinan

Doctor of Philosophy in French

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Professor Michael Lucey, Chair

This dissertation interrogates images and narratives of the body during the French-Algerian War, an eight-year conflict that began in 1954 and ended with Algerian independence in 1962. Moving between Algeria and France in my analyses and considering documents from the period in question and from later years that reflect back on it, I analyze literary works, films, memoirs, and a legal case in order to consider how physical violence and trauma produce a variety of forms of psychological and corporeal dissonance and how the repression of personal and collective memories can impact bodies and minds both destructively and productively. An investigation of the workings of the social constructs of gender and sexuality is at the center of this project, and I consistently take an approach that actively engages feminist theoretical perspectives, while also taking into account how other categories like race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship intersect with gender and sexuality to structure our understanding of embodiment and memory during the French-Algerian War. Given the unique and gendered ways in which bodies respond to violence and consequently hold memories, the French-Algerian War proves to be a compelling case study regarding the transformative and agential power of bodies during periods of resistance.

Drawing on disciplines such as cultural studies, feminist sociology, postcolonial studies, social movement theory, and human rights studies, I situate my dissertation at the intersection of theories of embodiment and of memory to investigate the myriad ways in which this war of decolonization was literally and figuratively fought on the bodies of Algerian women. Conversely, through the attention it caused to be paid to the Muslim female body, the war placed the seemingly “neutral” and “unmarked” body of the French, heterosexual, Christian, white, male body in question. In analyses of my primary archive, I also uncover how the process of decolonization sparked a crisis in national identity, as “Frenchness” (what it meant to be French) was constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed with every turn of the war, particularly as revelations of torture and brutality emerged. Additionally, I propose that this moment posed a crisis in gender and sexuality, as it became a period of reification of certain forms of masculinity and femininity and a contestation and production of others. Finally, I turn to recent works and current events

in order to uncover some of the ways in which the French-Algerian War goes on having an impact today.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION	iv
CHAPTER 1:        Veiling Unveiled: Embodiment and Action in Assia Djebar's <i>Les enfants du nouveau monde</i> and <i>Les alouettes naïves</i>	1
CHAPTER 2:        Torture, Memory, and Film: Alain Resnais' Absent "Muriel"	41
CHAPTER 3:        Technocrats and Tortured Bodies: Simone de Beauvoir and the French-Algerian War	90
CHAPTER 4:        Hidden Memories: Retracing October 17, 1961 in Michael Haneke's <i>Caché</i> and Leïla Sebbar's <i>La Seine était rouge</i>	137
CONCLUSION	183
BIBLIOGRAPHY	196

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. Overview

My dissertation interrogates images and narratives of the body during the French-Algerian War,<sup>1</sup> an eight-year conflict that began in 1954 and ended in with Algerian independence in 1962. Moving between Algeria and France in my analyses and considering documents from the period in question and from later years that reflect back on it, I analyze literary works, films, memoirs, and a legal case in order to consider how physical violence and trauma produce a variety of forms of psychological and corporeal dissonance and how the repression of personal and collective memories can impact bodies and minds both destructively and productively. An investigation of the workings of the social constructs of gender and sexuality is at the center of this project, and I consistently take an approach that actively engages feminist theoretical perspectives, while also taking into account how other categories like race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship intersect with gender and sexuality to structure our understanding of embodiment and memory during the French-Algerian War. Given the unique and gendered ways in which bodies respond to violence and consequently hold memories, the French-Algerian War proves to be a compelling case study regarding the transformative and agential power of bodies during periods of resistance.

Drawing on disciplines such as cultural studies, feminist sociology, postcolonial studies, social movement theory, and human rights studies, I situate my dissertation at the intersection of theories of embodiment and of memory to investigate the myriad ways in which this war of decolonization was literally and figuratively fought on the bodies of Algerian women. Conversely, through the attention it caused to be paid to the Muslim female body, the war seemed to place the seemingly “neutral” and “unmarked” body of the French, heterosexual, Christian, white, male body in question. In analyses of my primary archive, I also uncover how the process of decolonization sparked a crisis in national identity, as “Frenchness” (what it meant to be French) was constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed with every turn of the war, particularly as revelations of torture and brutality emerged. Additionally, I propose that this moment posed a crisis in gender and sexuality, as it became a period of reification of certain forms of masculinity and femininity and a contestation and production of others. Anne Donadey highlights the importance of studying gender in the postcolonial context: “Gender, rather than being peripheral to postcolonial literature, is indeed one of its crucial components... the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I have chosen to refer to the conflict as the “French-Algerian War,” rather than the more conventional “Algerian War,” “Algerian War of Independence,” or “Algerian Revolution” for the same reason that James Le Sueur cites. The term “Algerian war” is Franco-centric, as “Algeria has fought many wars without France. Hence, leaving aside the question of whether an undeclared colonial war can be called anything other than a civil war, I have settled on the more specific and neutral name French-Algerian War” (2006, 328, n. 1). As I will also discuss below, the French government would not call it a “war” at the time, yielding a whole other set of euphemisms.

question of gender disrupts Manichean dichotomies” (2001, xxix) of master/slave while questioning figurations of women as “objects to be protected... as stakes in the struggle... [or] as metaphors for the nation” (2001, xxx). While viewing gender as a central lens to study literary and cinematic production around the French-Algerian War, I simultaneously take an intersectional approach that looks at how gender, race, religion, and citizenship inform one another in studies of the war, as well as in subsequent memories of the conflict.

The relationship between embodiment and gender is more or less evident. Bodies are often immediately seen as fitting into one of the two accepted genders (and bodies that are not may be seen as disruptive and non-normative). Thanks to the work of feminist scholars and gender theorists, we can take as given the idea that gender, itself a reiterative series of bodily performative acts, is often experienced as “organic, ingrained, ‘real,’ invisible, and immutable” while also being a primary mode of oppression that sorts human bodies into binary categories” (Halberstam, 118). Less obvious might be the relationship between memory and gender. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith elucidate the notion of memory as gendered: “...the technologies of memory, the frames of interpretation, and the acts of transfer they enable are in themselves gendered... [E]xperience, as well as its recollection and transmission, is subject to gendered paradigms” (7). Following this line of thought, later in this dissertation I will show how memories of a woman tortured would shape the masculinities of soldiers involved in her death. In another chapter, I will examine how women function as the guardians and protectors of memories of forgotten events, thereby allowing for the creation of their own memory legacy that counters and/or fills in “official history.”

Embodiment and memory, my two vectors of analysis throughout this study, converge to allow us to talk about a host of other issues. Regarding memory, I concur with Michael Rothberg’s statement that it “captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side and the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past” (4). While emphasizing the effectiveness in studying memory, Rothberg also gestures towards the interconnectedness of memory and embodiment. In the obvious sense, bodies are the containers of minds that hold memories. But I take as a point of departure that bodies, too, hold memories, in both the individual and collective sense. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* helps me think of the body as a site of inscription of culture, habit, custom, History, and past experience, while also exploring how representations of the body allow us not only to determine how history is inscribed in the body but also how the body is inscribed in history.

My approach to embodiment is also informed by Elizabeth Grosz’s theoretical work on the body. I draw upon her assertion that “the body, or rather, bodies, cannot be adequately understood as ahistorical, precultural, or natural objects in any simple way; they are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social construction of nature itself” (1994, x). In *Space, Time, and Perversion*, Grosz summarizes several philosophical approaches to embodiment, ultimately dividing them into two categories. The first she identifies as the “inscriptive” model, which she uses to describe the work of Nietzsche, Kafka, Foucault, and Deleuze. She writes that this framework “conceives of the body as a surface on which social law, morality, and values are inscribed” (1995, 33). She terms the second approach, which is more prevalent in psychology, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology, the “lived

body,” and it refers to the body’s internal or psychic inscription. Grosz suggests that the two models may not be able to exist simultaneously: “Where the first analyzes a *social*, public body, the second takes the body-schema or imaginary anatomy as its object(s). It is not clear to me that these two approaches are compatible or capable of synthesis” (1995, 33). It is, indeed, this possibility of synthesis that I examine throughout the entire dissertation, for I believe the two models may in fact complement each other and allow for a more productive discussion of embodiment. I read the body at the moment of the French-Algerian War as both surface and depth, as both passive (affected and often controlled by exterior circumstances) and active (capable of shaping the individual’s future).

Given my framework for understanding embodiment, sexuality emerges as an exemplary site of inquiry into the production and construction of identity and provides a unique approach to the body as both surface and depth (as does the practice of torture, which I also analyze). The enactment of sexuality, particularly between the Algerian female subject and the European male colonizer, is inscribed on the surface of the body, while deeper within, inscriptions of race, class, gender, sexuality, desires, aversions, and memories are found, forever remaining in the body and potentially being called up at any moment in response to particular experiences or memories.

Throughout the dissertation, I mount an argument that literature and film about the French-Algerian War is shaped by the intersections between anxieties around national identity, on the one hand, and around gender, on the other hand. Before turning to this imbrication of gender and national identity as seen in texts of the period, I will provide a brief summary of the conflict, for the historical specificity combined with a number of unique aspects (including the nature of its pervasive violence in the form of torture, terrorism, and guerilla warfare) undoubtedly molded literary and cinematic production about the war.

## II. Historical Context

While the war is traditionally considered to have begun on November 1, 1954, there had already been moments of intense strain and upsurges in violence over the previous decades (most notably during the 1945 Sétif massacre in which tens of thousands of Algerians were killed). Algeria, once ruled by the Ottoman Empire, had been occupied by France for over a century before the Algerian Revolution seriously took shape in the mid-1950s. Dating back to its 1830 invasion of the region eventually known as Algeria<sup>2</sup>, France had always maintained a highly possessive relationship with this North African colony, much more so than it had with any of its other colonies in the region. This was in part due to the fact that Algeria was initially established as a settler colony, the French government encouraging *colons* to relocate to North Africa where they were assured of vast farming lands. By the 1950s, more than one million *pieds noirs* were living in Algeria, many

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<sup>2</sup> Prior to Ottoman rule and French colonization, “Algeria” was not a country but separate and distinct regions composed of tribes (including Berber, Kabyle, Chaouia, Mzab, and Tuareg). A variety of different languages and dialects were spoken and customs between these native groups were disparate. In this sense, “Algeria” was an arbitrary construction.

of whom had been born in Algeria and had never set foot in France proper. (The Muslim Algerian population was about nine million in 1954.)

Unlike what happened in Morocco and Tunisia, which both achieved independence relatively peacefully in 1956, France was not willing to give up this highly valuable territory. In fact, there was no legal distinction between the *métropole* and Algeria, as the French government had annexed the region in 1834 and, in 1848, named it not a colony but rather a part of France. It was composed of three *départements* (Algiers, Constantine, and Oran), each functioning just like Paris or Loire-Atlantique or Haut-Rhin. Legally, this meant that Algerians should be subject to the same legislation and should receive the same “privileges” as citizens of any other region of metropolitan France. This was, however, only in theory, and the truth was that those of Algerian origin living in Algeria (usually termed “*Français Musulmans d’Algérie*”<sup>3</sup>) were treated as second-class citizens compared to the *pièds noirs*, or those of French origin living in Algeria.<sup>4</sup> Instead, in 1865 the Second Empire’s Senatus consulte established the *Code de l’indigénat* in order to govern the region. Article 1 stated:

L’indigène musulman est français; néanmoins il continuera à être régi par la loi musulmane. Il peut être admis à servir dans les armées de terre et de mer. Il peut être appelé à des fonctions et emplois civils en Algérie. Il peut, sur sa demande, être admis à jouir des droits de citoyen français; dans ce cas, il est régi par les lois civiles et politiques de la France.

As is evident in the article’s language, Muslim Algerians were subject to certain aspects of French law (military service), yet were not considered fully “French.” (Despite the fact that Muslim Algerians could apply for French citizenship, fewer than 200 actually requested “naturalization,” most likely because they did not want to be seen as collaborators.) While Algerian Muslims were French nationals, this nationality gave them no political rights.<sup>5</sup>

A significant development came in 1870 with the Crémieux Decree that granted Algerian Jews (about 30,000) identical rights to all French living in the Hexagon. Still, however, Muslim Algerians were left out. Muslim Algerian men were finally granted full citizenship in 1944, after thousands of Algerians had fought for France in World War II, whereas Muslim Algerian women were not accorded full citizenship until 1958, already four years into the war with France. In his landmark study of the French-Algerian War, Alistair Horne writes:

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<sup>3</sup> In 1958, this was changed to “*français de souche nord-africaine*,” (“French of North African Origin”) with French of European origin being called “*français de souche européenne*.” Naming becomes very important at this juncture and shapes interactions and power structures between “colonizer” and “colonized.” For more detail, see Todd Shepard, pp. 50-54.

<sup>4</sup> For a contemporary study of the *pièd noir* population and relationship to Muslim Algerians, see Pierre Nora, *Les Français d’Algérie* (1961).

<sup>5</sup> For an extensive discussion of the complicated status of Muslim Algerians and their corresponding rights (or lack thereof), as well as the role gender plays in this debate, see Todd Shepard, pp. 24-33.

Though, like its predecessor, the Fourth Republic was born as a consequence of military defeat by the Germans, the constitution it gave itself started with what looked like a bright enough image. Its preamble led off that: ‘It... solemnly reaffirms the rights and freedoms of man and citizen as set forth in the Declaration of Rights of 1789’ and went on to declare that: ‘France, together with the overseas peoples, forms a Union founded upon equality of rights and of duties, without distinction of race or of religion.’ France would, it stressed, ‘never employ its forces against the liberty of any people.’ (65-66)

Despite this assertion, in practice Muslim Algerians were not treated as “full citizens,” a hypocritical stance that would inevitably provoke revolution.

Reacting to rampant racism, as well as France’s obstinate refusal to cede control of the region, Algerian nationalists began an intense campaign for independence beginning in 1954. On October 31, 1954, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), the Algerian socialist party and face of the national liberation struggle, coordinated twenty strikes against French military posts and police stations in Algeria. These attacks would later be termed “Toussaint rouge” and would signify a call to the Algerian public to join the fight for independence. Although the FLN could only arm about 800 soldiers, they proved to be adept at guerilla warfare and held their own against the much stronger French military. By war’s end, the total number of Algerian fighters would reach into the hundreds of thousands.

While the hexagonal French public was still largely oblivious to what was happening in Algeria (and partially distracted by the rapid modernization that was occurring in France), soldiers were increasingly being sent across the Mediterranean Sea to quell a growing revolution<sup>6</sup>, Algerian immigrants were arriving on the shores of France to work in its factories, and violence in both locations was escalating to new levels. Contempt and hatred was intensifying, as divisions between races, classes, and religions were becoming more pronounced as France mounted a fierce campaign to hold onto its dissenting province.

A brutal eight-year war ensued, with somewhere between 500,000 and 1.5 million Algerians killed and two million relocated to detention camps. On the French side, between 50,000 and 100,000 soldiers were killed and numerous governments collapsed. In order to maintain control in the face of growing uneasiness as well as increasing dissent and calls for independence, the French military and police began to use brutal force, unwarranted violence, and questionable interrogation techniques. Torture quickly became one of the main instruments of war.

Due in part to revelations of the military’s use of torture, the war bitterly divided the French population – while many called for an end to this “dirty war,” others ardently insisted on maintaining this valuable region emblematic of the French empire. This public divide, combined with governmental missteps, eventually resulted in the fall of the Fourth Republic. From the war’s official start in 1954, France saw seven prime ministers come and go before World War II hero Charles de Gaulle was called on to lead the Fifth Republic in 1958.

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<sup>6</sup> 1.7 million French men would serve in Algeria by war’s end.

The next four years would see escalating violence and intensifying conflict between the anti-colonial/Algerian nationalist camp and the supporters of *Algérie française*, including the far-right OAS whose motto was “*L’Algérie est française et le restera.*” In 1961, de Gaulle, knowing that Algerian independence was a foregone conclusion, began secret talks with the FLN that eventually culminated in the Evian Accords and a call for a formal cease-fire. In June 1962, the French electorate voted 91% in favor of the Accords, and on July 1, 1962, the Algerian electorate voted nearly unanimously in favor of independence. Two days later, on July 3, 1962, Algeria became an independent country.

Although France was ultimately forced to relinquish Algeria in 1962, traumatic memories of the war remained lodged in the minds and bodies of citizens of both nations, emerging decades later, often in violent ways. Blocking any possibility of a collective healing process was France’s refusal to call the war a “war.” Instead, it had only been referred to as “une opération de maintien de l’ordre” or “les événements d’Algérie”. Jean Monneret explains: “La position de l’administration et son refus de parler de guerre, s’expliquent par le fait que les combats se déroulaient sur un territoire constitué alors de départements français. Il n’y avait pas de guerre au sens juridique du terme puisqu’aucune déclaration, provenant d’un État n’avait précédé les actions militaires” (9). Marnia Lazreg elaborates on the politics of naming (or misnaming) that seemed to pervade all aspects of the conflict, from the practice of torture to the war itself:

The grammar of euphemisms contained torture by sinking it below the level of consciousness, repressing its disturbing intrusion on the oft displayed stage of France’s ‘civilizing mission.’ It released torture from its special status as an uncivilized method and floated it as one of many anonymous ‘exactions,’ reflecting the namelessness of the war itself. French officials and the press alike referred to the war as ‘Algeria’s incidents’ (*événements d’Algérie*). The French word *événements* is also synonymous with ‘events’ and ‘happenings.’ Algeria was thus eventful, but not at war. (...) Tangled up in this orgiastic name-fixing was the French unease with acknowledging Algerians’ identity. A French department (Algeria’s official status) was inhabited by *French* people. But every French person knew that Algerians were not quite French, yet they needed to be thought of as such for France’s own sense of identity. (2008, 112)

On October 18, 1999, thirty-seven years after the war’s end, the war was finally acknowledged when the National Assembly voted to permit the term “*guerre d’Algérie.*” With public recognition that the French-Algerian War was indeed a war, the veil of secrecy around the conflict has begun to be lifted. Previously closed state archives have been opened, allowing for more in-depth historical studies of the conflict to emerge. In the decade leading up to the French government’s admission, a large number of literary and cinematic works treating the French-Algerian War have been published. On both sides of the Atlantic, studies of the war have undoubtedly begun to proliferate. Historian Robert Aldrich echoes, “The Algerian War, and colonial history in general, has never before galvanised public attention as in recent years” (14.7).

### III. Gender, Memory, and Violence

In the Introduction to a 2002 special issue of *Signs* devoted to gender and cultural memory, Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith ask the following questions: “How... does the position of finding oneself on the threshold of a new citizenship shape assumptions about gender and sexuality?... How does the role of the female witness or agent of transmission differ from that of her male counterpart? How do feminist theories of empathy and intersubjectivity, of space, of solidarity, of the body and bodily memory... inflect our reading of the image?” (2). It is, in essence, these questions to which I respond throughout the dissertation. This exploration, responding, and re-questioning takes various forms. As already mentioned, I take embodiment as a point of departure in examining the ways in which Algerian women functioned as a tool in the French-Algerian War, used by all sides to serve particular purposes. The Algerian female body was functioning as a screen onto which both French and Algerian men could project their anxieties around colonial power and masculinity. Lazreg further describes the military’s use of women: “[Military strategists] found in the ideology of ‘women’s emancipation’ a weapon of choice and an opportunity to open a new psychological and political front that expanded their ‘pacification’ doctrine. (...) In its fundamentals, the military gender strategy sought to use women as its Trojan horse to do its bidding in the intimacy of the family under the banner of a ‘new’ Algeria.” (145).

While invested in uncovering how women’s bodies were used, I am also attentive to the resistance strategies deployed by these same women. As I will discuss in the chapter breakdown below, these tactics came in various forms, including legal means, bodily comportment and dress, literary production, and historical interventions. I engage with work by historians and feminist and post-colonial theorists in order to investigate how individuals negotiated their identities and bodies at this particular historical moment, ultimately demonstrating that neither subjectivity nor embodiment is fixed or stable. In fact, each individual is constantly engaged in a process of becoming whereby social, cultural, and psychological moments of disruption can prove productive and may result in newfound forms of being and action.

Another trope with which I contend in the dissertation is the idea that torture, in its laying bare of bodies and corporeal resistance strategies, is always already gendered – that is, torture relies on and even reinforces traditional gender roles: “Torture was meant to rebuild the native ‘suspect’ or combatant from the ground up in a psychological action based on sex, masculinity and femininity...” (Lazreg, 255). There were clear stakes in terms of gender normativity, and I examine how representations of tortured Algerian women were intimately linked to and aided in constructions of: (1) masculinity (violence as a way of shoring up manliness), and (2) nationality (violent treatment became justifiable, as it was part of the “civilizing mission” that positioned Algerians as less than equal). French intellectuals, for example, began to step in to “save” these women, and used a nationalist rhetoric of “this is what is happening in the name of France” in order to appeal to a technocratic, bourgeois generation of hexagonal French men and women who did not seem to know what to do or even how to come to terms with the war at all.

This idea leads me to another thread that runs through the dissertation: that of the desire (conscious or not) to turn away from the realities of the war, particularly on the part of the bourgeois class. Todd Shepard identifies the notion of “decolonization” as such an

avoidance tactic. The term “decolonization” (“*décolonisation*”) was first coined by journalist Henri Fonfrède in his 1836 tract “Decolonization of Algiers” in which he critiqued the French occupation of Algeria, but the word disappeared from usage until taken up by some social scientists and Communists writing in the late 1920s (Shepard, 5). However, it was not until decades later that the term began widely circulating, and this time it had taken on a new valence – “decolonization” came to be a way for the French to “avoid explaining why they now overwhelmingly accepted Algerian independence” (Shepard, 55):

‘Inventing decolonization’ allowed the French to avoid facing the challenges that Algerian nationalism and the Algerian Revolution posed to classic conceptions of French values and history, at least temporarily. These conceptions depended on principles of universalism, the individual, progress, and the Rights of Man; what the French avoided discussing was the failure of the institutional forms that most embodied these principles – republican government, nationality, citizenship, and the constitution – to make Algeria French. (272)<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the dissertation, I will show how this focus on decolonization, combined with an obsession with mid-twentieth-century technological advancements, aided in such a turning away from what was actually happening, providing the emergent class of technocrats with an alibi for not confronting the present.

#### **IVa. Representing Violence**

In a war that saw upwards of 1.5 million casualties, those bodies that survived were literally and figuratively marked by the eight-year conflict. Some of those tortured were obliged to live with the scars and burns left on their bodies by the violence done to them. Others had no visible evidence to mark their simulated drownings and repeated electrocutions, for the military became increasingly vigilant about *not* leaving any trace of the violations inflicted on these bodies. French soldiers returning from the war also had to deal with traumas to their bodies and minds. Of the 1.7 million conscripts sent over to Algeria, many returned home to a more modernized France with missing limbs, broken bodies, and haunting memories of the violent acts that they regularly witnessed and performed.

While the French government denied its use of torture and even censored films and books that suggested it advocated such tactics, there was no question that torture

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Dine echoes this point: “...France’s successful participation in the post-war project of Europeanisation was to be predicated upon the dropping of its historic claim to Algeria. Indeed, the underlying rationale for the wholesale reconstruction of French society so ambitiously undertaken at this time consisted in the shift from a colonial vision of national *grandeur*, with Algeria regarded as the jewel in the imperial crown, to a ‘hexagonal’ (i.e. exclusively metropolitan) conception of a modernised France at the heart of a united Europe” (2000, 73).

techniques were being employed on both sides of the Mediterranean.<sup>8</sup> The goal of torture was not always to force insurgents to reveal information about the resistance, but instead, it was meant to function as a form of psychological warfare, with both revolutionaries and civilians being targeted in an attempt to destroy morale and win support for continued French governance of the region. Page duBois writes: “Although we may still believe that torture is performed as a means of extracting the names of others... torture is no longer performed to obtain truth from a victim. Rather, torturers torture to punish, to offer examples of certain actions. They torture to send back out into the world people broken, destroyed, to serve as living warnings” (147-148). While torture was eventually utilized by Algerian forces to combat the French counter-insurgency, it held particular symbolic value when used by French forces. Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison elaborates: “Des années 1840 à l’indépendance en 1962, le corps physique de ‘l’arabe’ a donc été utilisé comme un instrument de terreur sur lequel le pouvoir colonial n’a cessé d’inscrire les marques de sa toute puissance” (2005, 161). For the purposes of this dissertation, this particular aim of torture becomes paramount, for the Arab body had, both literally and metaphorically, functioned as the prime site of inscription of France’s colonial power.

Alongside the growing condemnations of torture, a much larger debate about imperial power and national identity emerged. Speaking out against torture did not necessarily mean supporting Algerian independence or refusing France’s *mission civilisatrice*. Henri Alleg, for example, asked: “Should we condemn only torture and France’s involvement in the war, or more generally, the colonial system?” (Cohen, 236). Because torture was only a microcosm of wide-ranging violations of human rights, many claimed that along with denunciations of torture must come an indictment of colonialism more generally. This notion also points to paradoxical questions of imperialism and universalism with which many were grappling: How can a nation be both colonialist and universalist? How can a state preach equality while occupying foreign lands?

#### IVb. Representing Memory

*...history is an echo chamber; memory can be a form that establishes fidelity to the echoes.*  
-- Michael ROTHBERG<sup>9</sup>

The notion of collective memory is central to this project. Coined by Maurice Halbwachs, this idea that memory is socially constructed is at play in much of the work I draw upon, including that of Henry Rousso, Pierre Nora, and Benjamin Stora. Additionally, Mieke Bal’s notion of “cultural memory,” that is, the idea that “memory can

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<sup>8</sup> Confirmation that the French government did indeed sanction the use of torture would finally come from General Paul Aussaresses in 2001. In his book *Services spéciaux: Algérie 1955-1957* and in an interview with *Le Monde*, Aussaresses confessed to his own involvement in torture under the orders of Prime Minister Guy Mollet. He defended its use and stated that it was a necessary evil in the war. (He would also advocate for the use of torture in the current fight against Al-Qaeda.) I discuss this case in more detail in the Conclusion to this dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> Rothberg 2006, 181.

be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual or social one” (vii), has been equally helpful in theorizing the literary and cinematic transmission of memories around the war. I further consider how representations of the past are gendered and racialized, speaking to the ways in which cultural memory is inevitably linked to power. Studies of memory, both personal and collective, have grown immensely in the past decades.<sup>10</sup> Scholarly work around the Holocaust and trauma has been especially influential in the emergence of this new field of memory studies. While I do not make any attempt to survey this vast field of knowledge, I have been especially influenced by Michael Rothberg’s notion of “multidirectional memory,” a notion that comes out of his work on remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization. This approach to memory, characterized by “ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (2009, 3), has been profoundly helpful in thinking through the ways in which memories of Algeria overlap with World War II (and other historical moments as well); indeed, WWII haunts the French-Algerian War (as it haunts each of the chapters of this dissertation). Rothberg’s work has also allowed me to see how memories need not occlude one another: “An overly rigid focus on memory competition distracts from other ways of thinking about the relation between histories and their memorial legacies. Ultimately, memory is not a zero-sum game” (2009, 11).

I also look at the tension between personal memory and official history, and examine how national identity plays a role in remembering and forgetting. For example, referencing Ernest Renan’s ideas about the formation of the French nation across time (including its nineteenth-century conflicts with Prussia), Benedict Anderson argues that nations hold together by “having to ‘have already forgotten’” those threats to its cohesion, “those tragedies of which one unceasingly needs to be ‘reminded’” (Scandura, 5). Anthropologist Marc Augé proposes the theory that there is actually a duty to forget so as not to repeat the past: “We must forget in order to remain present, forget in order not to die, forget in order to remain faithful” (89). But forgetting, as Todd Shepard uncovers, also serves another function: “...French responses to the Algerian Revolution gave birth to the certainty that ‘decolonization’ was a stage in the forward march of history... This allowed the French to forget that Algeria had been part of France since the 1830s and to escape many of the larger implications of that shared past. Through this forgetting, there emerged novel definitions of French identity and new institutions of the French state” (2). Throughout the dissertation, I elaborate on this concept of changing forms of national identity and explore how questions of nationality are inevitably implicated in the practice of remembering and of forgetting.

## V. Archive

*After the war French writers rejected the idea of narrative because Hitler and Stalin were storytellers, and it seemed naïve to believe in stories. So instead they turned more and more to theory, to the absurd. The*

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<sup>10</sup> See Rothberg 2009, 315-316 (notes 1-6) for a good overview of this “memory boom” in scholarly work.

*French declined even to tell stories about their own history, including the war in Algeria, which like all history can't really be digested until it is turned into great literature.*  
-- Nancy HUSTON<sup>11</sup>

Social and cultural artifacts like literature, film, and legal documents do important work in remembering, transmitting, and representing the past. In order to serve the present and future, we must understand our relationship to the past, even if, as the case of the French-Algerian War demonstrates, this past is contested, constructed, and reconstructed. Mieke Bal describes the relationship between fictional texts and cultural memory (itself a fiction) in this way: “Because memory is made up of socially constituted forms, narratives, and relations, but also amenable to individual acts of intervention in it, memory is always open to social revision and manipulation. This makes it an instance of fiction rather than imprint, often of social forgetting rather than remembering” (xiii). Engaging in a process of cultural memory necessarily means engaging in a process of combined forgetting and remembering; through its inherent fictionalizing, remembering becomes a process of rewriting, not dissimilar from literature. Bal continues: “Cultural memory can be located in literary texts because the latter are continuous with the communal fictionalizing, idealizing, monumentalizing impulses thriving in a conflicted culture” (xiii).

France has remembered and forgotten its colonial past (and postcolonial present) in particular ways, and this collective memory and amnesia structures the ways in which both Algerian and French writers tell the story of the French-Algerian War and Algerian independence. While this dissertation cannot possibly offer a comprehensive picture of all literature and film about the French-Algerian War, through close readings of several novels and films, I attempt to provide in-depth analysis of a number of nuanced works representative of the period’s concerns and anxieties, hopes and fears. I am invested in looking at works that write the experiences of those silenced, forgotten, or left out of the official historical record of the French-Algerian War. Using a transnational feminist theoretical approach, I put French and Algerian literature and film in dialogue with the work of historians, cultural historians, and sociologists. I analyze canonical and somewhat less canonical works by well-known writers, directors, and activists, including Simone de Beauvoir, Assia Djebar, Alain Resnais, Gisèle Halimi, Leïla Sebbar, Michael Haneke, and Laurent Mauvignier. Each of these individuals speaks from a very different national subject position (including French, Algerian, Beur, French-Tunisian, Austrian), while also representing a range of genders, races, classes, linguistic backgrounds, and religions. But taken together, their works provide an excellent lens into the war and its aftermath, as well as into twenty-first-century legacies of colonialism.<sup>12</sup>

A wide range of genres are also represented in this study, from historical novel (*Les alouettes naïves*) to young adult fiction (*La Seine était rouge*), from Nouvelle Vague-esque film (*Muriel*) to Nouveau Roman-esque novel (*Les belles images*), from feature film (*Caché*) to a text that truly defies generic categorization (*Les enfants du nouveau monde*). Each work

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Michael Kimmelman, “Pardon My French,” *New York Times*, April 21, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> One group that is noticeably absent from my analysis are the *pièdes noirs*. For reasons of space and time, I did not believe I could do justice to the *pièd noir* experience during the French-Algerian War. I hope to address this absence in future versions of the project.

reflects on form and genre while also speaking to larger issues of fragmentation, censorship, and crisis unique to the period and the war. For example, several of the works I analyze use the technique of *mise-en-abyme* in order to reflect on themselves and the process of becoming artistically and politically engaged. Anne Donadey's characterization of postcolonial literature as disrupting genre and form proves true throughout this study: Postcolonial literature "underscores the fractures in the grand narratives of decolonization; it begins to effect a slippage away from the (former) colonizer as its main target and instead turns to a multiplicity of struggles... [T]he mark of the postcolonial... is the blurring of neat, dichotomous boundaries..." (2001, xxv).

## VI. Chapter Breakdown

I bookend my dissertation with two dates: May 16, 1958 (on which took place a government orchestrated event at which several Algerian women had their veils removed by the wives of French military officials), and October 17, 1961 (the date of the infamous – although oft-forgotten – massacre of hundreds of peaceful Algerian demonstrators by Paris police). While I also examine moments before and after, the particular events occurring on these two dates highlight the complex politics of gender, nationality, citizenship, and memory central to the eight-year war. Each chapter looks at a different group involved and/or profoundly affected by the conflict – Algerian revolutionaries and civilians, French soldiers, non-combatants (including middle-class French civilians and public intellectuals), and postcolonial subjects (French, Algerian, Beur) coming to terms with the French-Algerian War decades later.

In Chapter One, "Veiling Unveiled: Embodiment and Action in Assia Djebar's *Les enfants du nouveau monde* and *Les alouettes naïves*, I investigate a compelling trope of veiling and unveiling that emerges in literary and historical studies of the Algerian War of Independence. Representations of the veil produce scenes fraught with conflicts, contradictions, hypocrisies, and political maneuverings – all localized around the Algerian female body, a polarizing site onto which both sides of the war had projected their colonial and erotic desires and disturbances, fears and anxieties, strengths and weaknesses. The work of Assia Djebar, a female Algerian writer and filmmaker, is at the heart of this chapter. The two early novels that I consider, (*Les enfants du nouveau monde* (1962) and *Les alouettes naïves* (1967)) like much of her work, complicate discussions of race, gender, sexuality, and Algerian identity. I am also interested in her way of investigating the multiple models available for "being an Algerian woman" (including the revolutionary) at this particular moment in Algerian and in French history. I recuperate the veil from its traditional readings as a tool of oppression, proposing instead that it is a multivalent locale of female agency and action. I also analyze the theme of prostitution, as it presents a unique relationship between embodiment and subjectivity in the colonial context.

As a point of departure into this study, I examine an event that took place on May 16, 1958, four years into the Algerian Revolution and months after Algerian women were given the right to vote without restriction. The French government staged a public rally for which they brought thousands of villagers into the city of Algiers in hopes of winning over the local population and convincing them that fighting for independence was not the way to go. This sort of gathering was not unusual, as the French were realizing that if they

had any desire to retain this valuable territory, something would need to be done to quell nationalist sentiments. But this particular rally was not like the others. Sometime into the “celebration,” a number of Muslim Algerian women, followed by a group of French women, were brought up onto the stage. To the tune of *la Marseillaise*, the veils of the Algerian women were removed – by the French women. The Algerian women then began chanting “Kif kif les françaises” (“Let’s be like French women”), a phrase that spoke directly to France’s belief that assimilation was the answer to all problems related to Algeria. Although this event was but a blip on the radar of an intense eight-year revolution, the act speaks volumes about the nature of the war on both sides of the struggle, in particular the use of Algerian female bodies as a way to maintain control and assert power.

If in the first chapter I demonstrate the myriad ways in which the Algerian female body was made visible (both in the circulation of literary texts and in acts like forced unveilings of Muslim women), in Chapter Two, entitled “Torture, Memory, and Film: Alain Resnais’ Absent ‘Muriel,’” I turn to a conspicuous absence of the Algerian female body in Alain Resnais’ *Muriel, ou le temps d’un retour* (1963), a highly fragmented film that, through its disjointedness, speaks to the psychological and bodily pain inflicted on Algerians during the war, as well as to the anxieties of French soldiers upon their return from Algeria. As the title of the film would seem to suggest, Resnais is interested in the story of a certain “Muriel,” an Algerian woman who was tortured and murdered by a French Army unit. This title character will, however, never appear in the film, and her absence will highlight the multitude of silences surrounding the Algerian War and French remembrances of it.

While touching upon memories of destruction and rebuilding (both figurative and symbolic) around World War II, the film’s principal narrative is concerned with Bernard, one of the soldiers responsible for Muriel’s torture and death, who falls into psychological crisis after returning to France. He knows no other way to deal with his guilt around the incident than to gather “evidence” (in the form of photographs and “documentary” footage) in hopes of eventually telling Muriel’s story. His efforts ultimately prove unsuccessful, revealing along the way a certain crisis in masculinity that many French conscripts returning from war were experiencing. Although the torture scene is not represented visually, its presence haunts the entire film, echoing the previous chapter’s assertion that the Algerian female body was functioning as a screen onto which French men could project their anxieties around colonial power and masculinity.

While the first two chapters deal with novels or films that represent people directly involved in the war, in my third chapter (“Technocrats and Tortured Bodies: Simone de Beauvoir and the Algerian War”) I begin to address the memory problems of non-combatants in France. I am interested in how the period’s new technocratic class dealt with the individual and collective traumas of the previous two decades, particularly how they placed their faith in an undying hope in the future while simultaneously ignoring the horrors of war-time violence and the divisiveness of French colonial policies at home and “abroad” (i.e. outside the hexagon). The birth of new technologies and the growing access to television and other forms of media played a role in the development of this gaze

towards a utopic future and away from a troubled past, highlighting the complex ways in which remembering and forgetting functioned for this privileged class.

Building on the second chapter's analysis of war crimes and collective responsibility, I scrutinize two additional representations of female bodies tortured during the French-Algerian War, both of which appear in the writings of Simone de Beauvoir. The first is found in her 1966 novel *Les belles images*, where a newspaper article about a woman tortured to death sends the text's protagonist into a psychological crisis, forever altering her interactions with her family and fellow technocrats. While this woman will never learn how to become effectively engaged, the situation mirrors that of Beauvoir whose own encounter with a tortured Algerian woman further solidified her commitment to the Algerian cause. I then move to an examination of Beauvoir's involvement in the 1960 legal case of Djamila Boupacha, a young Algerian woman was brutally raped and tortured for 33 days, a case which garnered significant attention from the French public after Beauvoir and lawyer Gisèle Halimi embarked on a campaign to defend Boupacha. I examine the ambiguity and tensions found at the heart of Beauvoir's work on the case, and explore how she strategically used a rhetoric of nationality and of shame in order to reach an ignorant, and sometimes apathetic, public.

The final chapter, "Hidden Memories: Retracing October 17, 1961," addresses instances of state violence that have posed particular problems to French national memory. I examine several studies of the oft-forgotten Paris police massacre of October 17, 1961, a bloody event that resulted in as many as 200 Algerians being drowned in the Seine. I am particularly interested in the role that the media, and images in general, play in our "decision" to remember or to forget this moment when the French-Algerian War literally "hit home" in France. To this end, I focus my analysis around representations of physical and symbolic violence in cinematic and literary portrayals of the event.

I analyze two recent treatments of October 1961, one literary and one cinematic, each of which reflects on this notion of collective memory and its corollary, collective amnesia. I begin with Austrian director Michael Haneke's French-language film *Caché* (2005), a work that struggles with the physical and symbolic violence enacted on bodies due to repression of individual and collective memories like October 17, while simultaneously signaling how individual and collective memories are inextricably linked. I then turn to Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge: le 17 octobre 1961* (1999), a novel that grapples with remembering October 17 – by not only those who were involved but also subsequent generations. In addition to uncovering the problematics of remembering a disavowed past, Sebbar also exposes the complex politics at the heart of memorializing an event that most seem to want to forget. Both Haneke's film and Sebbar's novel pose questions around anamnesis and commemoration, albeit in different ways. While *La Seine était rouge* is interested in reconstituting memories of October 17 itself (through a literal retracing of the event) and its legacy in France and Algeria, *Caché* takes this notion a step further and makes the massacre metonymic of a whole host of forms of state-imposed violence and of hidden national memories that are not unique to France. In their different takes on the same event, each of these representations of past violence demonstrates the subjective nature to memory, history, and truth.

As each of these chapters makes clear, the French-Algerian War was a true battleground of identity politics. In his study of intellectuals' relationship to the war, James Le Sueur sums up the identity politics at the heart of the conflict: "The French-Algerian War and the process of decolonization... necessitated a fundamental reconceptualization of French (and Algerian) national identity in a changing world, a world without European empires and colonies... the effects of this realization triggered a profound questioning of national identity in Algeria and in France" (6-7). It was simultaneously a civil war and an international conflict, as it pitted French against Algerians, French against French, and Algerians against Algerians. Gender, too, became a tool in the war, with Algerian women being regularly used by all factions to serve much larger purposes; indeed, "a woman's body was another war 'terrain' in the counterrevolutionary war" (Lazreg 2008, 165).

For these reasons and many others, the French-Algerian War is key to any investigation of European and North African literature, film, and history, postcolonial studies, and gender studies. An analysis of representational strategies (literature, film, legal and historical documents) uncovers how bodies (oftentimes bodies that disrupt the status quo) hold colonial memories, refusing any attempt to consciously or unconsciously forget, on both an individual and collective level. Given debates around torture and its relationship to race, gender, and sexuality, as well as current discussions of immigration, secularism, and militarism, both inside and outside of France, this period has profound relevance today. The French-Algerian War undoubtedly holds lessons in how we must understand the past in order to direct the future.

## CHAPTER ONE

**Veiling Unveiled: Female Embodiment and Action in Assia Djebar's *Les enfants du nouveau monde* and *Les alouettes naïves***

*The veiling and unveiling of the body highlights the body as machinery,  
and indeed as a technology of both war and the everyday.*  
– Ranjana KHANNA

A compelling trope that emerges in literary and historical studies of the French-Algerian War is that of veiling and unveiling. It is a scene fraught with conflicts, contradictions, hypocrisies, and political maneuverings – all localized around the Algerian female body, a polarizing site onto which both sides of the war had projected their colonial and erotic desires and disturbances, fears and anxieties, strengths and weaknesses. The veil itself had changing significations, first and foremost a cultural and religious marker, at times a protective mechanism, serving to conceal, disguise, and obscure. As films like Gillo Pontecorvo's *La Bataille d'Alger* (1965) have famously made clear, the veil would also be used as a tool in guerilla warfare, a way to hide bombs, grenades, and firearms, thereby allowing women to play a unique role in the revolution.<sup>13</sup> Although abandoned by some during the course of the independence movement, it simultaneously became a symbol of resistance, affording others a way of asserting agency in the face of the colonizer who wanted to unmask their hidden faces. Analyzing two texts by Algerian novelist Assia Djebar and work by cultural historians and feminist scholars, in this chapter I will present several examples of the ways in which the notion of veiling pervaded this particular (de)colonial moment, opening with a striking tableau of unveiling that has been alternately described as female liberation and public rape.

On May 16, 1958, four years into the Algerian Revolution and one year after Algerian women were given the right to vote without restriction, the French government staged a public rally wherein they brought thousands of villagers into the city of Algiers in hopes of winning over the local population and convincing them that fighting for independence was not the way to go. This sort of gathering was not unusual, as the French were realizing that if they had any hope of retaining their most valuable overseas

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<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon is certainly not confined to the period. In fact, a recent article in *The New York Times Magazine* details how veiling allows women to play a unique role in the insurgency movement in Iraq: “When, in 2006 and 2007, American and Iraqi forces began increasingly to use concrete barriers to insulate government buildings, markets and other gathering places from car bombs, the insurgents turned to women, who could use to advantage their traditional dress: a voluminous, floor-length black *abaya*, made of folds of flowing fabric. Tribal traditions and Arab notions of modesty make it unthinkable that the police or guards would search women. They could pass through even relatively robust security cordons as if they were invisible. They walked up the steps of government buildings, approached checkpoints and entered the offices and homes of people the militants wanted to assassinate” (Rubin 40).

territory, something would need to be done to quell Algerian nationalist sentiments. But this particular rally was not like the others. With *la Marseillaise* and the *Chant des Africains* playing in the background, soon into the “celebration” a number of veiled Algerian women, followed by a group of French women, were brought up onto the stage. The French women turned toward the Muslim women, and, with intense purpose, approached; slowly and deliberately, they removed these women’s veils. Instead of expressing horror or shame for having been stripped – by the colonizer nonetheless – of one of the most significant markers of their cultural and sexual identity, the unveiled women broke into chants of “Kif kif les françaises” (“Let’s be like French women”<sup>14</sup>) (Shepard 187). These Algerian women were presented as the beneficiaries of France’s *mission civilisatrice*, and on the path to embracing assimilationism, a policy that the colonial administration believed would be the answer to all problems related to Algeria. Although this event was but a blip on the radar of an intense eight-year revolution, the act says volumes about the nature of the war and the intensity with which the French were determined to use Algerian women to maintain control over an increasingly violent and powerful insurrection, while simultaneously pointing to the complex relationship that both French men and French women consistently maintained towards Algerian women and their bodies.

Before turning to an analysis of veiling, unveiling, and embodiment in two literary texts of the period, I would like to flesh out the particularities of the event of May 16<sup>th</sup>. While the rally may have initially seemed spontaneous and makeshift, the unveiling was well orchestrated, designed to garner international support for France’s increasingly questionable actions in Algerian territory. The French-Algerian conflict literally became a “battle of the veil,” symbolic of the larger war, which, as I will reiterate in following chapters, was strategically fought on, through, and via the minds and bodies of Algerian women. As Frantz Fanon famously made clear in his essay “Algeria Unveiled,” the French government believed that the key to maintaining control over Algeria was by winning over the women. As Fanon writes, French sociologists and anthropologists identified a matrilineal structure in Algerian society, which then “enabled the colonial administration to define a precise political doctrine: ‘If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight’” (1967, 37-38). The French government’s true intentions were shrouded in its presentation of Muslim women’s subjugation at the hands of Muslim men. In addition to strategic reduction of the veil to a tool of oppression, the rhetoric of Algerian women’s so-called “emancipation,” was central to France’s approach to fighting the war.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, substantial efforts were taken by the French government to convince the international community that its mission was purely humanitarian. For example, as historian Matthew Connelly points out, an English-language documentary entitled *The*

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<sup>14</sup> A more appropriate interpretation might be “Let’s be as much like French women as they let us be.”

<sup>15</sup> For historian Todd Shepard, supposed concern for Algerian women’s well-being also became an evasion tactic: “By showing that women and their liberation were the targets of French efforts in Algeria, the government could avoid responding to the F.L.N. or engaging a debate on the question of colonialism” (187).

*Falling Veil* was produced by the French government for American audiences around 1960. The film presents images of European women guiding Muslim women to shops, post offices, and other “modern-day conveniences,” treating them as if they were residents of a prehistoric time and place that had yet to witness the glorious benefits of industrialization.<sup>16</sup> The voice-over simultaneously narrates, detailing French human rights efforts and stating from whom they are trying to protect these Algerian women: the “many Moslems... who insist on total control and total obedience, whose wives are treated little better than chattel.”<sup>17</sup> At another point in the film, General de Gaulle’s 1958 tour of Algeria, in which he appealed directly to the female Algerian population, is referenced. The film narrates: “his confidence in the women acted almost as an electrical current to many of them, a kind of psychological shock which jolted them out of their old attitude of apathy into a new awareness of themselves.” An obvious allusion to the infamous yet commonplace practice of torture by electric shock, the metaphorical use of torture as mapped onto Muslim women’s so-called apathy uncovers another way in which French men projected their colonial anxieties onto Algerian women. The commentary also implies that it was only thanks to this beneficent masculine French figure (de Gaulle) that Muslim women were finally able to wake up and see the “oppressive” reality in which they had been living. By shifting the gaze elsewhere, the possibility that oppression could be imposed by a French presence was erased.

Intersections between representations of the “Muslim woman” and discourses around the status of the veil were not new to this period. In fact, a cursory glance at French colonial history will demonstrate a long-standing obsession with the veil. (We continue to see this even today, as debates over the place of the veil and other religious markers in the French public education system rage.<sup>18</sup>) Many scholars have remarked that the veil has variously functioned as a symbol of the oppressive and regressive, as well as the exotic and erotic, simultaneously evoking discomfort and intrigue in the French male imagination. The veiled woman has thereby come to represent the most mysterious woman of all, for what is beneath the veil is seemingly unknown and unknowable.

In the midst of the colonial struggles, French women, even those purporting to fight for gender equality, maintained a particularly conflictual relationship with the veil and, consequently, the North African female body. By simultaneously ignoring their own still less-than-equal social status, these French women were able project their own anxieties onto an/other. Algerian sociologist Marnia Lazreg offers an interpretation of this relationship, highlighting the complex subject positions that a French colonial presence attempted to erase:

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<sup>16</sup> In his discussion of Suzanne Massu, wife of General Jacques Massu and self-proclaimed champion of Algerian women’s rights, Donald Reid gestures towards the often-problematic role French women played in advocating “female solidarity”: “Suzanne Massu claimed that the Mouvement [de solidarité féminine]’s goal was not emancipation or unveiling, but ‘la plus grande connaissance mutuelle.’ Meetings ranged from visits to museums to presentations on infant care. They typically ended with translation from the French: ‘Vous et nous, *kif-kif* ... vous et nous égales, identiques ... rien que des femmes!’” (473).

<sup>17</sup> *The Falling Veil* (dir. Robert W. Schofield, circa 1960). Cited in Connelly, 216.

<sup>18</sup> As David Bailey and Gilane Tawadros write, the veil continues to be “a persistent symbol of Europe’s struggle to come to terms with cultural diversity and social inclusion” (19).

If they did not dream of possessing them erotically [as colonial men did], they perceived them as symbolically obliterating their own existence as (French) women. The veil made colonial women uncomfortable, as did every task that Algerian women performed, from rearing children to cooking and taking care of their homes... The veil, for the colonial woman, was the perfect alibi for rejecting the Algerian women's culture and denigrating her. But it was also a constant reminder of her powerlessness in erasing the existence of a different way of being woman (1994, 136).<sup>19</sup>

Those French women who participated in the public unveiling, for example, professed the need to "save" the Muslim woman from the oppressive Arab man. But, as Jennifer Heath writes, just as forced veiling can be repressive, "when the veil is forcibly stripped from its wearer, that too, is subjugation, not emancipation" (3). Despite presenting themselves as authorities on women's rights, these French women were making uninformed assumptions about Algerian women's political and social priorities, failing to recognize the cultural structures in which Algerian women lived and the multiple subject positions from which they may have been able to express themselves and act. Citing Fanon, Donald Reid elaborates: "What Fanon characterized in 'L'Algérie se dévoile' as the French effort to change gender norms in Algeria in order to stymy revolution mobilized French women who drew on feminine gender norms at the heart of bourgeois French society" (473).

Returning to the public unveiling of May 16<sup>th</sup>, it is imperative to consider the identities of those who participated. Algerian nationalists denounced the newly unveiled women, claiming that they were "all-around maids of the General Government as well as boarders of whorehouses."<sup>20</sup> Fanon (who himself maintained a problematic and contentious relationship with colonized women) concurred, referring to the women as "servants on the threat of being fired, poor women dragged from their homes, prostitutes" (1967, 64). The FLN framed the event as collusion between French authorities and Algerian prostitutes, a significant detail given the fact that prostitution in Algeria was viewed by some as a colonial phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> As my below analysis of Assia Djebar's texts will reveal, the intersection of prostitution and patriotism would become a

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<sup>19</sup> French women did not only maintain a problematic relationship with veiled Muslim women, but with unveiled Muslim women as well. Frantz Fanon discusses the resultant catch-22 in which French women found themselves. While purporting a desire to liberate veiled women, in the face of unveiled Algerian women, the French woman actually feels "challenged on the level of feminine charm, of elegance, and even sees a competitor in this novice metamorphosed into a professional, a neophyte transformed into a protagonist" (1967, 44).

<sup>20</sup> Chérifa Benabdessadok, "Pour une analyse du discours sur la femme algérienne," *Diplôme d'Etudes Avancées en Linguistique* (University of Algiers: 1977), 86. Cited in Lazreg, 135.

<sup>21</sup> Some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that prostitution did not exist in Algeria before French colonial presence (Rafika Merini, Catherine Delcroix). This assertion seems rather tenuous, and it seems more likely that prostitution instead functioned in new contexts and markets in the colonial period.

prime site of contention during the struggle for independence, as veiled and unveiled Algerian women's bodies became a site of both sexual and nationalist exchange and commodification.

In actuality, the Algerian women who participated in the event, were members of a women's rights group called the Mouvement de solidarité féminine, a charity organization whose supposed goal was the betterment of the lives of Muslim Algerian women. The group was formed by the wife of General Raoul Salan (who himself commanded French armed forces in Algeria in 1958 and later became leader of the French terrorist organization OAS that fought against Algerian independence). It was Madame Salan, along with the wives of other French officers, who were responsible for removing the women's veils. The specificity of the participants' subject positions is necessary to keep in mind while considering what is at stake in this public unveiling. For example, had the act been performed by French men, the media and the French and Algerian public would have interpreted the event in radically different terms. Given prevailing notions of the mysterious veiled woman and a subliminal desire to unmask her, the event would have been erotically charged, thereby sexualizing the Muslim women. (Similarly, many have interpreted the event as a public assault or rape, given the fact that the woman unveiled may have felt naked and violated.<sup>22</sup>) Instead, the act was performed by those closest to French men—the wives of those responsible for instilling colonial policy and maintaining order.

In *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, Ann Stoler teases out the ways in which European women assumed a prominent role as agents of colonial rule, for they were strategically able use their female status to gain intimate access to the bodies, behaviors, emotions, and desires of both the native and colonial population. Mapping Stoler's argument onto the context of Algeria, French women's ability to regulate sexual and racial practices is made clear in the public unveiling. However, while European women's presence in the colonial realm often served to mediate real and imagined erotic exchanges between colonizer and colonized, the entire performance of May 16<sup>th</sup> still retains a highly voyeuristic element: French men gaze upon these women as they are denuded and revealed to a vociferous and titillated crowd. Under the purported guise of women's rights, the colonial power was able to transform veiled Muslim women into unveiled sex symbols, while covertly and strategically expanding control over the Algerian (female) population. The whole scenario could be the ultimate male colonial fantasy: French men watching (their) French women "disrobe" previously unknowable Algerian women (read: bodies) while simultaneously increasing their imperial power over these colonized subjects through a calculated rally for *l'Algérie française*.

The public unveiling also points to another way in which the Algerian female body functions as a site of control and manipulation. In order to control the nationalist movement and simultaneously win over Algerians (and Westerners) skeptical of their imperial project and *mission civilisatrice*, French colonial policy soon began catering to specifically "feminine" issues (e.g., the veil, health care, family issues, child care). While this colonial appropriation of Algerian women's bodies clearly had negative repercussions,

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<sup>22</sup> Mohja Kahf writes, "To try to enter into their feelings if you do not wear hijab, imagine having your blouse removed while passersby watch, or your underwear. Such a parallel is a realistic translation of a hijabed woman's mortification at being unveiled in public" (34).

it also signified recognition of the integral role that Algerian women played in what the French had consistently presented as a highly patriarchal structure in which Algerian men controlled Algerian women and their bodies. But the French appeal to modernity, liberation, and triumph over patriarchal oppression only went so far, ultimately resulting in further politicization of Algerian women and their experiences, which, as I will demonstrate, further supports the argument that the Algerian female body was employed as a tool to win the war.

The social and political status of Algerian women, French attitudes towards them and towards the colonial project, and, more largely, the tenuous construction of femininity, masculinity, and nationality, all converge in the event of May 16, 1958. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine some of the conflicts and contradictions inherent in this literal and metaphoric “battle of the veil,” focusing primarily on assertion of agency through embodied practices as presented in Assia Djébar’s *Les enfants du nouveau monde* and *Les alouettes naïves*. My principal points of entry into examining the roles Algerian women played in the Revolution will be through representations of veiling and of prostitution (a complicated sort of unveiling). An analysis of these disparate yet similar themes in Djébar’s novels reveals the myriad ways in which Muslim women’s bodies became objects of exchange for both French colonists and Algerian revolutionaries while simultaneously demonstrating new models of feminist action and identity.

### **Assia Djébar: Writing the Revolution**

Assia Djébar, novelist, filmmaker, and poet, has enjoyed growing success throughout the French-speaking world and beyond since her emergence on the literary scene with the publication of her first novel *La soif* (1957) at the age of twenty-one. She went on to publish three more novels over the next ten years<sup>23</sup> in this self-described *premier cycle* of works. Djébar’s œuvre centers around themes of language, translation, history/fiction, memory, and embodiment, and demonstrates a preoccupation with Muslim women’s experiences, particularly their relationship to speaking, seeing, and being seen (or not seen). While Djébar often intersperses Arabic within her writing, she chooses to write in French, a decision for which she has been criticized, especially following Algerian independence when writers were encouraged to write in Arabic.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Les impatients* (1958), *Les enfants du nouveau monde* (1962), *Les alouettes naïves* (1967).

<sup>24</sup> Barbara Harlow discusses how the choice for a North African author to write in French or Arabic remains a controversial debate in Maghrebian literature: “On the one hand, to write in French is criticized as continued submission to the literary and ideological influence of the former colonizer. Abdelkebir Khatibi, the Moroccan writer and critic, maintains, on the other hand, in his study *Le Roman maghrébin*, that the use of the French language by North African writers can produce a kind of ‘irony which would not only be a form of revenge on the part of the colonized who had been oppressed and seduced by the West, but would also allow the francophone North African writer to distance himself with regard to the language by inverting it, destroying it, and presenting new structures such that the French reader would become a stranger in his own language’” (xviii).

Born Fatma Zohra Imalhayène in Cherchell, Algeria, in 1936 to an Arabo-Berber family, she adopted the pen-name Assia Djébar<sup>25</sup> out of fear that her family and university administrators would disapprove that she was writing. Her father believed in the French republican principles of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, rejected the notion of veiling, and sent his daughters to high school in France. In 1955 Djébar became the first Algerian woman to be accepted to the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Sèvres, but was eventually forced to leave the university because of her participation in the student boycott that occurred in response to the outbreak of the French-Algerian War.

Djébar became active early on during the Revolution. In 1958 she married Ahmed Ould-Rouïs, an active member of the Resistance. However, he was soon wanted by the French police, and, as was the case with many other revolutionaries during this period, they were forced to flee to Tunisia to escape imprisonment. There, Djébar worked on the FLN newspaper *El Moudjahid*, edited by Frantz Fanon. She regularly visited refugee camps where she gathered details on the war, while simultaneously finishing her masters degree in history. In 1959 she traveled to Morocco where she began teaching North African history at the national university in Rabat. That same year she was reinstated to the Ecole Normale de Sèvres by President Charles de Gaulle himself, on the grounds that “she had too much talent as a writer to be deprived of her right to the finest education in the world” (Zimra, 208). She resided outside of Algeria throughout the remainder of the Revolution, but remained intimately connected to the fight for independence, both through activist work and through writing. She returned to Algeria on July 1, 1962, the day that six million Algerians cast their ballots in the referendum on independence. Two days later de Gaulle pronounced Algeria an independent country.

Assia Djébar’s third published novel, *Les enfants du nouveau monde*, tells a series of intersecting stories opening with a striking sequence in which an elderly woman named Lla Aïcha is killed by shrapnel that flies into the inner courtyard of her house. Based on a true story recounted to her by her mother-in-law, Djébar uses this event as a symbol of “the war’s senseless cruelty, which could reach everywhere and everyone, even the most feeble and the most innocent in the most secure of enclosures” (Zimra, 213). No one was safe in this war that pitted French against Algerians, French against French, and Algerians against Algerians. Interspersed amongst other personal and collective stories in the novel are images of the body of this dead woman being carried through the streets and grieved by her fellow villagers.

While the reader is provided with past history and background for most characters, the entire present tense of the narrative takes place over a period of twenty-four hours in the town of Blida, presenting Aristotelian unity of time, place, and action. Despite adherence to this traditional mode of narration, Djébar is able to subvert both form and content through an unconventional narrative structure in which multiple characters’ stories are intertwined and overlapping. Each of the nine chapters is entitled with the first name of a different character, and their stories are noticeably suspended and then resumed

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<sup>25</sup> In her online essay, Mireille Calle-Gruber writes: “Très tôt, Fatma Zohra Imalhayène... entre en littérature et elle prend pour nom d’écrivain ASSIA DJEBAR qui signifie: Consolation et Intransigeance. Djébar « l’intransigeant » est l’un des 99 noms du Prophète. Assia, en dialecte, c’est celle qui accompagne de sa présence. Et cette présence donne la rigueur d’une forme, rend l’intelligence sensible.”

in chapters named by other characters. While use of this stylistic strategy suggests that “the individual” might not exist at this historical juncture when most of the Algerian population was uniting to protest French occupation and demand independence, it also frames the narrative around personal agency and engagement. The reader is presented with seemingly contradictory ways of being throughout the novel— individuals are continually caught between resistance and collaboration, liberation and confinement, possibilities for action and avoidance of responsibility. The French-Algerian War not having yet concluded when Djébar wrote the story, the characters of *Les enfants du nouveau monde* will not see resolution or national liberation at the end of the novel (although the title, “children of the new world,” suggests the utopian possibility that it already exists in some form). The reader is, however, left with the feeling that they are all inextricably connected to one another through the collective struggle.

Five years later, Djébar would publish her fourth novel, *Les alouettes naïves*. This text, which is in many ways an evolution from *Les enfants du nouveau monde*, has yet to be given sufficient attention by literary scholars, postcolonial specialists, or historians of Algeria. Given the fact that Algeria had gained independence by the time of its publication, this story of the Revolution takes on altered models of resistance. The narrative is focalized through three protagonists: Omar, an intellectual trying to find his place in the fight for independence; Rachid, his close friend and activist who has other ideas on how one should engage in the struggle; and Nfissa, Rachid’s wife and liberated woman *par excellence* who is an active member of the resistance. The novel is especially concerned with personal and collective identity during the war, as well as the status of both romantic and platonic relationships in the movement. Women’s engagement in the revolution has evolved from Djébar’s previous novel, as has the depiction of female sexuality, themes to which I will now turn.

## Women’s role in the Revolution

In my examination of the roles Algerian women played during the Revolution, I will be focusing on the possibility and productivity of maintaining multiple and diverse commitments. Because each individual is multiply inscribed and because social, cultural, racial, and sexual categories are always in flux, the subject and her/his body are always in a process of becoming. As Lisa Lowe states in her analysis of Teresa de Lauretis’ theoretical work on gendered subjectivity, de Lauretis presents the construction of subjectivity as in progress, in that “each position of the dialectic—the complex of practices she calls ‘experience’ and the set of social relations—shifts and alters as the subject is signified” (196). Because the subject is multiply inscribed, she/he remains undetermined by any single category or “discursive apparatus”: “By virtue of its multiplicity, this subject cannot be totalized as it exceeds dominant discursive formations, and is always both inside and outside the apparatuses that inscribe any particular category, such as gender, race, class” (197).<sup>26</sup> In Lowe’s conclusion to her study of French and British orientalisms, she further

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<sup>26</sup> This approach to subjectivity is echoed in the Introduction to *Between Woman and Nation*. By deconstructing the notions of center and periphery, what becomes possible is an “articulation

employs de Lauretis' work to think about how the fact of being multiply inscribed can allow the subject to engage in a range of commitments. Individuals "may act at one time for feminist issues, while at others for racial or ethnic groups, labor unions, or in anticolonialist or antiwar activities" (197). This notion of multiple commitments will become important to my later analysis of women's roles and possibilities for action in the French-Algerian War.

Throughout *Les enfants du nouveau monde* and *Les alouettes naïves*, Assia Djebar presents the reader with a wide range of contributions, both large and small, made by women during the Algerian struggle for independence. In *Les enfants du nouveau monde*, we witness Amna, wife of the village's police inspector, lying to her husband Hakim in order to protect their neighbor Youssef, a local revolutionary. By telling Hakim that she heard Youssef return home the previous night, she momentarily quells his fears that he was out stirring up trouble. While her lie may seem rather insignificant, it actually sheds much light on notions of identity and collective struggle. Because of his status as *responsable politique local*, Youssef serves as representative of the Algerian people and their struggle for independence from France.<sup>27</sup> Amna lies to her husband because her allegiance is, above all, to her (future) nation. While she may not have the possibility of taking more radical actions, she hopes her small act of agency will contribute to this fight, even if it means betraying her husband's interests.

Chérifa, a twenty-nine year old woman (and wife of Youssef) whose story opens the novel, also demonstrates how seemingly small actions can have profound effects on the independence movement. We witness her strong will and assertion early in the novel through her refusal to have a child with her first husband and her ultimate separation from him, but it is not until she is faced with the possibility of her second husband being arrested that she realizes: "Je dois agir." After she finds out that Saidi, another local revolutionary, has been arrested and might reveal information under "interrogation," she feels she has no choice but to find Youssef and warn him of the impending danger. The problem, though, is that as a Muslim woman, she cannot leave the house unaccompanied. When faced with the choice of remaining faithful to this prescribed role or potentially losing her husband (who, again, serves as representative of the Algerian struggle), it is simple: she must act.

Pour une épouse heureuse vivant au cœur d'une maison d'où elle ne sort pas, selon les traditions, comment prendre la décision d'agir? Comment

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of 'impossible' unities, subjects, and practices, including the possibility of gendered subjectivities" (6).

<sup>27</sup> Hakim too sees Youssef as representative of the Algerian struggle: "Chaque jour de cette dernière année, Youssef est devenu pour Hakim le représentant de la ville entière, par lequel tous les autres (et même ceux qui continuent à le saluer, les plus lâches à s'arrêter, à bavarder) entendent lui rappeler qu'il n'est plus leur frère" (91). By virtue of his position as police inspector and his determination to find a reason to arrest Youssef and other revolutionaries, Hakim is, as Djebar writes, "de l'autre bord." In the eyes of local citizens, he becomes an "objet valet ou allié de l'ennemi" (91); he is in fact an outsider amongst his fellow Algerian citizens. Nevertheless, he vows to put an end to the revolutionary activity, even if it means betraying his own people.

« agir ? » Mot étrange pour celle qu'emprisonne l'habitude (et cette habitude, la ressentir tel un instinct, comme si toutes les femmes de sa famille, des maisons voisines, des générations précédentes la lui avaient léguée en héritage, sous forme de sagesse impérative) de ne destiner son comportement qu'à un homme, l'époux, le père ou le frère, de n'entrevoir qu'à l'abri de son autorité, que dans le miroir de son jugement les mille incidences de la vie. Mot nouveau auquel le sort... l'accule et qu'elle voit soudain surgir, riche de promesses et de fruits : « Agir ! Moi ? Moi ?... » (... ) « Il faut que je prévienne Youssef... Hakim va revenir ; peut-être va-t-il découvrir le mensonge de sa femme... Peut-être n'ont-ils pas besoin de preuve pour l'arrêter... peut-être... » Mais Chérifa n'a plus à s'appuyer sur des mots. Elle a décidé. Immobile, elle vibre pourtant : une flèche au début de sa trajectoire. (137-138)

Repetition of this word *agir* highlights the newness of this notion of action for Chérifa, who seemed to be unaccustomed to actively questioning the status quo and her confinement to the domestic interior.<sup>28</sup> While previously seen from the outside to conform to social and cultural norms, Chérifa discovers a new sense of agency in this action taken to protect her husband and fight for the Algerian cause, demonstrating that action may emerge from multiple and overlapping commitments.

While Youssef represents the Algerian fight for independence, his wife Chérifa represents the difficulty of women finding a place in the movement. Do they obey the conventions of what a woman should and should not do, or do they contribute to the fight by helping their husbands, lovers, fathers, and brothers? In fact, much of what Djébar is highlighting throughout this novel (and throughout *Les alouettes naïves*) is, as Teresa de Lauretis' theoretical framework demonstrates, the variety of subject positions and forms of agency as well as the range of commitments capable for women both inside and outside of the movement. This tension is exemplified in the description of Chérifa's action, which, while her story is cut short, is picked up later in the novel in the chapter centered on the character Khaled.

Depuis le matin, elle vit en pleine surexcitation: la nécessité de prévenir Youssef et pour cela de sortir de la maison, de s'exposer à la rue, de courir dans la ville, l'acharnement qu'elle a mis à ne pas se sentir humiliée par le regard des hommes dans les cafés, à trouver, malgré tout, son chemin, à réduire la méfiance de Yahia, toutes ces sensations violentes qui ont alimenté sa volonté de plus en plus tendue et qui, de plus en plus, la découvraient à elle-même, l'ont introduite dans un état second. (228)

The vocabulary used here, words and phrases like *s'exposer*, *l'acharnement*, *se sentir humiliée*, *sensations violentes*, *volonté*, *découvraient à elle-même*, points to the personal and societal consequences of taking action in this way. Despite leaving the house, exposing herself in the street, and feeling the gazes of the surrounding men, Chérifa's will is strengthened.

<sup>28</sup> Also significant is the fact that Chérifa is looking out for Amna, who lied to her husband to protect Youssef, highlighting a sense of solidarity between women.

This moment of physical and emotional displacement enables a recognition of other modes of being and acting. Her actions, the stares aimed at her, and her resultant bodily sensations introduce Chérifa into *un état second*: a new subjectivity.

Because her action is in defiance of gender conventions, though, Chérifa becomes a spectacle to those who witness this woman alone in the street. Still, she has found a sort of freedom in this action that both contributes to the anti-colonialist fight and potentially saves her husband. This idea is emphasized in the following quote:

Ainsi, elle a traversé la ville entière, cette présence pour elle aux yeux multiples, hostiles et au terme de cette marche, elle a découvert qu'elle n'est pas seulement une proie pour la curiosité des mâles—une forme qui passe, mystère du voile que le premier regard sollicite, faiblesse fascinante qu'on finit par haïr et sur laquelle on crache—non, elle a existé; une pensée dure l'a habitée et l'a ainsi rendue insaisissable. (228)

Chérifa exists through her action. In defying traditional notions of the Arab woman, she finds a sense of freedom, independence, and meaning. Her value is no longer structured by both the patriarchal and the colonial system that, as Djébar's words highlight, sees her as subservient, veiled, and mysterious. On the contrary, the hostility invited by her action of rushing through the street with a mission actually strengthens her sense of self-worth and contribution to the collective struggle.

Later, the narrative moves to the character of Hassiba, a sixteen year-old girl who, like Chérifa, sees no choice but to act. She does not hesitate or question; she just acts: "Elle ne s'est pas posé des questions. Jamais" (236). While we see various models of female subjectivity and action in *Les enfants du nouveau monde*, Hassiba stands out amongst the other female characters of the novel as exceptionally strong-willed and determined.<sup>29</sup> Each woman seems to find a way to contribute to the collective fight, but Hassiba is the only one to present herself as so unapologetically "independent." In *Les alouettes naïves* published five years later, however, we discover an evolution in the place of women's contributions to the struggle. The character of Nfissa, for example, exemplifies the *femme émancipée* and fights alongside her male friends and lovers. Soon after Karim, her first lover, is killed, she expresses to her sister Nadjia this need to act: "Au maquis (...) je vivais... et je rêve maintenant... Peut-être est-ce le contraire. Je ne sais ce qu'il faut choisir. Me sauver? Je ne me sauve pas, il me faut aller de l'avant, oui, c'est cela—et elle se soulève—avancer!" (124). Like Hassiba, she realizes the importance of the larger fight and the necessity of action. Nadjia also makes significant contributions during the revolution, the most major being the planting of a bomb in the French military barracks. This act has consequences, though, as her leg is severely injured and she is ultimately tortured.

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<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the novel's definition of "revolution" is actually voiced through this adolescent girl: "La Révolution, c'est le combat de tout le pays contre le colonialisme et le colonialisme, c'est la France qui ne veut pas reconnaître notre droit! (...) La Révolution, c'est le combat de tous." (237)

## The Veil: Fears and Fantasies

As detailed thus far, the literal and metaphoric veil is a site around which converge issues of embodiment, sexuality, subjectivity, liberation, confinement, and action. Djebbar's treatment of the theme of veiling and unveiling allows a recognition of the varied somatic and subjective identities available during the decolonization movement, for the veil signified much more than a piece of fabric, article of clothing, or cultural marker. Furthermore, Djebbar's narrative reveals that things are not always as they seem: the veiled woman may be the most bold and strong-willed while the "independent" woman may be the most constrained and cloistered. In *Les enfants du nouveau monde*, for example, Chérifa may appear, at first glance, to be the traditional, veiled woman, confined to the home, not venturing out without her husband's companionship. As analyzed above, she is, however, tested and discovers that even seemingly small actions can have profound effects on the independence movement. Through her unflinching desire to aid her fellow compatriots, she will display, to herself and to others, her own capacity for revolutionary action.

In *Les alouettes naïves*, Nfissa appears a more definitive and obvious model for female action and feminist subjectivity. She actively engages in the revolutionary struggle, dresses like a "Westerner," and does not wear the veil. Early in the novel, the reader discovers some of the issues she deals with because of these decisions. Some register shock, considering her "nue," bare without this most important garment, while others assume that she must be a Christian. She seems to delight in subverting traditional ideas about femininity, culture, and religion and playing with others' assumptions about her appearance and identity:

Dans des lieux publics, à la poste, à la mairie, elle se proposait spontanément pour aider telle ou telle femme qui ne savait point lire les formulaires ni reconnaître le numéro d'un guichet, et, dans le dialogue arabe qui s'échangeait, Nfissa s'imaginait déposer le masque devant l'inconnue qui s'étonnait; une fois, l'une se referma dans une hostilité immédiate: "Tu es des nôtres, toi, toi!... nos filles marchaient nues, c'est donc vrai?" (72)

It is ultimately language that is revelatory of Nfissa's true identity as an Arab woman. Statements like those above also point to the idea of "us" versus "them," revealing the importance of national identity and collective struggle in the face of the colonizer. Individuals that seem to adopt the comportment of the European Other are not to be trusted, for they risk being like "them." (Some even took Nfissa for a European spy: "...ne parlaient-on pas d'Européens qui faisaient semblant de s'islamiser pour espionner?" (72)). Another highly evocative scene occurs when Nfissa actually puts on the veil while with her family. Upon veiling, her aunt happily responds with the statement: "...le voile ne te va pas si mal! Et la voilette sur le visage, regardez comme elle souligne bien ses yeux!" (114), pointing to the centrality of corporeality in debates around veiling. Here, the veil does not hide, but rather *accentuates*. Eyes and "the gaze" take on new roles for the inscrutable and impenetrable veiled woman and those that attempt to see her.

Scholars have debated the figure of the veiled Arab woman as mysterious and sexualized enigma for decades. Meyda Yeğenoğlu, for example, writes of the presence of the Orient in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts and its continued constitution as

fantasy built upon sexual difference, demonstrating how “the figure of ‘veiled Oriental woman’ has a particular place... not only signifying Oriental woman as mysterious and exotic but also as signifying the Orient as feminine, always veiled, seductive, and dangerous” (11). Malek Alloula engages in similar work but uses the visual artifact of the postcard to examine how such images of North African women produced and sent by colonists, settlers, and tourists of the early twentieth-century reinforce the French phantasm of both the Oriental female and of the harem. Referring to the presence of the veil in these postcards, Alloula writes of its efficacy as a tool of resistance against the photographer, for the veiled woman effectively removes the power of his gaze and even turns it back against him:

[T]he feminine gaze that filters through the veil is a gaze of a particular kind: concentrated by the tiny orifice for the eye, this womanly gaze is a little like the eye of a camera, like the photographic lens that takes aim at everything... Thrust in the presence of a veiled woman, the photographer feels photographed; having himself become an object-to-be-seen, he loses initiative: *he is dispossessed of his own gaze*... Algerian society, particularly the feminine world within it, threatens him in his being and *prevents him from accomplishing himself as gazing gaze*. (14)

The parallel with the public unveiling of May 16, 1958, is evident. By removing the Algerian women’s veils, not only were the French women removing the mystery attached to the veiled women, they were also taking away any sort of agency that comes with possessing what Alloula sees as something akin to “the eye of a camera.” Like the photographer who felt unable to seize the veiled woman’s gaze, those who participated in the 1958 public unveiling were forced to draw the veil aside. Mohja Kahf echoes this subtle power held by the veiled woman: “At its physical essence, stripped of any religious or ideological definition... to be veiled is to partake in a primal power: *I see without being fully seen; I know without being known. I shore up an advantage over what I survey. Like a goddess like a queen of unquestioned sovereignty, I declare this is my sanctuary, my haram, from which I will impart what I will, when I will*” (30). By unveiling the women, the French thereby eliminated their own fear of being gazed at while foreclosing the women’s capacity of seeing unseen, knowing unknown.

Alloula devotes much of his text to exploring the image of the imaginary harem. (This notion of the harem is also reminiscent of the 1958 unveiling. The grouping of Muslim women, veils removed in front of French men, recalls the cultural images of “the Oriental harem” that had been circulating for centuries.) In the following passage, he summarizes what is at stake in the space of the colonial harem, foreshadowing themes that will emerge in my textual analysis of prostitution: “Affecting the colonial world without being the contrivance of any single individual, this phantasm [of the harem] is the equivalent of a mental habit (*mentalité*), a cultural ‘habitus,’ characteristic of those to whom an *algérienne* can only be a ‘Fatmah’ or a ‘Mouquère’ and definitely a desirable inmate of the harem” (68). Important to note here is that the word “Mouquère” came to connote both Arab woman and prostitute. This conflation of the Algerian female with the sex worker will prove integral to my discussion below of representations of prostitution in Djébar’s texts.

## “Alouettes Naïves” and the Changing Economy of Prostitution in the Colonial Context

Paramount to my investigation of embodiment in the French-Algerian War is the notion that cultural and historical representations and inscriptions inevitably lead to the production of culturally, sexually, and racially specific bodies. The theme of prostitution in Djébar's novels thereby emerges as an exemplary site of inquiry into said production and construction. Drawing upon the work of Elizabeth Grosz, it also provides a compelling approach to the body as both surface and depth. The enactment of sexuality, particularly between the Algerian female subject and the European male colonizer, is inscribed on the surface of the body, while deeper within, inscriptions of race, class, gender, sexuality, desires, and aversions are found, forever present and ready to be called up at any moment in response to particular experiences or memories. Returning to the trope around which I have structured this chapter, at the heart of this erotic and monetary exchange is, moreover, a literal and metaphoric unveiling, as bodies and structures, including gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, are laid bare.

Before delving into a textual analysis of prostitution, I would like to turn to Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, as this may shed light on how this trope is functioning in Djébar's novels. For Kristeva, the abject is located somewhere between self and other yet is neither subject nor object. It may be defined as “a kind of ‘pre-object’ or, perhaps, as a *fallen* object” (Moi, 238). In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva writes that the abject is “something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (4) and which draws us “toward the place where meaning collapses” (2). Literary scholar Françoise Lionnet expounds on Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject and its near universal cultural connotation as “feminine.”

The feminine body is paradoxically the text from which this logic [of catharsis of the abject] is derived and upon which this catharsis is most glaringly written. In postcolonial literature the gendered and racialized body of the female protagonist is consistently overdetermined; it is a partial object on which are written various cultural scripts and their death-dealing blows. (87)

Prostitution, with its cultural scripts and death-dealing blows, is one notable form of such “abjection,” and, as I will detail below, is typified in Touma, a principal character in Djébar's *Les enfants du nouveau monde*.

The literary topos of prostitution is noticeably prevalent throughout both *Les alouettes naïves* and *Les enfants du nouveau monde*. Omar and Rachid, the two principal male protagonists of *Les alouettes naïves*, regularly visit brothels, Omar even falling in love with his favorite prostitute, Meriem, who later succumbs to the canonical fate of the sex worker and falls ill and dies. However, tension between the colonizer's industry of prostitution and the notion of remaining true to one's culture, traditions, and conventions is just below the surface. Even the novel's title alone ambiguously refers to prostitution, for the term “*alouettes naïves*” (“innocent larks”) was the name given by French soldiers to a group of

Nailiyat women they frequented. In the preface to the novel, Djébar explains her choice of title:

Bien sûr, je dois en expliciter le titre: voici quelques années, en lisant *Le Maghreb entre deux guerres* de Jacques Bergue, j'apprenais un détail: les danseuses des Ouled-Naïl en Algérie près de Bou-Saada étaient appelées par les soldats français « Alouettes naïves ». Je demandai un jour à Jacques Bergue les raisons de ce surnom. Il m'expliqua qu'il ne s'agissait que d'une déformation de prononciation, *ouled* donnant « alouettes » et *naïl* « naïves ». Un quiproquo avait donc fait jaillir cette image. (7)

While Djébar here names these women as dancers, by the end of the novel we learn that their vocation may have been interpreted differently at the time, as Rachid refers to them as “prostituées-danseuses.” Regardless of whether they were “prostituées,” “danseuses,” or “prostituées-danseuses,” by both naming her novel as such and including prefatory remarks to explain the origin of the phrase, Djébar highlights a certain linguistic slipperiness and confusion surrounding the novel and indeed the entire colonial situation of Algeria,<sup>30</sup> while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of recognizing the place of sexuality and romantic relationships in the novel and in war-time Algeria.

The identity of the Nailiyat is indeed even more complex than suggested by either Djébar's prefatory remarks or by Rachid's reduction of them to prostitutes. The Nailiyat, who occupied the plateau of the Sahara Atlas south of Algiers, were known amongst Algerians for the sexual “freedom” enjoyed by women of the tribe (which ultimately led to the phrase “acting like a Nailiya” being an insult among other Algerian women) (Lazreg 1994, 30). While female sexuality was conceived in unique terms by members of the Ouled-Nail tribe, their categorization as “prostitutes” would be false. Women of the tribe would typically leave their village and travel to nearby towns, like Bou Saada, where they would entertain men with their distinct style of dance that involved hand movements intended to replicate the gracefulness of birds. The Nailiya was not a prostitute. She did not solicit men and did not ask for money, but would instead depend on the generosity of her client (who may eventually marry her). Her principal aim was to find a suitable husband and/or to save enough money to return home and support her parents (Lazreg 1994, 29).

Although there was no explicitly sexual component to the dances and songs that the Nailiyat performed, this soon changed as male colonists “discovered” them. Colonial discourse would soon vacillate between exoticizing the women and their ancient rituals and labeling them as prostitutes. Just as future French colonial policies would reduce the practice of veiling to “oppression,” the reduction of the Nailiyat's practices to sex work did not take into account the social, religious, and economic conditions in which these women (and their male peers and relatives) lived. If these women were not prostitutes in the modern-sense of the word, the colonial presence wanted to transform them into this role. Bou Saada soon became a tourist destination and “their performances changed to

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<sup>30</sup> This linguistic slipperiness is echoed in Malek Alloula's allusion to the word *Mouquère*. As I previously stated, the word, like the term *alouette naïve*, leads to a conflation of the Arab woman and the prostitute.

satisfy tourists' thirst for 'oriental' dances... The transformation of Nailiyat into tourist commodities went hand in hand with their classification as prostitutes by the colonial administration" (Lazreg 1994, 32-33). What was originally a dance performed fully clothed was morphed into belly dancing, and not long after, the French *Syndicat d'Initiative* (tourist promotion office) forced the Nailiyat women to perform naked (Lazreg 1994, 29). Not dissimilar to the 1958 event, these women, too, were forced to "unveil" their bodies to appeal to French desires.

Aside from Djébar's introduction to the novel, the only other instance in which the term "*alouette naïve*" appears is on the penultimate page where we are offered a glimpse into the thoughts of Rachid, the revolutionary. (He is normally only seen from the outside and is not privileged with first-person narration.) After returning from exile in Tunisia following the end of the war, he and his wife Nfissa are reunited. During a discussion of their relationship, how it has changed, and what the future will hold, he refers to Nfissa, in his thoughts, as an *alouette naïve*:

« Mon alouette naïve », pense-t-il, se rappelant soudain cette expression que les légionnaires appliquaient aux prostituées-danseuses de son pays, de celles qu'il a connues lui-même autrefois, symbole à la fois d'une déchéance extérieure et d'une lumière en elles tout à fait anonyme... Pareillement, la lueur et la foi dans les prunelles de Nfissa, comme en ce lendemain d'ivresse dont il ne se rappelle rien, ne paraissent-elles point cela justement, une telle ignorance en face d'un dehors pourri?... Les prostituées, pour entretenir cette flamme, dansaient devant les légionnaires. (482)

Rachid's thoughts about the status of these so-called prostitutes in Algeria's colonial past are noteworthy, but perhaps even more significant is the fact that he refers to his wife Nfissa, the epitome of the "liberated woman," as an *alouette naïve*. Not only does Nfissa eschew societal conventions placed on women and actively participate in the revolution, she also embraces her sexuality. This fact makes it all the stranger that Rachid would refer to Nfissa as an *alouette naïve*, or, in his mind, a "prostituée-danseuse." We are left to wonder if, now that the war is over and his perspective on relationships and love may have changed, he sees her, like the Nailiyat, as merely symbolizing "une telle ignorance en face d'un dehors pourri". Might Djébar be pointing to the difficulty, even impossibility, of naming Nfissa's status in postwar Algeria or of placing her, like the Nailiyat, into any definable category? Or might Rachid be realizing that he had not truly known her before, just as the French men did not know the dancers, distorting Arabic into French, to appeal to some sort of sexual pleasure? Rachid's use of the phrase identifies him as being fully aware of the existence of the women of the Ouled-Nail tribe (but not necessarily of the linguistic evolution with which Djébar provides the reader), but also recalls a foreboding moment in a long history of the use and abuse of the Algerian female body by imperial powers.

Omar, the novel's other male protagonist, also reflects on the place of prostitution in their society, and, although he participates in its continued existence, considers it corrupt: "A cette époque, je crois, notre petite ville me dévoila son plus secret visage, celui de la corruption. (...) Partout, en effet, dans notre pays, ensuite en Orient, puis à Tunis, j'ai connu de la prostitution les plaies et la force vivace" (266). Omar continues his story

by recounting his own early acquaintance with prostitution. When he was young, he would wander around the city's prostitution center, the Rue des Renégats, observing the scene. He did not seem to be there to pick up women, actually being frozen by what and who he saw: "Pas une fois pourtant je ne songeai à être tenté; je me sentais paralysé" (269). One day, though, he has an experience that changes him forever. Not only did the village "dévoila son plus secret visage," but so too did a young woman:

Une fois, ce fut le paroxysme, un instant lyrique. Au milieu de l'après-midi, j'étais là, à mon ordinaire, au meilleur poste d'observation (...) Une femme passa: jeune à sa démarche, à peine adolescente. (...) un homme l'appela par son prénom: elle se détourna et au mouvement brusque qu'elle fit, son voile, qu'elle portait avec la désinvolture des élégantes de la capitale, glissa et s'entrouvrit une seconde. Une seconde au cours de laquelle je devins homme véritablement, je le sais: sous le voile, la fille était totalement nue. Elle vit que je la vis. Je restai là, la face sans doute hébétée de la surprise innocente encore, mais homme, je le répète, en cet instant. (269-270)

Observing this young prostitute and ultimately seeing that she is naked underneath her veil, proves to be a decisive experience for Omar: at this instant, he becomes a man. His masculinity and male identity is constructed through this illicit observation of the normally veiled but now semi-nude female body. Formation of an adult male's sexuality and subjectivity is, in this case, predicated on participation (whether "active" or not) as a consumer in the social and cultural economy of prostitution.

Omar's formative experience fundamentally revolves around sexual difference, a relationship that also plays itself out across colonialism and colonialist discourse. For Meyda Yeğenoğlu, the idea of the "Orient" is predicated on sexual difference. As stated earlier, European texts of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries presented the "veiled Oriental woman" as mysterious, exotic, even seductive and dangerous. This notion is especially key to this particular scene in Djébar's text, as "the presumption of a hidden essence and truth behind the veil is the means by which both the Western/colonial and the masculine subject constitute their own identity" (Yeğenoğlu, 11). In addition to colonial men (and women) constructing their identities and desires through the objectified veiled Arab woman (and all that is attached to this archetype), I argue that the Algerian colonized male was also encouraged to view the veiled woman as mysterious and seductive, which, as we see above, had similar constitutive effects on masculine identity.

### **Anxieties over Women's Place in the Movement and in Society**

Omar consistently occupies his thoughts with reflections on the place of women in the war:

Je ne sais comment, à propos des héroïnes d'aujourd'hui, j'en suis venu à évoquer les prostituées d'hier. Peut-être parce que celles-là sont inattendues. Les 'combattantes', comme on dit à Tunis, avec un sentiment

de malaise devant cette espèce nouvelle. Dans mon village de montagnes, pareillement je suppose, les boutiquiers apeurés et sournois devant la garde découvrent cette autre catégorie d'eux-mêmes : en dehors des prostituées, en dehors du harem respectable des épouses cloîtrées, où mettre les héroïnes et surtout comment réagir devant elles? (270)

Omar's concern is not only over the role women should play (if any at all), but also how men should react to women's place as participants (and potential equals) in the revolution. After all, war-time heroines, or *combattantes*, (contrary to prostitutes) had previously not been the norm; they are *inattendues*, an *espèce nouvelle*. Up until now, Omar has been able to fit women into the opposing categories of *épouses cloîtrées* and *prostituées*; hence, he is unable to reconcile the notion of "woman" with the possibility of female revolutionary activity, and even seems to encounter linguistic difficulty when speaking of this new kind of female subjectivity. Being able to express himself and his worldview only in binaristic terms, his discomfort actually leads to a conflation of prostitutes and revolutionary heroines. The two seem to go hand in hand, for he sees both as women who fall outside traditional gender roles. Although he is aware of the vast distinction between the Algerian woman who fights for the cause and the Algerian woman who offers her body for pay, a logocentrism that operates in strict binaries pervades Omar's philosophical reflections on sexual difference and the Algerian fight for independence.

Anxiety over female sexuality is echoed later in the novel, this time in the form of a phallogocentrism, for Omar's thought is still structured in either/or terms with the (literal) phallus being at the center: "Chaque femme connaît un moment où son être devient matière flexible dont il semble qu'on peut tout faire: rendre la femme putain ou la transfigurer ange, merveilleuse, fascinante métamorphose à cause de la simultanéité des deux pôles!..." (376). Not only does this statement introduce troubling notions of identity and female sexuality, it also reiterates the above idea that there are only two possible roles for women. His narration continues: "Oui, vraiment, pour chaque femme, cet instant existe, plus ou moins long : une seconde en général au cours de l'orgasme, pour certaines quelques heures, quelques jours à l'aube du premier amour pour la plupart. Puis l'étincelle disparaît, astre dans la mémoire de nuit..." (376). This moment of split-second vacillation is, according to Omar, brought on by (hetero)sexual relations. The potential danger of female sexuality is, therefore, revealed: each and every woman is subject to the risk of becoming a whore upon engaging in sexual activity. In embracing sexuality every woman must confront the delicate balance between remaining *ange* and turning to the dark side by becoming *putain*.

Another problematic presentation of sexual difference and sexuality is found in earlier words expressed by Omar. In a discussion between members of the "Clan" about the place of the journalist in the colonial war, Omar says: "Un correspondant de guerre en terre coloniale est comme le client de bordel face à une beauté exotique. L'homme s'imagine qu'en couchant avec celle-ci, il se convaincra mieux de sa virilité. L'exotisme lui semble un piquant. Il le croit mais, en réalité, il s'en moque. Il a simplement besoin de coucher" (247). While the comparison of the colonial war correspondent with the client of a brothel may initially seem crude, Omar effectively alludes to the slipperiness of the discourse surrounding colonialism, especially as presented by supposed unbiased sources like journalists. In this framework the colonial land becomes the prostitute, and like the

brothel visitor (notwithstanding his payment for service), the journalist, too, potentially exploits this *beauté exotique*. The *terre coloniale* becomes sexualized, exotified and othered, allowing the distance necessary to justify abuse and manipulation by the colonizer. Marnia Lazreg concurs: “a woman's body was another war "terrain" in the counterrevolutionary war” (2008, 165).

Omar repeatedly presents masculine sexuality as intrinsically bound up with action and engagement (whether it be pro-colonial or anti-colonial). His reflections on the seemingly innate needs of men speak to the construction of masculinity – how men are conditioned to act and what they are supposed to want. Late in the novel, he declares: “Je fais donc partie de ce groupe d’hommes que Rachid prétend asexués, où, dans ses moments de moindre sévérité... ‘des hommes dévorés par l’Histoire’ pour parler le langage conventionnel” (456). Although he seems to distance his own wartime experience from sexuality by declaring himself asexual (despite his frequent visits to brothels), he then makes some general statements about what men want:

Nous [les hommes] préférons à la fois nous perdre et nous retrouver au sein de la multitude, comme n’importe quel mâle le fait, à la seconde du plaisir, dans les entrailles de la femme saccagée... Nous discouons et, dans notre propre écho, nous imaginons notre image, telle qu’elle apparaît dans les prunelles luisantes de l’épouse renversée... Même mirage, nostalgie identique de la puissance... (456)

In Omar’s model, sexuality, gender roles, collective struggle, power, and politics converge. Men are at the center of this scenario, but are only able to constitute an image of themselves as it appears in the eyes of the prostrate woman, thereby unintentionally underscoring the dependence on women in the construction of their own subjectivity and masculinity.

### **Sleeping with the Enemy, or The Danger of Female Sexuality**

Coupled with Omar’s and Rachid’s reflections on the complicated status of women who assert varying degrees of agency and, consequently, no longer fit into the binaristic categories of cloistered wife and prostitute, their words also uncover a preoccupation with the notion of female sexuality as dangerous. Returning to Djébar’s earlier novel, *Les enfants du nouveau monde*, these issues of female (and male) sexuality and social conventions converge in the character of Touma, a nineteen or twenty year old woman who has gladly taken to prostitution to make a living. Touma’s situation is distinct, though, for her clientele consists primarily of Europeans and French police officers for whom she also works as an informant. Her traitorous behavior and her sex work result in her being doubly demonized by her fellow Algerians: not only does she make money by selling her body, but also by selling out her people.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> There are interesting parallels to draw between Touma’s situation as outsider in her own society and that of Djébar herself. By choosing to write in French, Djébar made clear at this stage in her literary career that she was attempting to reach out to a presumably French, not

Earlier in the novel, we learn why Touma caters to non-Arab men. Her self-worth is actually enhanced by sleeping with and, in her words, being violated by these men:

...elle imagine le désir des hommes qui la jagent s'aiguiser davantage de pouvoir contempler « l'Arabe affranchie » (« Oui, avec des escarpins, une jupe courte, une permanente, vraiment pareille aux nôtres!... et même bien roulée... une brune si aguichante ; elle pourrait être de Marseille, ou d'Arles... »). Touma aime que ces hommes la violent ainsi ; elle y voit une forme d'estime. Les autres, quand elle passe, ferment leur visage. « Les autres » ; elle rectifie : « Les Arabes » et elle prononce ces mots en redressant la tête. Sa haine la secoue. (147)

Touma's relationship to these European men, and the fact that being violated/raped by them becomes for her "une forme d'estime," results in her seeing her fellow Algerians as "Other." She revels in being looked at and desired by French men and takes pride in the fact that she may pass as European. The fact that she is not accepted by other Algerians does not matter to her, for she actually expresses hatred for them.

Touma ultimately pays for what many see as her indiscretions and her poor judgment. (Djebar will present another warning of sleeping with the enemy through the male character of Saïdi, who, after having a three-day affair with a Frenchwoman, is arrested for supposed revolutionary activities and ultimately dies under torture.) Her sixteen year-old younger brother Tawfik, whom she has not seen in years, has decided to join in the national fight and become a revolutionary. He is, though, denied entry into the guerrilla ranks, mostly because of his age. However, he believes that the reason for his rejection is his sister's sexual indiscretions. Upon his second denial, he returns home to his mother: "« Ta putain de fille », grogna-t-il comme simple bonjour" (268). He then hides out in his room, sulking as he often does, and bemoans his situation.

Allongé sur un matelas, il gardait les yeux ouverts; « putain de sœur » grondait-il; « j'en suis sûr, c'est à cause d'elle ! » On avait eu beau protester. Il ne trouvait d'autre explication à leurs réticences. On n'avait pas confiance en lui. Tout le monde savait que Touma ne fréquentait que les Européens, elle plus indigne que la dernière des prostituées. (270)

He cannot accept that there may be other reasons for the organization not accepting his help—it must be Touma's fault. Curiously enough, though, he does admit that prostitutes can be freedom fighters too, just as long as they are not his sister (or rather, his mother's daughter): "Les prostituées—hurlait-il souvent à la mère comme si par son silence, elle défendait l'absente—les prostituées, elles, sont quand même des patriotes; mais ta fille!..."

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Algerian, public. Like Touma, she was viewed by some as "prostituting" herself to the colonizer. Some have also interpreted her interest in devoting a considerable amount of her novels to sexuality as an effort to appeal to French audiences. This tension between national, cultural, and sexual insider and outsider continues to be felt today, as much of Djebar's work has yet to be translated into Arabic.

(270). He blames their mother for what Touma has become, suggesting that women are behind the failures of the movement. Tawfik's assertion that prostitutes can be *patriotes* is also significant given Omar's statements discussed earlier. Omar viewed prostitutes as almost necessary to maintaining a certain level of masculinity and satisfying desire, but he did not see the possibility of including them in the revolution.

Tawfik ultimately decides that he must show the organization that, despite his sister's imprudence, he is worthy of membership: "Il voulait leur prouver qu'il était digne de confiance malgré tout, malgré elle... et il devait s'en charger seul, il commençait à le comprendre; oui, apporter lui-même la preuve qu'il était pur, qu'il était homme, qu'il n'était pas trop jeune" (271). He positions his identity against that of his sister, for he believes that he must demonstrate his purity and his masculinity, two qualities obviously lacking in his and others' perception of Touma. Whereas he sees her sister as "plus indigne que la dernière des prostituées," he identifies himself as "digne de confiance malgré tout". Tawfik soon resolves to take matters into his own hands, and he begins to follow Touma and survey her from afar. On one occasion he approaches her, screaming insults: "Sale putain, fille de chien, de race de chien!... Je veux que tu partes! Que tu partes de la ville! Qu'on ne te revoie plus. Qu'on puisse enfin t'oublier!" (272). (Tawfik's use of *on* implies that this is a general sentiment in the city.) But Touma fights back, yelling: "Tu crois sans doute avoir des droits sur moi! Pauvre idiot!" (273).

Soon after, Tawfik visits the café frequented by his sister. This time, though, he has more than just words for her; he has decided to avenge Touma's betrayal of her people while simultaneously demonstrating his own courage and unflinching devotion to the nationalist cause. After exchanging a few words with her, he pulls out a gun and shoots her. Tawfik escapes, leaving his sister to die in front of the café patrons that sit and stare. "Le corps de Touma est resté sur le sol, appuyé ainsi à demi, sur le côté; le cercle des hommes a eu le temps (« son frère ! – oui, c'est son frère ! – il a vengé son honneur ! – Dieu ait pitié de lui ! ») de contempler à loisir la victime abattue" (281). But they soon distance themselves from her dead body, not wanting to meddle in "family affairs". "« Cela ne nous regarde pas. » – « Affaire de famille. » – « Partons, c'est plus sûr. » – « Je n'ai rien vu. » – « Tant de morts, à présent, tant de meurtres ! » – « Que les temps sont étranges ! » – « Non, c'est l'heure de la justice ! » – Les mots courent. Les derniers témoins tournent le dos à Touma, à la place. Il est temps pour eux de rentrer, avant la nuit" (281). Even in death, Touma is rejected, no one even daring to respect her destroyed, lifeless body; she is no longer an individual but a casualty of war.

In her study of Djébar's writings, Rafika Merini asserts that the narrator is sympathetic to Touma and reads this scene as suggesting that prostitutes are victims. While this may be the case, we can also interpret it as suggestive of both the danger of female sexuality and the risk of abandoning one's national identity (an identity that was still in formation at this period in Algerian history). Touma has no qualms about distancing herself from other Algerians, even going so far as to engage in activities that could be labeled traitorous. As suggested above, she actually identifies with, or at least would prefer to be seen as, European. This presentation of "the traitor" is especially noteworthy because she is a woman. Not only is she going against her "national" interests, but she is defying conventions placed on Arab women. She is othered by her own people for literally unveiling herself to the colonizer.

Merini alludes to this idea and discusses the place of prostitution in the colonial context. She also evokes the importance of looking at the role of women in the Algerian movement:

Having been among the primary victims of colonization, having been directly involved in the wars of independence, and having fought at least as valiantly as the men did, Maghrebien women, who were denied access to education by the French, still perceive them as a real and lasting threat. It has been documented, for instance, that prostitution was introduced through colonialism (in the Maghreb, as well as in other regions of the world, in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance). In her study of Algerian and Egyptian women, Catherine Delcroix writes, “l’un des aspects les plus douloureux de la relation colonisé-colonisateur est le développement de la prostitution de femmes arabes organisée par les Français.” (131-132)

While, as already stated, I would disagree that prostitution was introduced to Algeria by French colonizers, recognition of the fact that sex work functioned in new ways and in new circuits at this particular historical juncture allows Touma’s situation to take on new meaning. She is othered by her own people for actually embracing what may have been seen as an appeal to the colonist: prostitution. This othering is mutual, though, as she also begins to see her fellow citizens as enemies. She thrives on satisfying European men but it is likely that they only see her as an erotic, exotic other. Touma is neither subject nor object, somewhere between self and other, perhaps even something akin to Kristeva’s “abject.”

The two tropes around which I have constructed this chapter – prostitution and veiling – further converge in *Les alouettes naïves*. While reflecting on the prostitution industry in his city, Omar calls up the memory of a curious incident with a prostitute “dont la voix m’avait plu”. Upon asking her price and then entering the “chambre laide” to engage in the act, she removes her clothing only below her waist. Seemingly surprised, Omar states: “Je veux voir ton visage!” whereupon she violently replies: “Je ne te connais pas! Voici mon sexe. (Elle ajouta un mot obscène.) Pas mon visage!” (267). Her retort points to a tension between purity and vulgarity, echoing Omar’s statements that each and every woman vacillates between whore and angel. This prostitute actually embodies both positions concurrently, which frightens Omar and leads him to quickly pay her and flee the scene. He is not capable of remaining with this woman who ultimately controls the exchange, denying him access to her face and thereby his desire to know her on a level beyond pure sexuality and monetary exchange. To this woman, certain body parts are more valued and personal. Her face is more important to a sense of identity (both personal and cultural) than is her vagina, and she will not compromise by removing her veil. Here, the choice to veil points to a potentially productive assertion of agency that cannot be co-opted by masculine demands for power.

In this chapter I have attempted to employ the trope of veiling and the figure of the prostitute in order to uncover the issues at stake in the changing social and political status of Muslim women and the ways in which their bodies were made to function as tools of war during the Algerian Revolution. The war became a literal and metaphoric

“battle of the veil,” as the public unveiling of May 16, 1958 makes clear. While attempting to “emancipate” these women from their “oppressive” Arab culture, the French colonial administration also demonstrated their own profound ignorance of the veil’s multivalency. As the work of Assia Djebar illustrates, the veil became a screen onto which both colonizer and colonized projected anxieties and attempts to control Algerian women and their bodies. The veil figuratively distorted linguistic structures (yielding phrases like “alouettes naïves”) and unveiled the in-betweenness and fragility of structures and categories, specifically that of the “Muslim woman,” a fragmentary notion that ultimately fails because no such unified subject position exists.<sup>32</sup> (Even the idea of “femininity” is problematic, for, as we have seen, it too is both veiled and deceptive.) As Mohja Kahf writes, “It is possible that power is not given or taken away from Muslim women by the absence or presence of the veil, but by the presence or absence of economic, political, and family rights. It is possible that women who want to veil have their own reasons, stemming from their own priorities and not those of patriarchal authorities... Women’s embrace of the veil cannot be understood only in terms of their being ‘controlled’ by male-defined religious ideologies. For some, it is a step toward greater power” (39). Despite the struggles that were waged on the bodies of Algerian women, both veiled and unveiled, the work of feminist writers and theorists demonstrates the dynamic process of veiling and its productive possibilities for action and engagement.

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<sup>32</sup> This is of course different from the French assimilative desire for erasure of the category of “Muslim woman.”

## CHAPTER TWO

Torture, Memory, and Film: Alain Resnais' Absent "Muriel"

*On me dit qu'elle s'appelle Muriel. Je ne sais pas pourquoi, mais ça ne devait pas être son vrai nom. (...) Elle hurle. Alors son regard m'a fixé. Pourquoi moi? Elle a fermé les yeux, puis elle s'est mise à vomir. (...) La nuit je suis revenu la voir. J'ai soulevé la bâche... Comme si elle avait séjourné longtemps dans l'eau... comme un sac de pommes de terre éventré... Avec du sang sur tout le corps, dans les cheveux... des brûlures sur la poitrine. Les yeux de Muriel n'étaient pas fermés. Ça ne me faisait presque rien, peut-être même que cela ne me faisait rien du tout.*  
– MURIEL, OU LE TEMPS D'UN RETOUR

*Nous avons conscience d'un acte sui generis par lequel nous nous détachons du présent pour nous replacer d'abord dans le passé en général, puis dans une certaine région du passé: travail de tâtonnement, analogue à la mise au point d'un appareil photographique...*  
– Henri BERGSON

*While military battle usually destroys the body, torture disturbs it, dismantles it in order to reach the mind, open it, and pave the way for its rearranging.*  
– Marnia LAZREG

*Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour*, the third feature-length film from acclaimed French director Alain Resnais and second collaboration with screenwriter Jean Cayrol, attempts to make sense of a fragmented past and present that have been torn apart by international wars and domestic conflicts. My epigraphs attempt to foreground what is at stake as the film grapples with themes of violence, memory, torture, and embodiment. Taking the recently concluded French-Algerian War (as well as the slightly more distant Second World War) as its point of departure, the film interrogates a post-war amnesia and its far-reaching effects on bodies and minds. Nonetheless, several critics have stated that Resnais and Cayrol seem more concerned with representing the erasure of the conflict's memory in the minds of French citizens than in actually confronting French audiences with the harsh realities of what went on during the war.<sup>33</sup> While Algeria figures heavily throughout the film, I propose that *Muriel* is above all interested in representing the pitfalls and paradoxes of a changing French national identity complicated by France's wartime crimes and its ultimate relinquishment of *l'Algérie française*.

Going hand in hand with the film's exploration of Frenchness in the wake of decolonization is its analysis of the physical and psychological razing and rebuilding that occurs after a crisis such as the French-Algerian War. The film is undoubtedly concerned with the effects of that destruction and reconstruction on bodies and minds. But given that the film has been accurately critiqued for solely exposing the experiences of the

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<sup>33</sup> For more on this argument, see the work of Suzanne Gauch and Rachid Boudjedra.

French *appelé* and civilian, it follows that its true investment is in representing the experience of its survivors rather than its victims. As detailed in the previous chapter, the experience of the victims has sometimes been symbolically condensed on to a particular corporeal site: the Algerian female body. While the film's title would seem to designate its object of analysis as Muriel, an Algerian woman, the film finally seems much more interested in highlighting the psychological fracturing of a French soldier involved in her torture and murder than in showing the physical fracturing of her body.<sup>34</sup>

Alain Resnais maintains a stylistic agenda of innovation in cinematic form and uses a variety of techniques to reflect the uneasiness and anxiety felt by his characters. His characters are, for the most part, average French citizens coping with the period's anxieties and are, therefore, representative of the psychic and physical struggles occurring for this particular class of French citizens in the wake of a war that saw upwards of 1.5 million deaths<sup>35</sup> and witnessed the use and abuse of interrogation techniques performed under the guise of French national security interests. In this way, the film subtly wrestles with the growing divisiveness within the French public concerning the use of torture and subsequent representations of it.

Resnais' disinterest in making verisimilar films allowed him to force his viewers to become active spectators, constantly attempting to grasp what he was trying to say. In *Muriel*, for example, we are required to make sense of the repeated contradictions in character and plot, as well as to make connections where there may actually be none. We cannot passively sit back and take the viewing experience for granted, for we become, in a way, characters in the story, attempting to comprehend the past so as to direct the future. As Resnais describes it:

Mon but est de mettre le spectateur dans un état tel que huit jours, six mois ou un an après, placé devant un problème, cela l'empêche de tricher et l'oblige à réagir *librement*. Ce serait merveilleux d'arriver à ce résultat. Ce qu'il faut, c'est ébranler la certitude des gens, les réveiller, faire qu'ils n'acceptent pas les valeurs reçues comme intangibles. C'est plus important à mes yeux que la destruction pure et simple. D'un spectacle destructeur, violent, négatif, les gens sortent plutôt rassurés, en définitive. Ils sont contents d'avoir joué à Guignol. (Roumette, 12)

Resnais' goal of waking people up and forcing them to question previously held beliefs about cinema and about the world around them was a main tenet of French New Wave film. While never fully embracing the Nouvelle Vague, Resnais confronted some of the same issues with which New Wave filmmakers were grappling through his rebellion against classic French cinema and a seeming inability to represent the "real."

Resnais' eschewing of unity and coherence was also undeniably New Wave-esque, as were various other cinematic techniques that he employed. Rapid montage and

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<sup>34</sup> This sentiment is exemplified by the following phrase spoken to said soldier by his stepmother: "Je ne m'intéresse à Muriel qu'à cause de toi."

<sup>35</sup> As stated in the Introduction, figures of casualties have been vigorously debated. It is estimated that between 500,000 and 1.5 million Algerians perished and between 50,000 and 150,000 French were killed during the eight-year war.

pervasive lingering shots create a viewing atmosphere of fragmentation that makes the film nearly impossible to summarize, indeed comprehend, in any coherent way. Conversations are often illogical, questions posed are rarely answered, and awkward silences are ubiquitous. In fact, characters often appear to be having conversations only with themselves, refusing to conform to the unstated rules of interpersonal communication. Despite the fact that the film has been deemed “one of the most technically innovative and thematically ingenious films to have been inspired by the Algerian war” (Dine 1994, 223), it is still, as reviewer Tom Milne writes, “difficult to seize, let alone write about” (Milne, 178). Susan Sontag echoes a similar sentiment, describing the film as “designed so that, at any given moment of it, it’s not about anything at all” (26). Although its plot is difficult to grasp, I believe it is actually through its fragmentation and disjointedness that the film speaks to the anxieties that French soldiers experienced upon their return from Algeria, as well as alluding to (if not quite explicitly discussing or representing) the psychological and bodily pain inflicted on Algerians during the war. Thus, we may interpret Resnais’ aesthetic choices as presenting a particular manner of addressing issues at the heart of the Franco-Algerian conflict, including the public secrets of censorship, torture, and war crimes.

If in the previous chapter of this dissertation I demonstrated some of the myriad ways in which the Algerian woman was made to be visible, even hyper-visible (both in the circulation of literary texts and in staged acts such as the public unveiling of Muslim women), in this chapter I will move to a conspicuous absence of the Algerian female body. The title positions a particular woman (Muriel) as its prime topic of investigation, an Algerian woman who was tortured and murdered by a French Army unit during the war. This title character will, however, never appear in the film. Whether because of the strict censorship regulations surrounding the Algerian War or a disinterest in portraying the effects of the war on any population other than that of the Hexagon, Resnais chose not to include any visual representation of Muriel. Her absence will haunt the film, but will also highlight the multitude of silences surrounding the French-Algerian War and its remembrances (or lack thereof) in the French national consciousness.

While touching upon memories of destruction and reconstruction (both figurative and symbolic) around World War II, the film’s principal narrative is concerned with Bernard, one of the soldiers responsible for Muriel’s torture and death, who falls into psychological turmoil after returning to France. As Emma Wilson states, Resnais attempts to provide a “detailed imprint of traumatic and other excessive mental and bodily experience” (6) and to evoke “creative means of escape from traumatic experience” (7) that are inextricably tied to everyday sensory experience and to eroticism. I would add to Wilson’s statement that gender and gendered embodiment are especially bound up both with trauma and with memories and amnesia of said experiences. Torture, for example, which figures heavily throughout this chapter, is necessarily tied to gender and sexuality. As Algerian scholar Marnia Lazreg states: “When a woman was taken prisoner, the sexual nature of torture was a matter of fact. It was borne by her gendered body ... Her body, perceived as that of the generic female, was imbued with sexual desire” (2008, 160). While the intention of torture was often “to rebuild the native ‘suspect’ or combatant from the ground up in a psychological action based on sex, masculinity and femininity” (Lazreg 2008, 255), there were also heavy stakes for the torturer, who was often equally

demonstrating a level of masculinity through this act of violence.<sup>36</sup> In her analysis of sexuality and the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, Jasbir Puar writes that “the body informs the torture, but the torture also forms the body” (87). In the context of Resnais’ film, the French male body informs the sort of violence that would be enacted on the Algerian female body. The violence will ultimately destroy this body, but will have lasting effects on the bodies (and particularly masculinities) of her torturers, as I will discuss later in this chapter. And even as Jean-Paul Sartre stated in his essay “Une Victoire”, “dans la torture, cet étrange match, l’enjeu semble radical: c’est pour le titre d’homme que le tortionnaire se mesure avec le torturé et tout se passe comme s’ils ne pouvaient appartenir ensemble à l’espèce humaine” (116).

Remembering and forgetting of such extreme violence are also related to social constructs like gender and sexuality, for both the tortured and the torturer. Tactics of memory evasion like forgetting and denial and, conversely, attempts to remember (and even hyper-remember) play out in particular ways that can be mapped onto masculinity and femininity. Without reducing this notion to a simple equation, it is worth mentioning that the two principal protagonists of *Muriel*, one female, one male, deal with their memory addictions in very different ways. For the most part, Hélène goes the route of avoidance and evasion, whereas Bernard cannot rid himself of troubling and traumatic episodes from the past, but often seems to misplace or displace memories, as is demonstrated by his obsession with taking videos and photographs around his hometown. As Jean Cayrol writes in the screenplay, “Sa mémoire se réfugie dans sa caméra, dans son magnétophone, dans ses armes, dans ses films; il a besoin d’un intermédiaire pour capter les autres, les prendre en intimité...” (21). Bernard knows no other way to deal with his memories and guilt around the incident than to gather “evidence” (in the form of photographs and “documentary” footage) in hopes of eventually telling Muriel’s story.

In this chapter I will be focusing more on Bernard’s memory strategies in order to analyze how both masculinity and femininity are structured vis-à-vis memories of Muriel and the French-Algerian War. Unsurprisingly, his efforts to tell Muriel’s story will prove unsuccessful, as he is powerless to change what happened in Algeria or to be understood by his family and friends at home in France. As I will outline, Bernard’s seeming impotence in telling the story of Muriel points to a certain crisis in masculinity that many French soldiers returning from war were experiencing. Although the torture scene is not represented visually, its haunting presence throughout the film also echoes an idea evoked in Chapter One, that the Algerian female body was functioning as a screen onto which French men could project their anxieties around colonial power and masculinity.

Before turning to a more comprehensive analysis of the film, I would like to offer a brief caveat and state that my reading of *Muriel* will differ markedly from previous analyses and critiques that followed an evolutionary reading of Resnais’ cinema. Claude Ollier’s words sum up this oft-taken approach: “je vois entre les trois longs métrages de Resnais une étonnante continuité, qu’on peut rapprocher d’une condition semblable nécessaire...” (20). While I will occasionally refer to other films directed by Resnais (*Hiroshima mon amour*, *L’année dernière à Marienbad*, *Nuit et brouillard*), I will not be approaching *Muriel* as a

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<sup>36</sup> For more on the relationship between torture and manliness, see Darius Rejali (2007).

culmination of these previous works.<sup>37</sup> I acknowledge the merit in other scholars' approaches that take Resnais' œuvre as their starting point to understanding this often opaque and sometimes baffling film, but, as film scholar Roy Armes states, any attempt to interpret one Resnais film in terms of another is fraught with pitfalls (10). I believe much can be gleaned from addressing the film as a work on its own, a work that was written and produced at a very particular historical moment when, after eight years of intense violence and prolonged strife, France had just ceded control of its most valuable overseas territory.

As stated above, the characters of Resnais' *Muriel* are all haunted by war-torn times, the most recent conflict in Algeria as well as the Second World War. After examining the film's two intersecting narratives and the collective memories they deal with respectively, it becomes evident that the film is particularly invested in exposing the imbrication of these two twentieth-century conflicts. The first narrative involves 38 year-old Hélène (played by the award-winning actress Delphine Seyrig) who, according to Cayrol's character sketch, should at any given time look both twenty and forty-five years old. She is an antique dealer and compulsive gambler and is obsessed with making sense of the past: "Pour Hélène l'héroïne, le passé devient réhabilitation, projet" (16). In addition to living amongst the dusty antiques that she sells out of her apartment (it is never clear which objects are her own and which are intended for sale, for the family even eats off plates that have already been sold)<sup>38</sup>, this obsession with the past also becomes apparent in one of the central storylines around which the film revolves. Hélène has invited to her home Alphonse, a now middle-aged man with whom she had an affair twenty years prior. The relationship ended abruptly in 1939, apparently as a result of a silly miscommunication. But war soon broke out and Alphonse was shipped off to duty, eliminating the possibility of them seeing one another and salvaging their relationship. In this strange reunion decades later, Hélène and Alphonse each seem invested in communicating and remembering a certain version of the past (often at odds with the other's), especially around World War II when their affair took place. But uncertainty, instability, and deception characterize their interactions (and the film as a whole), and we never know what to believe: is one or the other of them lying, misremembering, and/or forgetting?

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<sup>37</sup> All sorts of similarities and differences have been made between *Muriel* and Resnais' earlier films in an attempt to understand the film, including, to name just a few, comparisons in: feelings evoked ("L'impression dominante que j'ai ressentie très vite a été celle d'une croissante angoisse, et même d'une terreur, absolument semblable à celle que j'ai ressentie en voyant *Marienbad*. Et je me suis demandé alors: est-ce que *Muriel* ne serait pas une seconde version de *Marienbad*? un *Marienbad* historicisé?" (Ollier, 22)); complexity ("The reason *Muriel* is difficult is because it attempts to do both what *Hiroshima* and what *Marienbad* did. It attempts to deal with substantive issues—war guilt over Algeria, the OAS, the racism of the colons—even as *Hiroshima* dealt with the bomb, pacifism, and collaboration. But it also, like *Marienbad*, attempts to project a purely abstract drama." (Sontag, 24)); and location ("*Muriel*'s Boulogne may recall the editing of urban images in *Hiroshima mon amour*..." (Wilson, 101)).

<sup>38</sup> The constant flow of objects, people, and time through Hélène's home is echoed in Bernard's statement that you never know what period you're going to wake up to in the apartment.

The viewer is soon met with other uncertainties, as the true motivations for Hélène setting up this two-week visit are apparent to no one. Did she want to begin anew their relationship of decades earlier? Did she hope to manipulate Alphonse into paying off her gambling debt? Did she perhaps even subconsciously want to complicate her life? These questions, and many others, will go unanswered.<sup>39</sup> No one (including Hélène) will understand why she brought about this reunion, highlighting a confusion that is emblematic of the film's plot as a whole.

Like Hélène, Alphonse also has a problematic relationship to the past. He is invested in presenting a false past and constantly misleads everyone around him. As Cayrol states in his character description of Alphonse: "il improvise continuellement son existence, sans logique, à la mesure de ses mensonges, de ses réticences ou des vérités qu'il donne et qui sont à peine transformées" (18). His past and present are a series of lies, beginning immediately upon his arrival, for he has brought with him Françoise, a young actress whom he introduces as his niece but who is actually his present mistress.<sup>40</sup> He also presents himself as a successful restaurateur in Algeria, saying the fifteen years he spent in North Africa were the happiest of his life and that he only left because of the escalating conflict. The truth, as we will later learn, is that he never even set foot in Algeria.<sup>41</sup>

Jean Cayrol describes his characters as each having "une mémoire en quelque sorte intolérable et une mémoire transfuge et, pour parler plus familièrement, une mauvaise mémoire et une bonne mémoire" (16). This is evident in the second and, for the purposes of my project, more significant storyline. Bernard, Hélène's 21 year-old stepson, also maintains a troubled relationship to the past. Having returned to France eight months prior after serving in the army for almost two years, he is haunted by memories of his time spent in Algeria, just as Hélène is haunted by distant memories that revolve around World War II. When he returns to his hometown of Boulogne, he is forced to confront the memories of and guilt over actions performed during the war.

The film continually evokes questions around individual and collective responsibility regarding the colonial project, and, in this way, is very much concerned with French citizens and the nation as a whole coming to terms with troubling memories and guilt over injustices committed during the war. In this way, *Muriel* is also about the burden of being a witness to history.<sup>42</sup> While characters like Hélène and Alphonse carry around the burden of the Second World War, Bernard must always carry with him the burden of individual and collective guilt over France's actions in Algeria and to Algerians. Throughout the chapter, I will be allude to this notion of colonial guilt through the character of Bernard and his relationship to Muriel, with occasional references to other characters and subplots.

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<sup>39</sup> Hélène and Alphonse briefly discuss their past. Alphonse: "Nous n'allons pas revenir sur le passé." Hélène: "Mais vous êtes ici pour cela." Later on, when Alphonse asks her why she invited him, she changes the subject.

<sup>40</sup> Unlike the other characters of the film, Françoise is described as having "pas de passé ou si peu" (19). Cayrol also describes her as "l'élément le plus stable," which prompts the hypothesis that it is her lack of a past that allows her to be so grounded.

<sup>41</sup> As his brother-in-law states, "Quand son histoire d'Algérie n'intéressera plus personne, il changera de drame."

<sup>42</sup> See Wilson, 5 on bearing witness in Resnais.

## Naming and Misnaming

*The grammar of euphemisms contained torture by sinking it below the level of consciousness, repressing its disturbing intrusion on the oft displayed stage of France's "civilizing mission"... Tangled up in this orgiastic name-fixing was the French unease with acknowledging Algerians' identity. A French department (Algeria's official status) was inhabited by French people. But every French person knew that Algerians were not quite French, yet they needed to be thought of as such for France's own sense of identity.*

-- Marnia LAZREG

As the film's title suggests, *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* is first and foremost about a woman named Muriel, or rather, as we will later learn, one man's troubled memory of this woman. But Muriel was not her name (her true name was never known), and she was only given this French-sounding moniker by those who tortured and killed her. Her agency and identity were symbolically and physically taken away, first through this misnaming and then through her torture and eventual murder. Naming becomes very complicated in the film, and stand-ins proliferate for the ever-absent Muriel, which, despite her visual absence, renders her ever-present. For example, before we even learn who this woman actually was, Bernard speaks to H el ene of his supposed fianc ee (curiously named Muriel) in the first minutes of the film.<sup>43</sup>

Bernard: Je vais faire un tour, voir Muriel.  
H el ene: Mais tu rentreras pour dîner, j'esp ere? C'est le premier soir.  
Tu ne m'as jamais dit o u tu avais rencontr e ton amie, elle n'a pas un nom d'ici.  
Bernard: Elle est malade en ce moment.  
H el ene: Ah!  
Bernard: Non, elle n'est pas malade.

As demonstrated in the dialogue, mystery surrounds this woman and her "health". Only later will we come to understand that *this* Muriel is a figment of Bernard's imagination. The conflation of a tortured and murdered Algerian woman with a make-believe lover raises a whole set of questions and adds another layer of complexity to the always-already sexualized torture scene. As Marnia Lazreg elaborates on the relationship of sex and torture, "sex is always present in the torture chamber whether the victim is a man or a woman. The sexing of torture is deeply grounded in the recesses of the torturer's psyche. He either lets his fantasy loose by coercing his victim into sexual positions ... or prefers to contain it, gazing, ogling, instead" (2008, 123).

It is also important to note that this woman was given a French name by her torturers. It can be assumed that other incidents of torture involved misnaming, but I would posit that, as we saw in Chapter One with the misuse of names like Fatma, generic

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<sup>43</sup> Two other mentions of alternative Muriels are found in the film. A young girl in the street called by her mother ("Muriel, viens ici tout de suite!") and a newspaper headline about a woman named Muriel who was tortured for 30 hours, providing the only factual basis for the existence of "Muriel."

Arabic names would be used by torturers, whether consciously pejorative or not. Naming this woman Muriel creates a certain proximity to Frenchness, but her torture and death simultaneously highlight the impossibility of every being truly “French.” (I use quotes to emphasize the fact that Algerians were, at the time, technically French.) Bound up with the process of naming and misnaming, French identity shows itself to be rather tenuous and, in an almost Hegelian dialectical fashion, even dependent on the construction of a lower hierarchical status of Algerians. Lazreg refers to this as a failed Frenchness: “torture was meant to beat the ‘primitive’ out of the failed Frenchness of the victim. The Algerian was seen as having been created by France, but failing to become French. Torture was meant to remake him into an obedient French colonial subject” (2008, 133-134). Despite her murder, Muriel will be posthumously made into such an obedient French subject: in the form of Bernard’s imaginary fiancée. Having been assigned this French-sounding name, Muriel can continue to live on as his fictional girlfriend without there being a question for his family and friends about the national and ethnic background of this woman they will never meet. (It is worth noting that Bernard also has a real-life girlfriend named Marie-Do whom we will be introduced to later in the film.)

Because Muriel was not the true name of the Algerian woman who Bernard’s army unit tortured and killed, a whole set of questions are evoked regarding what is at stake in titling the film with a fictive name. For example, is there only fiction to the story of the French-Algerian War and to the story of this class of people at this particular moment? (The war itself was a prime example of misnaming, as it was not called a “guerre” at the time.) It is also important to keep in mind that the name “Muriel” does not refer just to its victim, but rather to a much larger set of issues, including the whole episode of her torture (including what Bernard was thinking, feeling, and experiencing). “Muriel” also stands in for torture in general, Algeria, the French-Algerian War, the Algerian female body (upon which the war was fought), as well as the constant evasion of truth, on large and small scales, surrounding the war.

As the second half of the title (“*le temps d’un retour*”) suggests, the film also deals with themes of time, memory, and returning. This process of integrating past into present and the complications that subsequently arise following *un retour* consume much of the oeuvre of both Resnais and Cayrol. As Jean Cayrol states: “I write and make films to ‘return’: it’s always the problem of memory regained” (Armes, 120). One of this film’s objectives seems to be to examine the return and uncover what remains after one has come back, and this idea takes many forms—temporal, physical, spatial, even emotional. The decision to use the indefinite article *un*, instead of the definite article *le* or even no article at all, is, however, curious. In this choice, Resnais and Cayrol signal a non-specificity; the title does not refer to one particular *retour* but to a multitude of different forms of return and returning. The film is about returning to the past and to the present. It is about returning to France and to one’s “home.” But it is also about the problems inherent in coming back to a post-war social and urban landscape, prompting the realization that one can ever truly go back to how things were.

Before fleshing out what exactly is at stake in this discussion of returning, change, destruction, and reconstruction, I would like to take a step back in an attempt to set the scene for the social, cultural, and national landscape of the film’s historical period.

## World War II and Algeria: Layered Memories

*One of the most striking phenomena on the French political and cultural landscape of recent decades is, surely, a preoccupation with the national past...*  
-- Naomi GREENE

*[Muriel provides an] exceptionally productive juxtaposition of the individual and collective will to forgetfulness as regards events in Algeria, with its characters' and the French nation's obsessive remembering of the Second World War: by hinting at convenient omissions in the memory of that earlier devastation, it serves to emphasize, if not quite to define, the officially encouraged silence surrounding recent events on the other side of the Mediterranean.*  
-- Philip DINE

The characters of Resnais' *Muriel* are all haunted by war-torn times, and the film's two intersecting narratives point to the imbrication of the two most recent twentieth-century conflicts, Algeria and WWII. They live in the northern French city of Boulogne, a region decimated by the Germans in 1944, but now, nearly twenty years later, completely rebuilt with modern block-like structures populating the urban landscape. The 1950s and 1960s were a period of newfound optimism and confidence for France's burgeoning class of baby-boomers. New technologies of modernization and increased buying power allowed these "technocrats" access to a more comfortable way of life filled with appliances and automobiles, seemingly ensuring happier times ahead. This future-directed hopefulness was, however, being enacted during a period of troubled relationships with the previous decades. While a failed colonial project and an indictment of those guilty of war crimes might have grabbed the attention of the public and the state, attention was instead directed at a slightly more distant past wherein France emerged victorious. The French-Algerian War remained obscured in the French mind at this moment when memories of World War II, when the French valiantly fought to fend off their Nazi occupiers, were crystallizing in the collective imagination, thereby aiding in the construction of a post-war national identity.

In *Muriel*, these issues of remembering and forgetting around World War II and Algeria are present in both form and content. While there appeared to be a collective amnesia around the war, we are forced to ask the following questions: Could World War II commemorations provide the protective layer to shield the public against confronting the atrocities committed under the French flag? Could celebrations of the French Resistance to Nazi occupation hide their own war crimes? Could an eight-year conflict that saw intense conflict in both Algerian and French cities and villages really be forgotten so quickly? And if so, what sorts of repercussions would this have on individual bodies and minds?

As a brief side note, I would like to mention that Cayrol, as a camp survivor, has admitted to being obsessed with the memory and the recounting of World War II. It is interesting to think that, for Cayrol, *Muriel* may have been more about WWII than about Algeria, while Resnais has stated that *Nuit et brouillard* (also written by Jean Cayrol), which takes the Holocaust as its subject, was actually about Algeria. This highlights how deeply

intertwined these two historical periods truly were for the filmmakers and for the contemporary viewing public.

In *Muriel*, Algeria is spoken about but never truly coalesces into memories that can be coherently remembered or related. Richard Neupert puts it this way in his summary of *Muriel*: "...behind it all, is the devastating war in Algeria, which meets up with the continuing destruction caused by World War II to mark two generations still trying to represent, explain, and understand who they are and what sort of world they have built around themselves" (329). Memories of Algeria remain only deep in the subconscious of individuals, occasionally emerging in incoherent and even violent ways, as is evident in Bernard's inability to transmit clearly his recollections of the war, as well as in the false memories that Alphonse has of this region in which he never actually set foot.

This problematic relationship to the past, and particularly to the overlap of WWII and Algeria, is highlighted by Resnais and Cayrol through cinematic devices and plot developments. For example, Resnais uses a rapid montage technique to move back and forth between these two wartime moments, creating what Emma Wilson has described as a type of "creative geography" (101).<sup>44</sup> Street signs commemorating the Resistance are presented alternately with images of newly built structures that symbolize the modern Boulogne-sur-mer. This juxtaposition technique almost seems to map the two historical moments onto one another, emphasizing their urban overlaps as well as their temporal proximity. Through the choice of images, though, the film simultaneously evokes some of the aforementioned divergences: World War II was (and continues to be) highly commemorated and celebrated, while Algeria is not. Even though the (de)colonial project exists in the memories and imaginations of the film's characters, the city has no plaques to commemorate a war that took hundreds of thousands of lives.<sup>45</sup> The film can only represent the war obtusely through the contemporary technologies and built structures so emblematic of this technocratic society of the late 50s and early 60s, a newly imagined world that was very much constructed *against* decolonization. Kristin Ross has written extensively on this relationship between decolonization and modernization, stating that France underwent a "dismantling of earlier spatial arrangements ... in the decade that saw the stumbling and final collapse of the French Empire" (6). In the eerily vacant streets of this newly constructed city without a center, no path ever seems to lead to either level ground or a feeling of stabilization<sup>46</sup>; similarly, Algeria, a patchwork of shattered and fragmented memories, never seems to coalesce into a coherent story. In Boulogne, as in other French cities, the narratives of decolonization and of modernization became inextricably linked to one another in time and space.

As I will discuss in the next section, physical location plays a significant role in the film. Boulogne was heavily bombed during the second World War. Gilles Deleuze

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<sup>44</sup> For more on relationship between geographical place and states of mind, see also James Monaco, 74.

<sup>45</sup> I will also be discussing this issue of commemoration as it relates to WWII and Algeria in my reading of Leila Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* in Chapter Four.

<sup>46</sup> Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit write: "*Muriel* is a wholly centrifugal film... *Muriel* is constantly rushing away from a narrative center never firmly established in the first place... what would it mean to be in the center no matter where we are? What is the narrative center of *Muriel*?" (190-191).

comments in *Cinéma 2* that in this movie “il y a deux mémoires... chacune marquée par une guerre, Boulogne, l’Algérie” (154). Deleuze thereby underscores the confusion and imbrication inherent in the presentation of this temporal moment: *Muriel* is consumed by two memories, and in Deleuze’s formulation, *l’Algérie* refers to the location in North Africa as well as to the Algerian War, while Boulogne refers to the French city, but must also refer to World War II and the destruction it visited upon this city.

### **Boulogne, *Ville martyre***

*Cette histoire doit se passer dans une ville reconstruite. Il ne reste plus que quelques îlots de ruines, de vieilles ruines qui ont mal vieilli. Bloc de ciment perle. Maisons ouvertes sur des pièces indéfinissables, pleines de paille, de débris, jardins de bois mort. Mais ces petits domaines d’une ancienne guerre ne peuvent être découverts que par hasard, au détour d’une rue, dans une marche. Tout le reste de la ville est neuf, bêtement neuf. Rues droites, se coupant perpendiculairement, lampadaires distribuant une lueur orangée, avenues comme prêtes pour une prochaine guerre de façon que les chars d’assaut puissent passer plus facilement. Magasins vides, à louer. Parcs de stationnement. Cinémas dont la sonnerie ne s’arrête pas. Murs blancs. Beaucoup d’antennes de télévision...*

-- Jean CAYROL

So begins Jean Cayrol’s screenplay. *Muriel*’s protagonists play out their own troubled relationships to time and place against the backdrop of a destroyed city haunted by its newness. Ruins, although often well hidden, are constant reminders of not only the past but also of the magnitude of force (i.e. aerial bombardment) that caused such utter devastation. The city has been partially rebuilt after the destruction of one war, but is simultaneously ready for another. The new, postwar, urban geometry now allows for the easy passage of tanks and other military vehicles. While there are inconspicuous ruins to be found throughout the city (symbolizing the “hidden” past), a shiny novelty pervades: everything is so new as to be “bêtement neuf.” The scene of the bright lights of movies and television points to the rapid modernization and non-stop movement that is going on. But they are juxtaposed against blank/white walls and empty storefronts. These stimuli cannot overpower the emptiness that remains, giving the city the feeling of what Alphonse terms, “une ville martyre.”

It was no accident that Cayrol and Resnais chose to set the film in the northern coastal city of Boulogne, a city destroyed during World War II and rebuilt in the 1950s. Like Bernard, French soldiers (three million in total) were returning home to cities like Boulogne that looked quite different than they did prior to their deployment. The fact that the city of Boulogne “a changé de visage, de forme, des suites de la guerre de 40-45” is evident early on in the film. After Hélène picks up Alphonse and Françoise from the train station, they stroll past newly built housing structures and stores selling televisions, apparently the lone occupants of this urban landscape. Françoise, always perceptive, quickly remarks, “Ça a l’air tout reconstruit, c’est à cause de la guerre?” The city is “reconstruit” but it is also bleak and sterile with an air of substitution and replaceability. This replaceability takes two forms: firstly, nothing is unique. Each structure looks the same as the one before. But Resnais also evokes the notion of the replaceable in that the

landscape echoes an underlying desire to replace memories of the past with those of the future, to replace the old with the new, to forget the past and look towards the future (or to a more distant past, in what Kristin Ross would call the “alibi for not dealing with the present”). Even the street’s occupants, Hélène, Alphonse, and François, highlight this, for Alphonse has replaced his old lover Hélène with this young/new woman Françoise.

Indeed, rebuilding for the future often requires replacing, razing, or even reinventing the past. (This could be the motto for the new class of technocrats emerging during this historical period.) The reconstructed city of Boulogne provides the backdrop for this process of negotiating past, present, and future. While there are analogies to be made between the city’s structures and its inhabitants (and I will continue to make these throughout the chapter), it is necessary to note that human bodies react to past memories in unique and varied ways. Old buildings can be destroyed, but bodies hold memories, often after the mind has “forgotten” them.

Boulogne, as Cayrol puts it in his screenplay, “a quitté un passé trop étroit, une mémoire trop bavarde pour prendre en mains un présent actif.” Notwithstanding the hidden ruins around the city, Boulogne has been able to maintain the façade of a new, modernized city. But its characters are obsessively drawn to the past, not knowing how to leave it behind. A fanatical focus on the past and the future leaves the characters with a complicated, perhaps even non-existent, relationship to the present. Mapping the dimensions of time and place onto one another, Deleuze writes that, just as Boulogne has no center, the characters have no present (1989, 116). They most certainly are suffering some sort of identity crisis as a result of recent devastation and subsequent modernization.

Resnais was particularly interested in portraying the notion of fractured existences in his films. This is echoed by screenwriter Cayrol when he states that the film poses the question: “Comment se souvenir en 1963?” (Morrissette, 137).<sup>47</sup> In a 1961 interview, Resnais speaks of the importance of fragmentation in the structuring and style of his films, stating that:

La vie moderne est faite de ruptures, cela est ressenti par tout le monde, la peinture comme la littérature en témoignent, pourquoi le cinéma n’en témoignerait-il pas également, au lieu de s’en tenir à la construction linéaire traditionnelle? (Roumette, 13)

This “vie moderne” of which Resnais speaks is modernity at a very particular moment in modern French history, a postwar period when technology was rapidly transforming everyday life and a class of technocrats was emerging. By virtue of its status as moving picture and its unique ability to reflect technological change and progress, cinema is a distinct medium in which issues related to this rapidly modernizing lifestyle can be treated. While advancements were being made in technology, French society was still reeling from destruction and decolonization and many were still searching for some sort of cohesive identity, an issue I will continue to explore in the next chapter.

The transformed city of Boulogne can also be read as a metaphor for other forms of destruction and reconstruction present in the film. Just as Boulogne was destroyed and

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<sup>47</sup> In the next chapter, I will cite a similar statement made by Simone de Beauvoir about people forgetting after 1962.

rebuilt, so were bodies, and this historical period witnessed the co-opting of particular bodies to serve particular purposes. As discussed in Chapter One, the Algerian female body became a site of contestation, as both sides of the war attempted to shape it in specific ways so as to prevail in the war. In *Muriel*, however, Resnais is more focused on another sort of rehabilitative intervention. It is Bernard's process of psychological construction and, as a result of his participation in Muriel's torture, his ultimate destruction that occupies much of the film.

### **Bodies in Pain: Resnais' Modernist Mise-en-Abyme**

*Torture is in its largest outlines the invariable and simultaneous occurrence of three phenomena which, if isolated into separate and sequential steps, would occur in the following order. First, pain is inflicted on a person in ever-intensifying ways. Second, the pain, continually amplified within the person's body, is also amplified in the sense that it is objectified, made visible to those outside the person's body. Third, the objectified pain is denied as pain and read as power...*

-- Elaine SCARRY

The modernized Boulogne, presenting a façade of progress and technological advancement, allowed those in the hexagon to distract themselves from what was going on behind the scenes in Algeria: people were getting tortured. Throughout the first half of Resnais' film, several oblique and vague references are made to Bernard's time as an *appelé* in Algeria and to the woman (mis)named Muriel. The title alone of course also evokes this individual, but it is not until halfway through the film<sup>48</sup> that we finally learn from Bernard who she was. In order to capture the weight of his words, I quote his monologue at length:

Personne n'avait connu cette femme avant. J'ai traversé le bureau où je travaillais, recouvert la machine à écrire. J'ai traversé la cour. On y voyait encore. Le hangar était au fond, avec les munitions. D'abord, je ne l'ai pas vue. C'est en m'approchant de la table que j'ai buté sur elle. Elle avait l'air endormie, mais elle tremblait de partout. On me dit qu'elle s'appelle Muriel. Je ne sais pas pourquoi, mais ça ne devait pas être son vrai nom. On était bien cinq autour d'elle. On discutait. Il fallait qu'elle parle avant la nuit. Robert s'est baissé et l'a retournée. Muriel a gémi. Elle avait mis son bras sur ses yeux. On la lâche, elle retombe comme un paquet. C'est alors que ça recommence. On la tire par les chevilles au milieu du hangar pour mieux la voir. Robert lui donne des coups de pied. Il prend une lampe-torche, la braque sur elle. Les lèvres sont gonflées, pleines d'écume. On lui arrache ses vêtements. On essaie de l'asseoir sur une chaise, elle retombe;

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<sup>48</sup> This moment occurs at nearly the exact middle of the film. For a discussion of various scholars' false remembrance of the temporal location of this scene in the film, see Wilson, p. 91. This idea of misremembering is at the heart of Resnais' film, so it is ironic that arguably the most important moment of the film would be incorrectly remembered.

un bras est comme tordu. Il faut en finir. Même si elle avait voulu parler, elle n'aurait pas pu. Je m'y suis mis aussi. Muriel geignait en recevant les gifles. La paume de mes mains me brûlait. Muriel avait les cheveux tout mouillés. Robert allume une cigarette. Il s'approche d'elle. Elle hurle. Alors son regard m'a fixé. Pourquoi moi? Elle a fermé les yeux, puis elle s'est mise à vomir. Robert a reculé, dégoûté. Je les ai tous laissés. La nuit je suis revenu la voir. J'ai soulevé la bâche... Comme si elle avait séjourné longtemps dans l'eau... comme un sac de pommes de terre éventré... Avec du sang sur tout le corps, dans les cheveux... des brûlures sur la poitrine. Les yeux de Muriel n'étaient pas fermés. Ça ne me faisait presque rien, peut-être même que cela ne me faisait rien du tout. Le lendemain matin avant le salut aux couleurs, Robert l'avait fait disparaître.

The gravity of Bernard's description is undeniable, even potentially evoking a visceral response for the listener. Muriel, or rather her body (any mental or physical identity and agency has been removed through both the misnaming and the torture), is at the center of Bernard's story. Her raw body—her eyes, lips, arm, and hair—and her bodily fluids—blood, vomit, and sweat—still obsess Bernard. In fact, it is the changing state of her body (particularly her open and closed eyes) that seems to affect his attachment to this past event and to his storytelling mode. But while her body is central, it is only the object of the story. The subject, as demonstrated by use of the subject pronoun “je,” is Bernard: “Je les ai tous laissés,” “Je suis revenu...,” “J’ai soulevé la bâche.” After admitting to slapping Muriel, the focus is on the pain felt in *his* body, not hers.<sup>49</sup> In a shift from the beginning of the passage when it was Muriel's gaze that singled out Bernard, part way through the passage, as he stares at her, she becomes the object of his gaze, coinciding with his attempted escape from guilt. It is precisely because he finds himself as the object of her gaze, however, that he feels the need to shift the frame of reference, yet again removing her agency.

At this moment in the film, there is a profound disconnect between the words we hear and the images we see. The film's screen literally becomes another screen for another film composed of a very different sort of image. Bernard's “confessional” and admission of his role in this woman's torture and murder, told to an old man dubbed Vieux Jean (whose identity we do not know, only that he is “un vieil homme, genre portier, veilleur de nuit”), is set against the backdrop of home movies presumably shot by Bernard during his time in Algeria. However, this film-within-a-film is not composed of images of Muriel or of tortured bodies, but rather, as Cayrol describes it, of “des images floues d’Afrique du Nord très carte postale.”

Cayrol's choice to describe the images in this way is a significant one, given a use of actual *cartes postales* earlier in the film. During his first night in Boulogne, Alphonse finds himself alone in Hélène's apartment, Hélène having strangely departed with her current lover, de Smoke. With consideration for the privacy of the apartment's occupants, Alphonse starts snooping around. (As Cayrol describes it, “[il] a décidé de visiter l'appartement et de surprendre ses secrets.”) He comes across what appear to be

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<sup>49</sup> This is much like the pain/guilt he later experiences – it, instead of Muriel's torture, becomes the focus of the story.

postcards of the Algerian landscape, complete with sunny skies and palm trees. This leads him to a stack of documents belonging to Bernard: notes, journals, military papers, photographs (including one of Bernard with his face cut out). But most significant about this scene is that we are given, in pieces, a preview of the above story of Muriel's torture and death in fragments that Bernard would later recount to Vieux Jean. Here it is Bernard's handwritten journal that reveals what happened: "...fosse très vite. J'ai déroulé la bâche, et je ne sais pourquoi les yeux de Muriel n'étaient pas ferm..." As Alphonse flips through the pages, we can only attempt to piece together these linguistic fragments. Later in the notebook, he/we read: "...plus vivre comme avant Muriel. Jamais plus... ...c'est avec Muriel que tout a commencé vraiment, que j'ai compris. C'est depuis Muriel que je ne vis plus vraiment... ...ça ne peut pas continuer du tout. Je suis fichu. Je crois que j'ai envie de mourir, en tout cas je n'en ai plus peur..." (Contrary to Bernard's spoken confessional, this scene contains no sound or music, and the only images we see here are the words on the page and Alphonse's hands.) Although at this point in the film we do not know the whole story of Muriel's death (nor, for that matter, will we by the end of the film), these notes discovered by Alphonse nevertheless force us to begin asking questions about Bernard and about Muriel. Who was she? What exactly is it that began? What is it that Bernard understands? Here again we see "Muriel" standing in for more than just the woman she was, but rather the event as a whole that served as a catalyst for some sort of self-discovery on the part of Bernard.

The image/word discrepancy of this pivotal scene also highlights a certain impossibility of truly telling the story of Muriel, or, more generally, telling the story of torture. Bernard can say the words, but there are no appropriate images to match his narrative. Emmanuel Lévinas' elaboration in his essay "The Transcendence of Words" on the relationship and break between the visual and auditory seems appropriate here:

In sound, and in the consciousness termed hearing, there is in fact a break with the self-complete world of vision... In its entirety, sound is a ringing, clanging scandal. Whereas, in vision, form is wedded to content in such a way as to appease it. In sound the perceptible quality overflows so that form can no longer contain its content. A real rent is produced, through which the world that is here prolongs a dimension that cannot be converted into vision. (147)

For Lévinas, the hermeneutics of sound is privileged over the hermetics of vision. Vision, associated with ration and knowability, strives to capture what it represents, whereas sound always goes beyond, defying any attempt to contain it. In Lévinasian terms, *Muriel's* sounds of war elude representation, especially in light of the dissonance between the auditory and the visual. Additionally, for Lévinas sound moves us, and we feel its vibrations in our body. We feel Bernard's words in our own bodies. His monotony of voice, though, both betrays and magnifies the gravity of his narration's content. Even though his narrative is contained (after all, there is a beginning and an end), the reverberating narrative, itself located at the film's exact midpoint, bleeds into the rest of the film, into what precedes and what follows.

Later in the film, we will be met with another discrepancy between the visual and the auditory that will reinforce Muriel's visual absence. Françoise comes upon a tape

recorder belonging to Bernard and starts the tape, playing what appears to be the recording from the torture session. Like the playful images of Bernard's film, the recording is of the sounds of soldiers laughing. Just like Bernard's story of Muriel's torture, the sound recording seems to defy representation.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Richard Neupert states that *Muriel* is an "example of the impossibility of telling a conventional story... [and] is about the limitations of storytelling..." (329). Naomi Greene echoes, "If it is 'impossible' to talk about Muriel, it is not only because of censorship but also, and perhaps above all, because of people like Hélène and Alphonse who continually erect 'barbed wires' to avoid disturbing truths" (49). As Alphonse states (albeit rather disingenuously) to de Smoke, when asked about his time in Algeria: "Il me faudra du temps, beaucoup de temps pour que je puisse parler à cœur ouvert sur ce sujet. Qu'on nous laisse tranquilles pour le moment."

While evading and avoiding representing torture, both Bernard's film and sound recording subtly allude to governmental silencing around the French-Algerian War. With the founding of the Fifth Republic, censorship had been abolished. But by declaring a state of emergency, a constitutional clause allowed for the reinstatement of the state censor. (As I will detail in Chapter Four, this declaration of martial law also allowed the state to legally impose other policies directed at controlling the Algerian population, including curfews.) Numerous works depicting scenes of torture would be banned, including films like Jean-Luc Godard's *Le petit soldat*<sup>51</sup> and Gillo Pontecorvo's *La Bataille d'Alger* and texts like Henri Alleg's *La question*. Alain Resnais, too, had personal experience with the censor during the French-Algerian War. Years before directing *Muriel*, he had commissioned Anne-Marie de Vilaine to write another story about Algeria in which "politics was articulated with sexual relations" (Sellier, 112). The screenplay about a young couple torn apart by the war would never be produced, however, as the censor's intervention forced him to abandon the project (Sellier, 216).

The role of cinema is worth interrogating here. For example, what could films do that other media could not? Returning to the above scene in which Bernard confesses his role in Muriel's death, the "images floues d'Afrique du Nord" that provide the imagery to the story Bernard recounts of Muriel's torture and eventual death are composed of video of troops firing heavy artillery, images of mosques, and quotidian activity of French troops joking amongst themselves. With the exception of the film's last scene wherein Simone, Alphonse's estranged wife, arrives at Hélène's home in search of her philandering husband, Bernard's amateur video footage contains the only shots in which the camera is in motion in the entire film. In this way, Resnais' aesthetic choice to shoot nearly the whole film in still shots speaks to a larger issue of psychological and somatic fragmentation in this social and political post-war climate.

In the post-torture, post-death, post-Muriel epoch in which the characters live, they see themselves as immobile and unable to effect change in the past or present. They must stay in neat little boxes (which, ironically, are the sorts of structures that populate the

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<sup>50</sup> Wilson writes, "The return of the sounds of the scene of torture appears to act as catalyst; it may catalyze action but again stifles memory and representation" (95).

<sup>51</sup> *Le Petit soldat* provides an interesting counterpoint to *Muriel*. In Godard's film torture was shown, although Algeria was not named. In Resnais', Algeria is named but torture is not shown.

landscape of the modernized Boulogne), just as they must stay within the frames of the film. Conversely, the use of moving shots suggests a freedom of movement of body and of camera. Just like the “images floues” and scenes with soldiers laughing, Bernard’s moving shots, albeit shaky, hark back to a recent past where France and its citizens were not forced to stand physically and temporally at a distance from war-time actions. Shaken up by crisis, the post-Muriel lack of movement speaks to the effects that war crimes “abroad” and the treatment of “foreign” bodies like Muriel’s would have on society “at home.” The only other tracking shot used in the film does, however, open up some sort of hope for the future. Although the film’s main characters have dispersed around Boulogne or even fled the city entirely, Simone is able to move freely in the space, potentially demonstrating a break on the hold that the past has on these memory addicts.

The medium of cinema also allowed that Muriel *not* be seen, that she be conspicuously absent, in a way literature could not, for example. The inability to confront the violence that was an everyday occurrence both in Algeria and in the *métropole* is actually highlighted by Resnais’ choice to *not* show torture or its victims. The absence of torture and of the title character is a glaring omission. This could be interpreted, though, as Resnais pointing out a larger absence, not only in French cinema, but also in the larger national consciousness. Michel Marie elaborates:

*Muriel* n’est en aucune façon un film qui s’efforce de tout dire sur la guerre d’Algérie. Mais il tente de revenir, au niveau de sa matière du signifié comme dans son projet idéologique, sur les silences du cinéma français pendant la période antérieure (1954-1962), et sur le rôle effectif qu’a joué le cinéma en tant qu’appareil idéologique à cette époque. En ce sens, *Muriel* désigne notamment ce dont ce cinéma parlait, au nom de quoi il parlait, et par voie de conséquence, ce qu’il occultait. (337)

We will never learn why Muriel was tortured. In this way, it can be read as having an air of gratuitousness or of the generic, lacking uniqueness. At a 1963 press conference, Resnais stated that one of the film’s principal themes was “une haine de la violence qui peut être une chose très banale, très quotidienne (...) Nous avons voulu noyer cette violence à l’intérieur d’événements quotidiens et banals.”<sup>52</sup> Even though the postcard-like images that we see during Bernard’s narrative do not seem to match the gravity of a woman’s body literally being destroyed, they do effectively function as a way of highlighting the *everydayness* of torture during the Algerian War.

### **Haunted, or Masculinity in Crisis**

*The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life ... The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us*

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<sup>52</sup> Alain Resnais, Press conference at the Palais du Cinéma, Venice, August 31, 1963. Cited in Boudjedra, 27.

*affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.*

-- Avery GORDON

*Broken bodies generate 'broken' images.*

-- Celia BRITTON

Bernard is haunted by Muriel and by all for which she stands. This is expressed by not only the strange combination of word and image, but also through the manner in which he tells her story. For example, one of the most striking aspects of Bernard's recounting is the constant shifts in time. In fact, he shifts tenses five times in the passage describing the torture, beginning in the present and moving back and forth to and from the past. Midway through recounting this event that would forever alter his future, a sudden focus on himself and his own victimhood jolts him back to the more conventional storytelling mode. He quickly moves back to past tense and remains here: "Alors son regard m'a fixé. Pourquoi moi?..." The shift back to the past tense follows two highly visceral moments—he hears Muriel's screams and sees her face (or more importantly, she sees him). He cannot escape her gaze, and it evokes a myriad of conflicting emotions that will haunt him, including fear, guilt, cowardice, and even sense of purpose.

Bernard is particularly fixated on that instant at which he and Muriel lock eyes, for it is at this moment that she sees him for who he is: a representative of the French colonial project and a torturer.<sup>53</sup> According to Cathy Caruth's definition, we may even posit that Bernard is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, for "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event" (4-5). Having participated in Muriel's torture, he is now haunted by her condemning eyes and her destroyed body. She stares at him imploringly, forcing him to make a choice about whether or not he will save her from the inevitable torture to follow. Having done nothing to prevent her death, he must later choose whether to accept or avoid responsibility for his role in her torture and murder. In the moment, he chooses to avoid responsibility with the question "pourquoi moi," wondering why she seems to be singling him out in her gaze. But he cannot avoid guilt for long. The memory of the dead Muriel "continues to haunt Bernard as an accusing gaze – as though she is now torturing *him*" (Britton, 42). Although she is no longer living, her undying gaze (after all, she dies with her eyes open) underscores Bernard's guilt as torturer as well as his collective responsibility as participant in the French colonial project.

For Gilles Deleuze, "Le personnage dans le cinéma de Resnais est précisément lazarien parce qu'il revient de la mort, du pays des morts; il est passé par la mort et il naît de la mort, dont il garde les troubles sensori-moteurs" (1983, 270). Perhaps to cope with what Deleuze would identify as his return from the land of the dead, Bernard has, as

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<sup>53</sup> As I will discuss in the next chapter, this idea of a French citizen being seen to represent the French colonial project will also appear in the memoirs of Simone de Beauvoir. In both cases, it provokes much guilt and anxiety and requires the subject of this guilt to act in ways to relieve this feeling, often through gathering "evidence" (as in the Djamila Boupacha case and, as I will discuss later, in Bernard's personal "trial" of Robert) writing about injustices performed by others.

stated earlier, even created a fictitious fiancée named Muriel.<sup>54</sup> He realizes that because he did not save her life, he must work to save her memory and perhaps even expose the injustices done unto this woman and her tortured body. For Bernard, and perhaps for the film, this woman has come to represent not only the Algerian people and the Algerian conflict but also, perhaps counter-intuitively, the fracturing of the French psyche and identity.

Bernard is able to return to the more conventional past tense once, even though her eyes are open, the dead Muriel can no longer see him. Although he seems to feel some responsibility for doing nothing to halt the torture, his self-interrogation has the potential effect of erasing the possibility of guilt, for it suggests that there is no reason for him in particular to be pointed out, stared at. His question “pourquoi moi?” which positions him as both subject and object of the scene, will haunt him, for he knows there could be a reason for being singled out by Muriel. While on the one hand the question demonstrates some sense of replaceability (Why me? Why not another? I must be in the wrong place at the wrong time.), it simultaneously signals the singularity of his situation. He *felt* her stare so strongly that it remained with him even upon his return to France. He seems to take this “Why me” as a question of responsibility and he realizes he must now do something. It is too late to save Muriel’s life, but he may still save her memory. This quest for justice at times looks more like a quest for absolution for his own crimes than an attempt to bring any justice to the situation. In this way, he becomes symbolic of the French Republic’s relationship to the Algerian War and their subsequent handling of war crimes and the amnesty that was granted to all soldiers by de Gaulle in 1968.

Despite the fact that Bernard leaves the torture scene, he does still feel something, as he is compelled to return to the location of the crime. What he witnesses is horrific. There no longer exists a woman in pain, but only a dead and destroyed body. Her eyes are open, but because her gaze is now lifeless and, therefore, non-judgmental, he doesn’t feel much: “Ça ne me faisait presque rien, peut-être même que cela ne me faisait rien du tout.” He no longer need fear the woman’s living and breathing look that makes him feel guilt for his participation in her torture and eventual death. However, he will still make it his mission to gather *preuves*, although it is not clear if this is against the person responsible for murdering Muriel or against the person who forced him to be implicated in this act that would destroy his sanity and result in him being, as he puts it, “défiguré par la guerre.” This disfigurement proves the most threatening to his masculinity, and he will continue to search for a way to reconstitute some sense of manliness, and, as I will analyze later, eventually resulting in him committing a deadly act. This desire to reconstitute his masculinity might also explain why “Muriel” might be used as the name of an imaginary girlfriend. He can only resort to creating a fictitious partner in order to present the image of healthy male sexuality. In choosing the name “Muriel,” he is able to reconstitute this unjustly murdered woman, allowing her to live on.

Bernard’s existence will subsequently be consumed by telling Muriel’s story, which is, more largely, representative of injustices around the French-Algerian War. Bernard’s

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<sup>54</sup> “Is the imagined love a way of keeping Muriel alive in memory, keeping her name circulating...? Does the creation of a romantic attachment to Muriel belie something erotic, however twisted, in Bernard’s retention of Muriel’s story as his narrative of Algeria?” (Wilson, 96)

attempt to tell her story will come in the form of an indictment of his fellow soldier, Robert (who Cayrol describes as the “mauvais génie” on Bernard’s shoulder, pushing him to commit “des actes répréhensibles”). The fact that Bernard will never be successful in exposing the story of Muriel’s torture on a larger scale is symptomatic of the larger diversion of memory going on around the war a preference to forget and/or look away from memories of war crimes committed and other memories that threaten (the façade of) a healthy and sane national identity.

### **Representing the Unrepresentable: Blurred Bodies and Kaleidoscopic Consciousnesses**

*...the screen of visibility we observe in film is to be understood in terms of both what is seen and what is unseen on the scene of representation... In many films about or from Algeria, the figure of woman encapsulates how filmic representation gestures toward that which it cannot represent. Its very constitution is made invisible.*

-- Ranjana KHANNA

It is impossible to separate style and narrative in *Muriel*, for the film’s fragmented plot is both reflected and exacerbated by its editing. For example, jump cuts, long takes, cut-aways, oblique angle shots, and discontinuous cuts dominate, working to create a feeling of brokenness, almost as if something has been omitted from the film’s narrative. Through stylistic techniques like rapid montage and lingering, almost voyeuristic, shots, Resnais’ cinema is also able to portray violence in a way that other media (like literature) cannot. His technique of using extreme close-ups of body parts, for example, has been read by some scholars as creating the effect of mutilation or of cutting up the body. The viewer is immediately met with this feeling of visual fragmentation in the opening sequence, as images of random objects rapidly alternate with hands and other body parts. Vacillation between extreme close-ups and rapid montage creates a unsettling effect for the viewer who becomes unable to grab onto any centering force. These shots, inadvertently or not, violate the camera’s object, removing any subjectivity and dislocating it from any living consciousness. Emma Wilson echoes this idea and links it to larger social issues: “Through the intrusive cutting of the film, its restlessness, its challenge to order, its plangent music, *Muriel* appears to assault the viewer. This can certainly be read as a reflection on modern alienation and on the unease of this post-war French community...” (99). Surprisingly, one film technique is not employed by Resnais. Despite the film’s obsession with memory and the past, there is not one flashback. The only images of “the past” are Bernard’s amateur film footage as well as his photographs discovered by Alphonse. This absence underscores the notion of an unrepresentable past.

While we cannot make assumptions about the effects that certain filmic techniques have on the viewer, it is worth noting that, in both form and content, the notion of mutilation pervades the entire film. Resnais’ cinematic devices and the elliptical nature of the film’s plot echo an interest in portraying trauma, leaving the viewer feeling unsettled and disturbed, much as Bernard felt upon his return to France. But despite the ability to

portray violence (sometimes where there might be none), Resnais chooses not to film the most serious form of violence contained in the film: the torture of Muriel. Instead, we have only Bernard's description of the event with its sensory descriptions and details, themselves enough to incite visceral responses in the spectator.

The violence of the unrepresentable is echoed in the violence of Resnais' filming and aesthetic choices, particularly in his choice to set Bernard's narration of Muriel's torture and death against the screen of his amateur, sometimes playful video footage. However, the modernist *mise-en-abyme* that is Bernard's film creates a metafiction; the internal duplication in Resnais' film allows it to talk about and reflect on itself, adding a self-referential quality to both films, to the act of narration, and to the use, misuse, and abuse of images. The images both Bernard and Resnais choose to include and to exclude in their respective films not only allude to the silence and repression in the air, but also highlight a process whereby one image and memory could be layered onto another, potentially replacing the former. Like the city of Boulogne with its newly built structures that obscure the ruins of the past, both films call attention to how quickly images disappear, or other images and memories layer over them.

While creating a feeling of unease for the viewer, the fragmented, non-cohesive, and even at times kaleidoscopic filming simultaneously makes a strong statement about the film's topic matter. Bodies and psyches are fractured, and the structure of the film lends itself well to highlighting the shattered existences of the characters. I will now focus on two such scenes that, through an overlapping of style and narrative, highlight the fragmentation of identity, including gender and culture. The first scene is a brief moment, comprised of only seven seconds, in which we see Bernard through a kaleidoscope. The second is a bit more mysterious and is of the fading into nothingness of a projected image of Algerian women. While the former highlights replication and duplication and the latter focuses on blurring and fading, they both point to the reality of the period's fractured existences.

The kaleidoscope scene does not seem to "fit" (as if any scene in the film does), as it is sandwiched between two much longer scenes, the first with H el ene and Alphonse and the second with H el ene and de Smoke. We quickly see an image of Bernard's girlfriend, Marie-Do, pointing a kaleidoscope in his direction. The film's frame then shifts to what she is perceiving as she looks through the kaleidoscope's viewer: a colorful array of images, moving and shifting as she turns the kaleidoscope, that we can easily decipher to be Bernard (or rather multiple Bernards). This scene substantiates the film's investment in exploring the relationship to not only shattered but also non-distinct and infinitely replicated existences. (Emma Wilson even describes the experience of watching a film by Resnais as similar to looking at changing images through a kaleidoscope (4).)

In its kaleidoscopic approach, the project of *Muriel* might also, to use a Foucauldian framework<sup>55</sup>, subvert the "art of surveillance" and refigure the "diagram of power" that existed during the war. (These themes will reappear in Chapter Four.) Instead of setting up surveillance and power visually like a pyramid or hierarchical structure, *Muriel* constructs it as a kaleidoscope, or a circle, or as a horizontal "plane," perhaps in an effort to diffuse the all-seeing, fascist-like gaze that certainly existed in periods of censorship into a subjective, more democratic, but therefore also less coherent

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<sup>55</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170-175.

visual experience. Bernard's film-within-a-film successfully draws attention to the fact that the film is actually a development process unto itself. You cannot see what is going on while you are experiencing it. (After all, only in the film's final scene where the only tracking shot is employed do we see how the physical space is connected.) In this way, the entire film (aided by the containedness of its static frames) functions as negatives from a roll of film, showing the inverse of the panoptical-like approach to filmmaking, the inverse of what the man in the tower actually caught on tape. In *Muriel*, technology thereby diffuses power in order to create a direct tension with a systematic way of disciplining bodies. Despite the absence of the body of the tortured, the film and the film-within-the-film represent a counter to the official history.

This particular scene also highlights the previously alluded to critique of Resnais that he is not concerned with Algeria but rather with the effects of Algeria on the minds and bodies of French citizens. Precisely by *not* showing torture, Resnais' camera can be seen as violating its purported object of study (if we assume that the title indicates what the film is about). While the title of the film positions the absent Muriel as central to the entire film's narrative, Resnais refuses to show her. This choice has resulted in heavy criticism. Rachid Boudjedra, for example, states: "*Muriel* n'est donc pas un film sur l'Algérie mais un film où il est question de l'Algérie comme d'une pensée gênante que chacun cherche à oublier" (27). Juxtaposed with the next scene I will examine, Resnais' choice of imagery supports the notion that he is less invested in exploring the physical fracturing of Muriel's body (and other Algerian female bodies) than in the effect torture of such individuals had on a French psyche.

Hélène, concerned about Bernard after Robert approaches her to inquire about his whereabouts, goes to his atelier in search of him. Against the backdrop of a foreboding and cacophonous soundtrack, she curiously looks around the workshop and turns on a film projector. An image of several veiled women at an outdoor market flashes onto the wall, but immediately the image blurs and then disappears. With Hélène standing there witness to this image of Algerian women as disappearing into nothingness, the scene becomes reminiscent of the unveiling that I discussed in Chapter One. Both are indeed disappearing acts. Even though public unveiling contrarily made the women hyper-visible, agency and identity were removed and forced to disappear in the act of taking off the veil (despite the fact that the French used this event to act as if they were working in the interest of Algerian women and giving them a place in their society).

A few seconds later, Bernard walks into the workshop and seems agitated to find his stepmother there.

Bernard:	Curieux de te voir ici.
Hélène:	Tu me montres quelque chose?
Bernard:	Je n'ai pas envie de faire du cinéma. J'accumule des preuves, c'est tout.
Hélène:	Des preuves? Contre qui...
Bernard:	Tu ne comprendrais pas.

Bernard then stands in front of the wall onto which the images were projected and angrily says "Laisse-moi maintenant, je t'en supplie!" Hélène starts to leave but, before exiting, alludes to his seeming inability to integrate back into French society since his return from

Algeria: “Il y plus de huit mois que tu es rentré, penses-y.” Bernard strangely utters: “Muriel n’est pas là, tu sais. Tu peux me prêter trois mille francs?” to which Hélène responds, while handing him the requested loan: “Je ne m’intéresse à Muriel qu’à cause de toi.” The image of Algerian women disappeared right in front of her eyes, yet she does not seem disturbed or surprised and is only concerned with that which very directly affects her or her family, much like a number of French citizens preferred to turn a blind eye to the atrocities that were being committed by the French army across the Mediterranean Sea.

Underlying this episode (and the film as a whole) is also a larger crisis of masculinity that was occurring at this historical moment. This scene is a prime example of this dissertation’s proposal that the Algerian female body functioned as a screen onto which French men could *literally* project their anxieties around colonial power and masculinity. As demonstrated in Chapter One’s discussion of veiling and unveiling in Chapter One, Algerian women’s bodies were used in particular ways by both sides of the conflict. The female body itself became (re)colonized while also functioning as a weapon in the war. Ranjana Khanna reiterates this strategic deployment of the Algerian female body by both sides of the conflict and its resultant status as a screen onto which men could project their feelings, desires, and anxieties: “The veiling and unveiling of the body highlights the body as machinery, and indeed as a technology of both war and the everyday. The revolution ... is bodily for women, and yet the body of woman is always a screen, albeit one with projected feeling” (104). In this scene, Bernard physically positions his body in the exact spot where the projected image of Algerian women faded away, underscoring the notion that (French) masculinity was being (re)constructed against (Algerian) femininity and the destruction thereof (in the form of Muriel’s torture and murder). This literal and figurative projection thereby positioned French males as being able to discount or remove the agency of Algerian women, while simultaneously reinforcing, through military status and use of violence, their own status as manly men.

### **Evading Responsibility and Reinforcing Masculinity**

*Marie-Do: “Un documentaire?”*

*Bernard: “Pire.”*

*Marie-Do: “Tu me fais peur.”*

-- MURIEL, OU LE TEMPS D’UN RETOUR

Bernard’s above statement prompts the following questions: What could be worse than a documentary? Why does this scare Marie-Do? What does she know? Could Bernard have film of the actual torture scene? We are led to believe that, through sound recordings, home footage, notes and diaries written while stationed in Algeria, and photographs of Boulogne, Bernard hopes to compile a dossier that will tell Muriel’s story and will incriminate those responsible for her death. Even though he himself would

presumably be one of the guilty individuals,<sup>56</sup> as the film progresses, he appears specifically interested in calling attention to the guilt of his childhood friend and fellow conscript, Robert. We will never see the indictment that Bernard purports to be producing, and Resnais' film leaves us longing for a documentary about Muriel or about the countless other torture victims that went nameless.

Bernard often walks the streets of Boulogne, taking photographs to add support to his case. While it is not clear how images of his hometown would aid in bringing justice to the torture and murder of an Algerian woman in Algeria, it is important to note the presence of photographs and cameras (both still and video) in the film. One way to understand Bernard's use of these forms of visual media is that they allow him to replace images (and memories) with others that are presumably less psychically disturbing. For example, these still images of Boulogne may cover over the memory image of the dead Muriel with eyes open staring at him. Similarly, the new Boulogne is replacing the prewar Boulogne with all of its memories of death and destruction.

The passage from Henri Bergson's *Matière et mémoire* with which I introduced this chapter summarizes the sort of memory work that is occurring for Bernard and its relationship to his seeming obsession with cameras and documenting a lost past of a misnamed woman: "Nous avons conscience d'un acte *sui generis* par lequel nous nous détachons du présent pour nous replacer d'abord dans le passé en général, puis dans une certaine région du passé: travail de tâtonnement, analogue à la mise au point d'un appareil photographique" (148). Bergson's metaphorical camera and its relationship to memory is echoed by Cayrol, who sees something similar going on in cinema and in this film in particular: "Seule la caméra peut être sentimentale, pleine d'une jeune nostalgie..." (15). Indeed, it is through cameras that Bernard attempts to capture this nostalgia and reconstitute and (re)construct memory. Like Muriel's gaze, cameras also serve to point out collective responsibility. This inevitably forces us to question the role of the camera filming this film. In encouraging a presumably French audience to confront issues of colonial violence and torture (even if they are visually absent), Resnais' camera could be seen to function as a tool to accept collective responsibility for the actions done under the name of the French Republic.

Even if there is an attempt to signal a collective responsibility, the film nevertheless grapples with the near impossibility of communicating (and maybe even remembering) those acts (like torture) that have gone untold. As discussed above, towards the end of the film, Françoise, comes across one such piece of evidence, the tape recorder belonging to Bernard. She jokingly asks him if it contains "secrets or confessions," a question which prompts him to slap her across the face (echoing the slap he confessed to having given Muriel), and suggesting that he may, in fact, be hiding something. Fully aware of the fact that Bernard's reaction was more in response to some memory from his past, Françoise responds: "J'en ai assez de ce patelin ravitaillé par les souvenirs." Further complicating the situation, Françoise then accidentally starts the tape, playing what we can assume is the recording from the torture session. The recording is not of screams of pain, but, analogous to the images of Bernard's film, it is comprised of the sounds of soldiers laughing. Just like Bernard's retelling of Muriel's torture, the sound recording from the

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<sup>56</sup> As Bernard states when Hélène asks him what he did "là-bas," he answers "Comme tout le monde."

“interrogation” defies representation. In fact, Algeria (and all significations it carries with it) thwarts speech, always forestalling any capacity for true comprehension.

Statements made by Robert earlier in the film call attention to this inarticulacy and amnesiac tendency of war, for he places Muriel’s story (and others like it) “in the realm of the *intransmissible*, or more particularly in the realm of that which will be repressed and silenced on return to France” (Wilson, 96)<sup>57</sup>: “Tu veux raconter Muriel. Mais Muriel ne se raconte pas. ... Chaque Français se sent seul. Il crève de peur. Il mettra lui-même des barbelés autour de sa petite personne. Il n’aime pas les histoires.” Here, Robert is simultaneously pointing to the fact that Frenchness is at stake and that things are done out of fear of what might happen to an individual and collective identity and accountability. Robert’s statements are somewhat of a wake-up call for Bernard. He realizes he cannot do anything to change the past, and maybe realizes that no one *wants* to know Muriel’s story or hear anything about Algeria. Despite his intention of incriminating those responsible for the torture and murder, Robert’s words, combined with the realization of powerlessness to change the past and repair the future, will result in Bernard committing a deadly act.

Instead of exposing the fact of Muriel’s torture and death on a larger scale, he then leaves to find Robert, the only link he still has to his time in Algeria, and shoots and kills him, an act that only reinforces his own complicity in the crimes of war (Gauch, 55). (Rachid Boujedra, critical of Resnais’ approach to filming the Algerian War, interprets Bernard’s act as an inability to communicate with and relate to others, stemming from the traumatic memory he cannot let go of: “L’expérience de la guerre pour Bernard ne débouche pas sur un engagement politique, mais sur l’impossibilité de communiquer avec les autres. Bernard se voue au culte de la mémoire et ne s’en libérera que par l’assassinat” (27).)

Bernard will now be forced to flee Boulogne, erasing any possibility that he may be able to bring Muriel’s story out into the open. After having killed Robert, he renounces his efforts to represent the torture, even throwing his camera into the sea, ridding himself of some form of his identity and distancing himself from the past. Like Françoise’s half-joking statement that planted in the viewer a seed of doubt over what Bernard may have done in Algeria, his act also forces us to question what might have been on that camera that he disposed of. May it contain actual images of Muriel’s tortured, destroyed, and dead body? Could Bernard be guiltier than he has let on to be?

Bernard will not be successful in exposing the information we are yearning for, as he will engage in an act that could potentially undermine his work of gathering *preuves*. The act will, however, do a different sort of work—that of shoring up a sense of masculinity that Bernard seems to have lost with the death of Muriel. Through his sensitivity to Muriel’s pain and his figurative and literal detachment from his fellow soldiers (after all, he is behind a video camera while filming them), he has also distanced himself from what it means to be a man at this postwar period of international crises. He is less interested in engaging in the violent acts that Robert embraces and more invested in exposing the fragility and sensitivity of human bodies and psyches. For example, in his

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<sup>57</sup> Also, the fact that her story cannot be told may be the reason for Bernard’s creation of a fictitious Muriel (his imaginary fiancée). A false Muriel is the only way he can speak of the real Muriel.

recounting of the torture, he even points to the vulnerable state of his own body in mentioning the pain that *he* felt when he slapped Muriel. He attempts to restore some sense of masculinity, perhaps a more self-righteous version, in attempting to act as a whistleblower and incriminate his fellow conscripts who tortured and murdered at least one individual. But instead of transmitting the *intransmissible*, Bernard restores his masculinity in a way similar to that which he could not do before Muriel's murder. He shoots and kills Robert, the only individual in Boulogne who had seen and experienced those horrors that Bernard had too.

### **Technocracy: Barely Holding it Together**

*...the secret of Muriel's torture insofar as it is remembered... explodes the fragile structure which had held the group of characters together.*  
-- Celia BRITTON

*Pour moi, le personnage idéal est celui qui, en trois répliques, devient attirant, puis en trois autres repoussant. C'est entre ces deux pôles qu'on peut essayer de saisir l'ambiguïté de la vie. On ne peut pas avoir de jugement définitif, tout est constamment remis en question.*  
-- Alain RESNAIS

Alain Resnais stated that the characters of *Muriel* “will be seen from the outside. We will never penetrate the thoughts and minds of our characters. These will show themselves only through their actions” (Houston, 36). Just like the replicable structures built up throughout the city of Boulogne, these impenetrable characters appear as mere façades without interior consciousness moving through the world. This appearance of empty subjectivity is, however false; it is a defense mechanism and self-preservation strategy to cope with this generation's process of self-searching in the wake of war, decolonization, modernization, and the fall of the French Empire.

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to show how guilt, collaboration, and the committing of unspoken (and unrepresentable) acts like torture during the French-Algerian War led to the partialness of selves and to fragmentation of body and mind. I have taken up Alain Resnais' film *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* in order to examine how memory is structured and how images are repressed so as to not disturb the front of sanity and national cohesiveness. Cinema is a unique medium to approach this hypothesis, for, as *Muriel* demonstrates, various cinematic techniques can be read as an expression of shattered psyches and fractured bodies.

It was not haphazard that Resnais chose to focus on a female torture victim, nor was it an oversight to never actually represent her in the film. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, and will see again in the next, the bodies of Algerian women are unavoidable in these representational struggles. Masculinity and femininity become mutually constitutive, as French men project their masculinity onto Algerian women through torture and less malign forms of control. In *Muriel*, Bernard struggles with this tendency. He subconsciously seems to want to subvert this dynamic but not knowing

how and not having the tools to dismantle the structures, like gender, race, and nationality, that purport to hold people together, he ultimately evades responsibility and loses his chance to expose atrocities.

In the next chapter, I will continue to pose the question of what is at stake in using female bodies to talk about these issues surrounding torture. I will also continue to explore the fragility of national identity at this period of decolonization when the definition of “French” was continually being placed in question. Although not conceived of for this reason, the idea of “technocracy” was, nevertheless, a way of keeping French identity together. This new class was invested in presenting a particular façade that was constructed in the wake of two recent and devastating wars. In addition to technological change, this historical moment saw changes and innovations in film and literature, as filmmakers and writers struggled with this collective postwar rebuilding. If in this chapter I focused on a film on the margins of the Nouvelle Vague, the movement that provided moving images for this generation, in the next chapter I will undertake an analysis of a novel that bordered on the Nouveau Roman, the movement that emerged as this generation’s literary “voice”.

I would like to conclude this chapter with an anecdote told by De Smoke, Héléne’s current lover, towards the end of *Murriel*. He tells the story of a house built on a cliff:

c’est comme cette histoire de maison qui glisse... C’est cet immeuble haut sur pattes en forme de boîte à outils. Il y a eu l’esquisse, un avant projet, des dessins d’exécution, trois cents pages de quantitatif descriptif, le choix des entrepreneurs et enfin les travaux commencèrent avec les mille pages du cahier des charges et le contrôle du Véritas et du Sécuritétas. Bref, l’immeuble a poussé. Tous les boutons de porte, tous les timblers sont en place, la maison est prête. Les vitres sont posées, mais elle glisse... et la falaise recule. Elle est neuve, elle est vide, et on attend qu’elle tombe. Ça ne fera pas de belles ruines. Un grand tas de grumeaux et de pics de fer rouillés.

The analogies to the contemporary climate are evident. Despite being *neuve* and *vide*, structures built upon disintegrated ruins and memories may be physically unsteady. Predicated on looking at the future, not the past, this technocratic culture (symbolized by these new inventions in building and technology) may be guaranteeing another sort of collapse.

Bernard’s crisis in memory was an example of such a collapse. Chapter Three will witness another psychological and bodily crisis. If in this chapter we noted how Resnais’ film purported to not penetrate the thoughts and minds of the characters, the next chapter will plunge headfirst into the consciousnesses of at least one protagonist. Not dissimilar from Bernard, she is shaken to the core when she, too, is confronted with the torture of an Algerian woman.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Technocrats and Tortured Bodies: Simone de Beauvoir Writes the French-Algerian War**

*The Algerian War was, in a sense, everywhere and nowhere, present daily in Parisians' newspapers as bulletins from the Evian conference and stories of nighttime bombings against supporters of independence, but largely absent from their everyday lives...*

--Tom McDONOUGH

*Je ne supportais plus cette hypocrisie, cette indifférence, ce pays, ma propre peau. Ces gens dans les rues, consentants ou étourdis, c'était des bourreaux d'Arabes: tous coupables. Et moi aussi. 'Je suis française.' Ces mots m'écorchaient la gorge comme l'aveu d'une tare. Pour des millions d'hommes et de femmes, de vieillards et d'enfants, j'étais la sœur des tortionnaires, des incendiaires, des ratisseurs, des égorgeurs, des affameurs; je méritais leur haine puisque je pouvais dormir, écrire, profiter d'une promenade ou d'un livre...*

--Simone de BEAUVOIR

In its paradoxical absence and presence, the French-Algerian War provoked an individual and collective crisis – French national identity, purportedly a beacon of culture, civility, and valiance, was suddenly placed in question as a domestic and international public learned of the French military's widespread use of torture. While many civilians preferred to turn a blind eye to the abuses done in the name of France, a number of intellectuals, including Simone de Beauvoir, experienced the war as a profound personal and philosophical watershed. In the wake of three international conflicts (one in which they were occupied and another in which they were the occupier), French intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike were struggling to understand what went wrong in Algeria. Assumptions about French universality were turned upside down, while France's status as upholder of human rights appeared disputable. In his study of French intellectual responses to the war, James Le Sueur breaks down some of the issues at the heart of contemporary responses: "The issue of self-definition has remained crucial for French and other intellectuals, certainly during the four great wars in the French twentieth century: World War I, World War II, Indochina, and the French-Algerian War. The French-Algerian War compelled intellectuals to return to the workshop of identity to refashion their self-definitions of intellectual legitimacy" (2005, 3).

Self-definition often led to self-critique and was necessarily bound up with recognition of difference and otherness, as is exemplified by the passage from Beauvoir's *La force des choses* cited as an epigraph in which she distances herself from herself in order to critique herself (and her country). Her existential ethics and adherence to theories of collective responsibility dictated that she fight for universal freedom for the self and for the other. As she had written in her earlier *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, "l'individu ne se définit que par sa relation au monde et aux autres individus, il n'existe qu'en se transcendant et sa liberté ne peut s'accomplir qu'à travers la liberté d'autrui" (193). In *La force des choses*, Beauvoir writes of her continually evolving personal relationship to history, politics, and activism. Despite her philosophical commitment to engagement, up until the 1950s she often stood at a distance from the messy world of politics and war, admitting in

her earlier *La force de l'âge* that she preferred to maintain a fairly closed lifestyle where her free time was spent socializing with her close-knit group of friends and reading Hegel and Kant at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Even when World War II was breaking out and Hitler was gaining power throughout Europe, Beauvoir admits that she preferred to turn a blind eye to the growing turmoil, as may have her peers, assuming “une catastrophe aussi imbécile ne pouvait pas fondre sur moi” (1960, 384). She did eventually grasp the weight of the situation and began to assert a leftist politics through literature, writing novels like *Le sang des autres* and working with Jean-Paul Sartre on *Les temps modernes*. However, it wasn't until a decade and a half later that she was finally willing and able to become personally involved in activist causes. France's controversial actions in Indochina and Algeria fully awakened in Beauvoir a political consciousness, and she committed herself wholeheartedly to the anti-colonial struggle and fighting for the freedom of oppressed peoples throughout the world. She saw the Algerian fight for independence as bound up with that of contemporary French leftist politics, stating that “la lutte du peuple algérien contre l'oppression colonialiste et pour son indépendance se confond avec celle du peuple français contre le fascisme et pour la démocratie” (Gonfond-Talahite, 146). She recognized the paradoxical relationship at the heart of these two struggles; while France was attempting to shed any traces of fascism from the previous war, the military was forcefully occupying/oppressing its North African *départements*. Further emphasizing the historical irony that the French government would mirror the behavior of its own recent oppressors, Beauvoir laments: “Oui, j'habitais une ville occupée, et je détestais les occupants avec plus de détresse que ceux des années 40, à cause de tous les liens que j'avais avec eux” (1963, 146).

Beauvoir's emotional and intellectual struggles were taking place amidst the emergence of new theoretical paradigms that reconceptualized the role of the individual, society, and history. From the fall of existentialism seemed to come the rise of structuralism, a turn that clearly dissatisfied Beauvoir. She stated in a 1966 interview that structural approaches “fournissent à la conscience bourgeoise ses meilleurs alibis. On supprime l'histoire, la praxis, c'est-à-dire l'engagement, on supprime l'homme. Alors il n'y a plus ni misères ni malheurs, il n'y a plus que des systèmes” (Piatier, 1). Despite Beauvoir's quick dismissal of all she deemed “structuralist” (a term she used rather loosely and, at times, unsatisfactorily), it is, nonetheless, important to recognize how her ideas about this new mode of thinking shaped her later writing.

Much as in her statements above, in *Les belles images* she would present a caricature of her interpretation of structuralist thought. Often read as an experiment with form and with the techniques developed in the *nouveau roman* and/or as an indictment of the period's growing technocratic culture (both accurate descriptions), the presence (or, ironically, absence) of Algeria is often overlooked in studies of the novel. Despite only a fleeting mention of the word “Algeria,” contemporary politics (the war, and, more largely, encounters with otherness) are just below the surface. The war, for the *jeunes cadres* who are the novel's characters, was everywhere and nowhere, consistently occupying the space of the unsaid.

Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir's nascent postcolonial ethics and engagement in the Algerian cause have also been overlooked. Indeed, many critics have diminished Beauvoir's commitment to the anti-colonial movement, assuming her involvement was merely self-serving. While there are arguments to be made for and against this approach

to her actions, labeling Beauvoir either as purely opportunistic or solely humanitarian misses the mark, falling short of an opportunity to examine the increasingly equivocal relationship between intellectualism, activism, and national identity at this historical moment (and beyond). Beauvoir's position is much more ambiguous; as she herself is the first to admit, she is both product and beneficiary of the culture she writes against (not dissimilar from her protagonist in *Les belles images*). Therefore, in juxtaposing and analyzing Beauvoir's relationship to Algeria through various literary and journalistic writings, I will keep in mind the tension inherent in her involvement as a white French woman in the Algerian independence movement.

Building on the previous chapter's analysis of Resnais' *Muriel*, here I will consider additional representations of tortured (Algerian) women in order to make a larger statement about how Muslim women's bodies were co-opted by all factions of the war, including intellectuals and the FLN. I will preface this analysis of torture with a discussion of the postwar technocracy and the ignorant and troubled/troubling relationship it maintained to the French-Algerian War and France's overall colonial project. I will analyze how these *technocrates* dealt with the individual and collective traumas of the previous two decades, particularly how they placed their faith in an undying hope in the future while simultaneously ignoring the horrors of war-time violence and the divisiveness of French colonial policies at home and "abroad" (i.e. outside the hexagon). Because the birth of new technologies and growing access to television and other forms of media played a role in this future-oriented gaze, I will note the complex roles that "images" (real or imagined) play in their typical habits of remembering and forgetting of this privileged class. I will then move to a literary analysis of Beauvoir's *Les belles images* (1966), in which a newspaper article about a woman tortured to death results in a nervous breakdown for Laurence, the text's protagonist, forever altering her interactions with her family and fellow technocrats. While Laurence will never learn how to become effectively engaged, the situation mirrors that of Beauvoir whose own encounter with a tortured Algerian woman further solidified her commitment to the Algerian cause. In the next section, I will examine Beauvoir's involvement in the 1960 legal case of Djamilia Boupacha, a young Algerian woman who was brutally raped and tortured for 33 days, which garnered significant attention by the French public after Beauvoir and lawyer Gisèle Halimi embarked on a campaign to defend her.

Throughout the chapter, I will be attentive to the place of gender and nationality in representations of torture and will examine the broader role that such images and accounts play in the construction of French national identity. I will pose questions about the relationship between tortured female bodies and the burgeoning post-war class of technocrats, as well as inquire into the relationship between contemporary intellectuals' engagement and tortured women. What do these representations of torture reveal about this technocratic class? about French identity? about gender? In what way did representations and accounts of tortured female bodies serve a particular philosophical and/or political purpose for contemporary intellectuals, including Simone de Beauvoir? As in Chapter One where I focused on the ways in which Algerian women were used by both sides as strategic tools to win the war, I will continue to examine how the war was, in large part, fought on the literal and symbolic bodies of Algerian women. I will ultimately propose the somewhat counterintuitive notion that it was actually through viewing and constructing representations of certain types of violence enacted on certain types of bodies

that both technocrats and intellectuals could assuage individual and collective guilt about what had occurred during the war. Such images and narratives also served the purpose of reconstructing and propping up an increasingly criticized French national identity. In this way, the war becomes a veritable battleground of emerging identity politics. Le Sueur concurs: “The French-Algerian War and the process of decolonization that effected this profound break necessitated a fundamental reconceptualization of French (and Algerian) national identity in a changing world, a world without European empires and colonies” (2005, 5-6).

## Technocrats of the Trente Glorieuses

*L’histoire qu’on va lire commence en mai 1957, à Paris. La France est en pleine effervescence : dans les douze années depuis la fin de la guerre elle a eu droit à vingt-quatre gouvernements et à quatre-vingt-neuf propositions de révision de Constitution. Mais les gens ne s’en préoccupent pas trop : d’après un sondage récent, seulement 41 % des conversations françaises portent sur la politique, alors que le sujet numéro un, avec un score de 47 %, c’est Brigitte Bardot... De façon générale, la vie est belle – et moderne. Le chômage est inexistant, les voitures sont chromées, la télévision illumine les foyers, les cinéastes font de nouvelles vagues, les bébés font boom et Picasso s’attaque à Icare des ténèbres, une fresque géante pour l’UNESCO qui montrera, promet-il, “l’humanité apaisée qui tourne son regard vers un avenir heureux”. Certes, tout n’est pas parfait. Ça et là, même en France, certains signes laissent croire que l’humanité aurait encore quelques petits progrès à faire. Par exemple, quatre cent mille jeunes Français, ayant subi un entraînement militaire en Allemagne, se trouvent actuellement en Algérie pour participer – non à une guerre, bien sûr, mais à un processus de pacification que s’avère, disons, assez délicat.*  
 -- Nancy HUSTON

So begins novelist Nancy Huston’s highly acclaimed *L’Empreinte de l’ange*<sup>58</sup> whose opening I quote at length because of its effectiveness in capturing the political and cultural climate of the late 1950s. Set during the French-Algerian War, the novel depicts two immigrants’ attempts to come to terms with the lasting repercussions of World War II during France’s long war of decolonization. As Huston mentions, and as the previous chapter made clear, hundreds of thousands of French conscripts were engaged in a misunderstood conflict across the Mediterranean Sea. Of course the French public had more pressing concerns and preoccupations than distant wars and far-off conflicts. Much like the French civilians of *Muriel* who wandered amongst the modern structures of a rebuilt city, this bold, forward-thinking class of French citizens was more likely to be drawn to the flashy images, colorful advertisements, and shiny gadgets that proliferated during the *Trente Glorieuses* than to ponder the escalating violence in North Africa.

The rapid modernization that was occurring throughout the *métropole* indeed proved to be a convenient distraction away from the harsh realities of war. This new bourgeois class of technocrats projected an image of themselves as happy, nuclear families driving into an optimistic future where everything was improving all the time and where

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<sup>58</sup> The novel was short-listed for the Prix Goncourt in 1998.

pain and suffering would cease to exist in just a few short years. As Kristin Ross writes, the technocrats were “anxious to leave the crises of the après-guerre period and decolonization behind them, to consecrate their efforts on the economic renovation of their country, and to benefit from the general improvement in the standard of living that followed from it” (144). But behind the glossy surface of this social set lay very real and very present injustices. Attempts to forget and deny the existence of social suffering and racial difference preoccupied these representatives of the future, exacting a toll on their minds and their bodies. Consequently, the future not only became a time of glowing televisions and fancy cars, but also of tranquilizers and anti-depressants. In creating a false sense of security, the growing saturation of new media and entertainment allowed a diversion of attention from those *other* images that could potentially threaten sanity and stability.

Glorification of a slightly more distant past wherein France emerged victorious provided a convenient alternative to confronting France’s failing colonial project. Memories of World War II, when the underdog French valiantly fought to fend off their Nazi occupiers, remained firmly embedded in collective consciousness, proving integral to the construction of a post-war national identity.<sup>59</sup> The growing class of technocrats became reliant on this idealized past to construct its idyllic future. Celebrations marking French heroism became habitual. 1964, the twentieth-anniversary of France’s liberation from the Nazis, proved to be an important year to commemorate. (It also marked the second anniversary of Algerian independence, a less notable fact to most French citizens.) Describing this noteworthy year, historian Henry Rousso writes, “Elle constitue à la fois un tournant et un apogée. Les déchirements de la guerre d’Algérie, qui ont remis en lumière ceux de l’Occupation, commencent à se cicatriser (mais elle provoquera une nouvelle blessure de mémoire). Les nostalgies du passé laissent la place aux futurs optimistes que programment allègrement planificateurs et autres technocrates” (95). Any attempt to comprehend the horrors around Algeria was veiled by a more facile glorification of the past, obscuring a psychically challenged present that continued to hold subcutaneous memories of the Algerian conflict.

Through a celebration of strength in the face of adversity (i.e. the Resistance movement of World War II), the future-focused technocrats worked hard to erase their nation’s own occupying sins from history. As Rousso describes, starting in 1964 (and continuing today), a prize has been awarded each year in every school in France for the best essay on the Resistance and deportation: “comme la République et la grammaire, la geste héroïque des aînés doit forger le potache et futur citoyen” (95). Rousso goes on to discuss the “détournement de mémoire” that was going on: the Resistance was celebrated in novels and films, while Vichy and the collaboration that occurred during the Occupation became a rarely evoked taboo subject. While occasionally mentioning Algeria in his text, Rousso fails to recognize the other simultaneous “détournement de mémoire”:

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<sup>59</sup> On the topic of the construction of a postwar, national identity, conservative political journalist Jacques Fauvet wrote in 1957 that France was reeling from its “contemporary dramas” that “have distressed France, torn apart the French, threatened the Republic” and any coherent national identity. His proposed solution was not to withdraw from North Africa, but rather, to return to “Western humanism.” *La France déchirée* (1957). Cited in Tom McDonough, 84-85.

through the ceremonial memorializations that occurred in 1964 and after, “memories” (real and constructed) of a war two decades earlier in turn eclipsed memories of the war that had ended just two years prior. The French-Algerian War, indeed France’s entire colonial project and tumultuous North African withdrawal, was enshrouded by a more convenient history with less fraught memories. The fact that these narratives were oftentimes comprised of fabricated memories was inconsequential, as they needed to serve a particular purpose in the construction of, as Rousso terms it, “le potache et futur citoyen,” indeed in what would become a new, imagined national identity: the “healthy and brave representatives of the new streamlined middle class, the spearhead of French modernization” (Ross, 136-137).

In the final volume of her autobiography, *Tout compte fait* (1972), Simone de Beauvoir evokes *la technocratie* in speaking of her intentions in writing her last novel, *Les belles images*: “J’ai repris un autre projet: évoquer cette société technocratique dont je me tiens la plus possible à distance mais dans laquelle néanmoins je vis; à travers les journaux, les magazines, la publicité, la radio, elle m’investit” (172). In a 1966 interview, Beauvoir also described the novel as “une oeuvre de dénonciation objective. Car je ne déforme pas, je photographie, et le document parle de lui-même. Moi, on ne m’entend pas” (Piatier, 1). As both Beauvoir’s words and the text’s title suggest, the novel is interested in presenting a fascination with “the image.” Indeed, the omnipresence of media in this new culture is repeatedly evoked; magazines, newspapers, and televisions are everywhere, and the characters of the novel are preoccupied with all sorts of images: real, fantasized, mediated, recuperated, remembered, and forgotten. As readers, we are, however, consistently reminded of both the benign and malign properties inherent to media. While technology and inventions like the television are lauded by most in the novel, media is recognized by some as a violation of private, protected space. As stated by one of the novel’s characters, “Quelle vie est protégée, aujourd’hui avec les journaux, la télé, le cinéma?” (39).

The novel’s new generation of *jeunes cadres* embodies progress and an unflinching desire to succeed in this post-war, increasingly capitalist society. Largely voiced through the character of Laurence, an advertising executive and mother of two, the text presents a group hostile to those outside their social set: “Famille, amis: minuscule système clos; et tous ces autres systèmes aussi inabordables. Le monde est partout ailleurs, et il n’y a pas moyen d’y entrer” (26). In addition to Laurence, this insular group consists of: Laurence’s husband, Jean-Charles, an architect, who is emblematic of this society’s utopian view of the present and the future, resting all his hope on fast-emerging technology; her unnamed father, who seemingly represents the antithesis to Jean-Charles’ views, for he romanticizes the past and its more ‘simple’ way of life, exemplified, he believes, by Greek peasants; her mother, Dominique, a successful businesswoman divorced from her father, who seems to stop at nothing to get what she wants; Gilbert, Dominique’s long-time partner (who will later leave her for a nineteen-year-old woman) and the wealthy president of a huge electronics company who is representative of all that Jean-Charles idealizes; Catherine, Laurence and Jean-Charles’ young daughter, whose existential questions on unhappiness and poverty (“...les gens qui ne sont pas heureux, pourquoi est-ce qu’ils existent?” (24)) place this entire society’s value system in doubt; and Brigitte, Catherine’s motherless, older, Jewish friend, who functions as absolute ‘Other’ for this narrow-minded group unaccustomed to dealing with difference or challenges to their arbitrary order.

Despite the closed system in which she lives, Laurence maintains a troubled relationship with those around her, indeed with this entire bourgeois society. She comes to realize that the people she is close to are merely two-dimensional images living inauthentic and socially prescribed lives. In spite of Laurence's eventual recognition of others' *mauvaise foi*, she herself encounters great difficulty in expressing her authentic self. She does not know how to stand up for her beliefs, sometimes not even knowing what she believes. She indecisively fluctuates between depending on the men in her life (particularly for guidance as to what to read, watch, and think) and attempting to speak up on certain issues (specifically how to raise her daughters).

The novel, focalized through Laurence, rapidly moves from first- to third-person narration and back, sometimes several times within a paragraph. Unlike Beauvoir's earlier *Le sang des autres* which also employed a vacillating narrative voice, the shifting between the different modes of narration in *Les belles images* seems rather erratic (although the two voices are linked by the fact that they are both told in the present tense), creating a sense of confusion, alienation, and detachment from her present reality.<sup>60</sup> There is no narrator present in the novel, and this third-person mode is most akin to free indirect discourse, a style Beauvoir had perfected throughout her novelistic career. Danièle de Sallenave discusses Beauvoir's predilection for this literary technique: "le style indirect libre est l'image la plus juste et le révélateur le plus sûr de la mauvaise foi, ce mensonge à soi-même" (17). Indeed, as some scholars have stated, the first person often (but, I would note, not always) appears to demonstrate some sort of authenticity on the part of Laurence, whereas the third person displays her (occasionally inauthentic) social persona. The use of first-person narration displays a feeling of power to affect change, a sentiment she nearly embraces at the end of the novel, whereas the third-person narration uncovers Laurence's *mauvaise foi*. The use of a third-person voice may also serve another function. It provides an outsider's view of Laurence, a perspective that allows the reader to see her as being-for-others and as socially constructed. In addition to these rapid shifts in narrative voice, Beauvoir employs various other literary strategies, such as enumeration and repetition, in order to further cultivate a sense of confusion, alienation, and detachment from Laurence's present reality. I will return to this question of enumeration and repetition later in the chapter and will explore how this technique further underscores the conflicted relationship Laurence has to her technocratic peers and to the French-Algerian War.

Like her narrative expression, Laurence's social position is paradoxical: she is integrated in but simultaneously alienated from her society. Yet, by virtue of her vocation as an advertising executive, Laurence is also partly complicit in the creation of technocratic values. As creator of images (or, more accurately, the text that accompanies images), she is acutely aware of the power of the image and is adept at manipulating slogans and pictures in order to appeal to an idea of postwar safety and security: "...elle connaît son métier. Je ne vends pas des panneaux de bois: je vends la sécurité, la réussite, et une touche de poésie en supplément" (23). Newspaper and magazine images figure especially strongly throughout the novel, and, as we will learn, it is the consumption of such media that resulted in Laurence having a nervous breakdown years earlier. Not only has she

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<sup>60</sup> For a more detailed analysis of narrative voice in *Les belles images*, see Elizabeth Fallaize, 119-125, and Sarah Fishwick, 471-484.

been duped into certain beliefs by the images she has ingested (and created), but they have in turn swallowed her up, transforming her into image: *une belle image*. While she is able to locate neither the origin nor the modus operandi of the process of the production, circulation, and consumption of images in which she is caught up, she successfully identifies it as a general characteristic of the modernizing society in which she lives.<sup>61</sup>

## Postcolonial Disorders

*A marked increase in mental disorders and the creation of conditions favorable to the development of specific morbid phenomena are not the only consequences of the colonial war in Algeria. Quite apart from the pathology of torture there flourishes... a pathology of atmosphere, a state which leads medical practitioners to say when confronted with a case which they cannot understand: 'This'll be all cleared up when this damned war is over.'*  
--Frantz FANON

Central to *Les belles images* are Laurence's past (and future) fragility and the existential doubt she experiences regarding her sense of self and her relationship with others. Through references to the past, we learn that she has experienced at least two psychological crises, one five years prior and another in 1962.<sup>62</sup> This former mental instability is continually evoked as a precautionary warning and as a looming threat that she may fall back into such a depressive and dangerous state. Even Laurence, in her thoughts, evokes this past breakdown, but reassures herself that she is armed and prepared to defend her body and her psyche against any sort of self-mutiny: "Je ne retomberai pas. Maintenant je suis prévenue, je suis armée, je me tiens en main. Et d'ailleurs les vraies raisons de ma crise, je ne les ignore pas et je les ai dépassées..." (44). She believes that awareness will save her from another crisis. (Of course it will not.)

While Laurence's crisis is alluded to by Jean-Charles and Dominique several times, we do not learn until well into the novel what provoked it: "Elle tremblait, elle était hors d'elle le jour où elle avait lu l'histoire de cette femme torturée à mort... elle avait fait un effort pour chasser ce souvenir, elle y avait presque réussi" (133). Although it is not named, this story of torture is undoubtedly a direct reference to the French-Algerian War. (Even though the national/ethnic identity of the woman is not identified, we can assume that she was Arab.) Through her identification with this distant tortured woman (and subsequent statements she makes about her daughters), we sense a subtle solidarity felt by Laurence with women around her. Additionally, her sympathetic crisis may emerge from

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<sup>61</sup> In his study of *Caché* (which I will analyze in the following chapter), Max Silverman states, "Today we are all objects of someone else's gaze and, because of the endless circulation of images, often incapable of fixing its source." (247)

<sup>62</sup> The reader is left to construct the past and is often met with uncertainty about when these nervous breakdowns occurred, which is emblematic of the confusion (especially in regards to time) that the text, on the whole, evokes. Jean-Charles' statement about her breakdown of 1962 is the only real temporal locator of the entire novel. Nevertheless, there are fleeting, yet unquestionable, allusions to the French-Algerian War.

her own feelings of being “tortured.” While she has not experienced the pain and damage of physical torture, she herself has felt psychologically damaged by a society that has attempted to contort her into an emotionless, two-dimensional *belle image*.

In order to maintain her mental sanity and physical well-being post-crisis, Laurence has been forced (by herself and others) to detach from anything potentially harmful to her psyche. While this is not markedly different from the behavior of her peers who also ignore injustices, Laurence is, unlike them, conscious and even ashamed of the decision she has made to turn a blind eye to the suffering of others: “Tous les jours nous lisons dans les journaux des choses affreuses, et nous continuons à les ignorer” (133). Laurence is sensitive to the evasion of difference that her fellow technocrats engage in, and is not afraid to speak of this active disregard for “des choses affreuses.” Her husband Jean-Charles, however, feels differently. He reacts defensively to Laurence’s eventual articulation of concern for others and nearly scolds her by invoking her most recent crisis: “Ah! ne recommence pas à me faire une crise de mauvaise conscience comme en 62” (133). This evocation of 1962, the only year mentioned in the entire novel, is critical. The parallels between Laurence’s psychological *crise* and France’s own identity crisis are evident, as is further supported by the text’s only specific mention of Algeria by name: a newspaper article Laurence attempts to read, “*Crise entre l’Algérie et la France*”. 1962, the last year of the French-Algerian War, saw numerous bombings in France and in Algeria and several instances of state violence, including the most “remembered” (and memorialized) case of police brutality, the Charonne Métro Affair in which nine French citizens were killed. (It was also the year that Beauvoir and Halimi published *Djamila Boupacha*.) The level of national “crisis” grew until finally, a drastic change was inevitable: Algerian gained independence in July of that same year.

Laurence’s past emotional crisis and the risk of its recurrence appear connected to the French-Algerian War (itself often termed a “crisis” by government officials and the general public), while her personal instability itself becomes metonymic of the larger precariousness in the political sphere. Because the entire narrative revolves around these two crises, one individual and the other collective, I contend that *Les belles images* is a story of not remembering, or more specifically, attempting to forget Algeria and all the conflict signified to the average French citizen, including decolonization, the contradictions of *la mission civilisatrice*, torture, racial difference, and political tumult. Save the title of the newspaper article that is twice repeated, Algeria is not explicitly discussed and is certainly not referred to as a “war”. Naomi Greene summarizes the politics of euphemisms and the convenient detachment that resulted:

Because de Gaulle would not admit that France was at “war” with one of its own *départements*, the war was referred to by a variety of euphemisms: it was a “peace-keeping operation,” a “police action,” the “Algerian drama.” Although fought on soil considered an integral part of France, for the vast majority of French people it remained a distant struggle: one devoid not only of emotional resonance but, above all, of a clear and compelling message. (133)

In Beauvoir's novel, Algeria can only be referred to by the year "62." This bourgeois set could not integrate memories of France's troubled colonial past, as it threatened to destabilize a French identity built on progress.

*Les belles images* is also a study of what happens when things (personal and/or political) are denied access to consciousness and the effect that this repression has on the body. It is the story of a tortured female body that sends Laurence into physical and psychological turmoil, causing a nervous breakdown in which she detaches herself from those around her. She also develops a conflicted relationship with her own body, alternating between bulimic and anorexic tendencies as she vacillates between vomiting and starving herself. The fact that memories and (unsuccessful) attempts at forgetting horrible acts done in the name of the French Empire are manifested through Laurence's body supports one of the principal arguments of this dissertation, namely that the body, as a site of memory, plays a significant role in understanding and coming to terms with a nation's colonial past and postcolonial present and future.

Fanon's analysis of psychosomatic disorders proves helpful in understanding Laurence's emotional struggle. He defines a psychosomatic disorder as "a means whereby the organism responds to, in other words, adapts itself to, the conflict it is faced with, the disorder being at the same time a symptom and a cure" (1963, 290). Indeed, Laurence's response to learning of the tortured woman is both symptom of a larger individual and collective apathy to the French-Algerian War and the potential cure to society's ignorance, for they cannot ignore *this* domestic crisis. Regrettably, they quickly move past the broader issue – as Beauvoir wrote in her final volume of memoirs, "En octobre 63, les tortures, les massacres, c'était déjà de l'histoire ancienne qui ne dérangeait plus personne" (1972, 164). Returning to Fanon: "...it is generally conceded that the organism... resolves the conflict by unsatisfactory, but economical, means. The organism in fact chooses the lesser evil in order to avoid catastrophe" (290). As proven by the recurrence of her psychological breakdown, Laurence resolved the conflict unsatisfactorily. Colonial repercussions (individual and collective, corporeal and psychic) risk returning.

In *Les belles images*, the body defies mastery and enacts a disavowed past (sometimes even of things not actually experienced). For Laurence, reading about a tortured woman evokes in her anxieties over her own French identity,<sup>63</sup> anxieties that are in turn manifested through her body: she vomits up this new class and culture that has ignored the suffering of others in favor of a more joyful (albeit ignorant) present and future where they believe that, in a mere ten years, no one will go hungry.<sup>64</sup> Laurence, on the contrary, continually struggles with the fact that injustice and unhappiness exist, wondering if she has the courage to engage with the world and confront what is going on around her. Previously, when faced with atrocities, she would retreat, preferring to turn a blind eye to those less fortunate than her and her family.<sup>65</sup> This inability or reluctance to engage with

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<sup>63</sup> As this chapter's epigraph demonstrates, Beauvoir herself had a similar experience regarding her identity (and privilege) as French during this period of conflict.

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Charles assuages his daughter's fears with the assurance that "tout le monde mangera; tout le monde sera beaucoup plus heureux (...) dans dix ans" (31).

<sup>65</sup> This is not much different for Jean-Charles and for Laurence's father, despite the fact that they supposedly remain aware of current events. Although both possess very different relationships to the present and the future, History remains absent from both points of view

the outside world is symbolized by the act of reading the newspaper. (After her '62 breakdown Laurence avoided newspapers for fear of falling into a similar depressive state.) Even though she has no desire to flee present reality, she feels it is the only possibility, for one never knows what they will find upon opening up to the world: "Elle replie le journal, soulagée tout de meme, parce qu'on ne sait jamais ce qu'on risque d'y découvrir." The narrative then quickly shifts to the first person: "J'ai eu beau me blinder, je ne suis pas aussi solide qu'eux. 'Le côté convulsive des femmes', dit Jean-Charles qui est pourtant féministe. Je lutte contre; j'ai horreur de me convulser, alors le mieux c'est d'éviter les occasions" (44).<sup>66</sup>

Despite Laurence's seeming preference for sanity, images (and not necessarily *belles images*) slowly yet forcefully threaten to enter her consciousness.

Cette affaire de tortures, il y a trois ans, je m'en suis rendue malade, ou presque: pour quoi faire? Les horreurs du monde, on est forcé de s'y habituer, il y en a trop: le gavage des oies, l'excision, les lynchages, les avortements, les suicides, les enfants martyrs, les maisons de la mort, les massacres d'otages, les répressions, on voit ça au cinéma, à la télé, on passe. Ça disparaîtra, nécessairement, c'est une question de temps. (30)<sup>67</sup>

Laurence's psychic struggle (brought on by the "affaire de tortures") is enacted in bodily reactions and linguistic struggles. The frequent enumeration functions as a search for meaning, for language cannot adequately represent "reality." Numerous substantives are needed to express an idea, and her authentic feelings can only be expressed through excess. Now that she has opened herself up to the outside world, she is inundated with images of suffering, as is seen in her description of French magazine *Match*'s year in review, which reads more like an list of horrors and tragedies:

On voit les *Actualités*, les photos de *Match*, on les oublie au fur et à mesure. Quand on les retrouve toutes ensemble, ça étonne un peu. Cadavres

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as each shrouds himself in the myth of another epoch, denying the reality of the past, present, and future.

<sup>66</sup> Through the phrase "côté convulsive des femmes," hysteria is alluded to as some sort of inherent danger (even by those like Jean-Charles who self-identify as "feminist"). In this way, *Les belles images* (like much of Beauvoir's corpus) is very much concerned with a societal tendency to force women into certain roles. While there are examples of "strong" women throughout the novel (Dominique has a high-powered job in French radio and Laurence is an advertising executive), women are, nevertheless, made into "belles images" (a phrase that will be repeated three times in the course of the novel).

<sup>67</sup> This enumerative list is echoed in Beauvoir's own description of Algeria in her memoirs ("...en Algérie, c'était la terreur: vols d'armes, rackets, braquages de banques, mitraillades, assassinats, plastic, bombes") and in her introduction to *Djamila Boupacha*: "Au cours de ces derniers mois, la presse, même la plus prudente, a déversé sur nous l'horreur: assassinats, lynchages, ratonnades, chasses à l'homme dans les rues d'Oran; à Paris, au fil de la Seine, pendus aux arbres du bois de Boulogne, des cadavres par dizaines; des mains brisées; des crânes éclatés..." (1)

sanglants de Blancs, de Noirs, des autocars renversés dans des ravins, vingt-cinq enfants tués, d'autres coupés en deux, des incendies, des carcasses d'avions fracassés, cent dix passagers morts sur le coup, des cyclones, des inondations, des pays entiers dévastés, des villages en flammes, des émeutes raciales, des guerres locales, des défilés de réfugiés hagards. (147)

Alison Holland has demonstrated the significance of Beauvoir's use of enumeration and repetition throughout the novel: "The text is so dominated by enumeration that this strategy could almost be described as a textual tic... This is perhaps quite natural, given the premise that meaning is never present and cannot be reduced to a single or fixed significance but is the outcome of an endless process of present and absent differences and is endlessly deferred" (116). Also significant is that what we have here is an open list (like most of the enumerations employed by Laurence, there is no 'et' at the end), suggesting that there are more disasters, destruction, ruin, wreckage still to come. These instances of enumeration, repetition, and silence not only point to a failure of language, but also function as a reaction to this closed, bourgeois, technocratic system that mistakes these actual events for glossy magazine images lacking reality.

Despite the risk of encountering a similar list of tragedies, Laurence does finally gain the courage to read the newspaper: "Elle les ouvre, à présent, sans appréhension. Non, il ne se passe plus rien de terrible... Elle est contente d'avoir vaincu cette espèce de peur qui la condamnait à l'ignorance... Au fond, il suffit de prendre sur les choses un point de vue objectif..." (74). Despite being expressed in the third person, she knows that her fear of relapsing has condemned her to ignorance, but she is determined to overcome it and gather up the strength to look at the realities of the outside world. This passage's lack of the first-person 'je' suggests a distancing, as if Laurence is watching herself. Confronting the present necessitates detachment for Laurence, while those around her do not seem to confront true reality, until a mere question will disrupt their closed system.

## Unhappiness, or Confronting the Other

Catherine's "...les gens qui ne sont pas heureux, pourquoi est-ce qu'ils existent?" shatters the joyful façade of familial closeness that her class attempts to project. The question itself is prompted by encounters with difference and "otherness." Firstly, a poster deploring/advertising world hunger (replete with sad child's face) allows Catherine to realize that not everyone is like her. This image disrupts the bourgeois comfort zone, exploding any semblance of blissful ignorance that may have previously reigned. As Laurence states, "Pouvoir de l'image. 'Les deux tiers du monde ont faim', et cette tête d'enfant, si belle, avec des yeux trop grands et la bouche fermée sur un terrible secret" (29).<sup>68</sup> (The double to this image will be found later in the text when a gaunt Laurence will refuse to eat.) Secondly, and more importantly, Catherine's close friendship with the poor, motherless, Jewish Brigitte is, according to her family's collective opinion, the root of her

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<sup>68</sup> This is echoed in Beauvoir's memoirs: "...je connais à présent la vérité de la condition humaine: les deux tiers de l'humanité ont faim" (1963, 503).

dangerous questioning. (Brigitte is also the one who showed Catherine the poster). The well-intentioned Brigitte unconsciously reflects back to this bourgeois society the fear they feel in relation to difference. Jean-Charles, for example, states: “Ne me prends pas pour un antisémite. Mais c’est connu que les enfants juifs sont d’une précocité un peu inquiétante et d’une émotivité excessive” (131). This sentiment is echoed later in the text by Laurence’s father: “Ma soeur m’a raconté un cas tout à fait analogue, a-t-il dit. En quatrième une de ses meilleures élèves s’est liée avec une camarade plus âgée, et dont la mere était malgache. Toute sa vision du monde a été transformée; et son caractère aussi” (173).

In this postcolonial epoch, Laurence and others are repeatedly forced to confront such problematic relationships with misery and otherness.<sup>69</sup> In contrast to her peers, Laurence displays an excess of empathetic feelings and an inability to be blind to difference, a quality that has, as we have seen, previously resulted in a breakdown.<sup>70</sup> Contrarily, most other characters in the novel (except her daughter, Catherine) turn away from all things different than the non-threatening bourgeois familiarity to which they are accustomed. Despite their seeming awareness of current events (as demonstrated by their ability to “healthily” digest the news), there is a failure to identify with “real” events in the novel. While they would like to deny otherness, or at least be blind to it, when it begins to invade their closed world, they react.

Similarly, France’s contemporary war of decolonization is always just under the surface for these technocrats. In the novel’s only explicit mention of Algeria, Laurence falls upon the newspaper article entitled “*Crise entre l’Algérie et la France.*” Still maintaining the strength to read it despite the horrors she might encounter, she is immediately interrupted by the arrival of her sister Marthe who has come to express her intense concern over the lack of religion in their household and the effect it must be having on Catherine.<sup>71</sup> Quickly dismissing Marthe’s anxiety,<sup>72</sup> Laurence immediately returns to the newspaper article following her departure. But she cannot concentrate on the crisis between Algeria and France, as Marthe’s concerns have actually reactivated fears of Catherine’s crisis. She begins to doubt her level of closeness with her daughter: “...il nous manque un langage commun (...) Je n’arrive pas à trouver le contact” (77). The text then abruptly shifts back to the article, effectively occluding the familial concerns that were beginning to invade her consciousness. In this return to the international conflict,

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<sup>69</sup> Actually, they all are made to look at otherness, but Laurence is the only one who is sensitive to it.

<sup>70</sup> This overabundance of empathy was something she lived with even as a child: “Peut-être n’aurais-je pas tant pleuré sur les enfants juifs assassinés s’il n’y avait pas eu de si lourds silences à la maison” (36).

<sup>71</sup> Given the juxtaposition of Algeria/France and secularism/religion, Marthe’s attempted intervention reads as a xenophobic reflex. In this way, her attitude seems to represent a larger nationalistic response to the French-Algerian War as well as a shutting out of those who symbolize “difference.”

<sup>72</sup> Like most of her set, Laurence is very distrustful of religion: “C’est vrai qu’il n’est pas facile d’élever laïquement des enfants, dans ce monde envahi par la religion” (76). As Deirdre Bair notes, “The only way to describe what, if anything, the characters believe in is to call it conspicuous consumption...” (524)

Laurence substitutes a public crisis with a private one.<sup>73</sup> Finally ready to confront the outside world, she is now not able to deal with the problems at home. This tension between the internal and the external is at the heart of the novel and is symptomatic of this society's constant need to look "elsewhere." The article also functions as a reminder of the historical reality of this period, while the repetition of the word *crise* recalls Laurence's own crisis resulting from the political circumstances of the time. (It could in fact be argued that this mention of Algeria has automnesiac effects on Laurence, as she will again fall into crisis late in the novel.) As already stated, the theme of "crisis" is significant in *Les belles images*, the word being used eight times throughout the novel.<sup>74</sup> In the first mention of Laurence's own personal breakdown, crisis is evoked as a "feminine" issue: "Sa dépression d'il y a cinq ans, on la lui a expliquée; beaucoup de jeunes femmes traversent ce genre de crise..." (19). One of Beauvoir's intentions in writing this novel was to evoke the discourse of a particular group at a particular historical moment. As the above quotation demonstrates, this discourse also worked to mold bodies and create and reinforce gender stereotypes, particularly the notion that women are emotional and unstable, which, in turn, shapes who they are and who they might become.<sup>75</sup>

If earlier in her life it was a story of crisis (torture) in Algeria that provoked her own personal breakdown, in the course of the novel it will be the collision of interior and exterior, private and public, domestic and international (i.e. Catherine's encounters and "crisis" with difference and otherness in a postcolonial world) that sparks Laurence's new breakdown. This new crisis forces us to pose several critical questions: How will Catherine's generation negotiate the consequences of the devastating (de)colonial present and postcolonial future? Will they too turn away from harsh realities or will they acknowledge the collective crimes of their fellow citizens? Will they embrace the otherness inherent in this new postcolonial era? While I will return to these same issues in

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<sup>73</sup> This theme will reappear in Chapter Four's analysis of a scene from *Caché* where a domestic crisis eclipses an international one (the War in Iraq).

<sup>74</sup> See pages 11, 19, 44, 74, 77, 129, 133. The first mention is of another sort of crisis: "la crise de l'architecture," which leads to a long discussion of technology and a utopic future where war will not exist.

<sup>75</sup> Also related to the gendering of crisis are intergenerational relationships, a recurrent theme throughout Beauvoir's body of work. *Les belles images* is concerned with both how parents shape their children's future while also asking the question of whether there is an escape from the role each individual has been put into by their elders. (The response of Beauvoir's existential philosophy to this question would of course be a resounding "yes.") But the text is not just preoccupied with what is passed from parent to child, but specifically what is transferred from *mother* to *daughter*. So given the novel's leitmotif of "crisis," it is not surprising that this same word would be used to describe Laurence's daughter's interrogations into unhappiness and poverty. In relating to Jean-Charles what Catherine's teacher said about her emotional state, Laurence states: "Souvent à cet âge-là les petites filles traversent une crise... c'est l'approche de la puberté, il ne faut pas trop s'inquiéter," to which Jean-Charles responds: "Ça m'a l'air d'une crise sérieuse" (129). These statements reiterate the idea that "crisis" is a feminine problem—after all, many girls experience this. (Clearly, for some, e.g. Laurence, the "problem" doesn't end at puberty.) But the statement also invokes the forces exercised on women of the period to act in a way that would conform to societal expectations.

the following chapter's discussion of the recent film *Caché*, all of these questions will go unanswered in *Les belles images*. Laurence's and Catherine's reflections and questions demonstrate a hesitant interest in exploring what is behind the glossy façade of post-WWII life. While neither has the tools or the language to effectively critique the ignorant attitudes of their class, independently and together they contest this blinkered outlook. As part of the next generation, Catherine wants to be a doctor in order to help others, while Laurence's ambiguous position with herself and others at the novel's end symbolizes the uncertainty of the future in different terms.

Beauvoir herself posed many of the same questions as those above, also asking: What is our role as citizens of a colonizing nation? Are we responsible for brutal acts committed by our government and in the name of, say, national security? In her article "Beauvoir and the Ambiguity of Evil," Robin May Schott has observed that:

From her writings published during World War Two, Beauvoir's work is marked by an awareness of these historical crises and the dilemmas that they pose. What is one to do with the knowledge of the Nazi death camps? Is forgetting a betrayal of the dead, or is surrendering to the pain of remembering a betrayal of the living? (...) How can one live when one sees oneself 'through the eyes of women who had been raped twenty times, of men with broken bones, of crazed children.' (228)

My focus is on Beauvoir's relationship to collective responsibility in the moment of Algerian independence, the struggle against imperial power. While the first half of this chapter focused on the technocratic relationship to the French-Algerian War portrayed in *Les belles images*, in the next section I will examine the legal defense of Djamilia Boupacha, concentrating on (1) Beauvoir the intellectual/activist's involvement, and (2) the ways in which Beauvoir (and others) used a discourse of national pride and collective responsibility to beseech the public to rally against the French military's use of torture. While I will acknowledge the ambivalence and tensions in Beauvoir's work around Algeria and Boupacha, I also contend that, in keeping with her philosophical position of ethical engagement and collective responsibility, she was effective in using Boupacha's story in order to talk about something larger than this one isolated case. As in Chapters One and Two, I will also signal how the figure of Djamilia Boupacha is put to use, how her physical body becomes a prime site of contention and exchange, and how the case further supports the idea that all sides of the war co-opted Algerian women's bodies in order to serve particular purposes, even if they may at first seem benign.

## Djamila Boupacha and the French-Algerian War

*...ces gémissements, ces cris, ces hurlements à crever les oreilles qui montent depuis si longtemps de la terre d'Algérie – de celle de France aussi – vous ne les avez pas entendus ou si faiblement qu'il vous a suffi d'un peu de mauvaise foi pour les ignorer.*  
-- Simone de BEAUVOIR

Following the collapse of France's Fourth Republic in 1958, newly instated President Charles de Gaulle pledged to end the already ubiquitous practice of torture during the French-Algerian War.<sup>76</sup> Already four years into the eight-year conflict, the war was, as seen in *Les belles images*, paradoxically absent and present in contemporary French society. While military maneuvers and debates over Algerian independence were present in daily newspapers, the harsh realities of the war remained far from the everyday consciousness of French civilians. Slowly but surely, stories began to emerge that proved de Gaulle's pledge to be in vain, as the French military continued to employ unwarranted violence in order to maintain control in the face of increasing calls for Algerian independence. In response, a number of public figures, including Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, took up their pens in order to protest the actions of a government that continued to sanction torture. But while some intellectuals were beginning to reevaluate previous assumptions about France's status as upholder of human rights, many civilians still preferred to turn a blind eye to the abuses done in the name of France.

One case clearly proved that torture continued to be sanctioned. Djamila Boupacha, a young Algerian woman who was raped and tortured for 33 days, testified to the brutality she, like many other Algerians, had endured at the hands of the French military. In his personal appeal regarding the case, French journalist and torture victim Henri Alleg writes: "...Djamila Boupacha témoigne que la torture n'a pas cessé sous le pouvoir gaulliste, qu'elle ne pourra cesser qu'avec la guerre coloniale dont elle est le fruit empoisonné."<sup>77</sup> Boupacha's case garnered significant attention after Simone de Beauvoir became involved in the campaign to defend her against false accusations that carried the death penalty. In the following pages, I examine the ways in which the figure of Djamila Boupacha became a tool in the war of decolonization, her physical body a prime site of contention and exchange. Boupacha's case exemplifies the ways in which all sides of the war co-opted Algerian women's bodies in order to serve particular purposes, even those that at first glance may seem benign. I will be especially interested in examining the ambiguity and tensions found at the heart of Simone de Beauvoir's work on the case. I will explore how Beauvoir strategically used a rhetoric of nationality and of shame in order to reach an ignorant, and sometimes apathetic, public. Beauvoir's nascent postcolonial ethics and engagement in the Algerian cause have, I believe, been overlooked, as many

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<sup>76</sup> De Gaulle's pledge would directly come up in the Boupacha case that I will be discussing in this section of the chapter. Djamila's father repeatedly appealed to his torturers by citing the French president's pronouncement, to which an officer reportedly responded: "De Gaulle... qu'il fasse les lois chez lui; ici, c'est nous les maîtres!" (Il a employé d'autres termes, trop orduriers pour qu'on les reproduise ici.)" (Beauvoir 1962, 223).

<sup>77</sup> See *Djamila Boupacha*, 236. Henri Alleg's *témoignage* (along with several others authored by public figures) is included as an appendix.

critics have diminished her commitment to the anti-colonial movement by assuming her involvement was merely self-serving.<sup>78</sup> She has often been criticized for engaging in intellectual solipsism (an accusation generally attributed to Frantz Fanon but taken up by others), as well as demonstrating a lack of emotion. Writing decades after the case had concluded, Gisèle Halimi even described Beauvoir as an “entomologist” in her level of detachment and disinterest in meeting Boupacha in person.<sup>79</sup> While I will keep in mind the practical and theoretical problems that Beauvoir’s actions provoked, I believe that labeling Beauvoir either as purely opportunistic or solely humanitarian misses the mark, falling short of an opportunity to examine the increasingly equivocal relationship between intellectualism, activism, and national identity at this historical moment and beyond.

As Simone de Beauvoir makes clear, Djamila Boupacha’s case was unexceptional: “Une Algérienne de vingt-trois ans, agent de liaison du F.L.N., a été sequestrée, torturée, violée avec une bouteille par des militaires français : c’est banal” (1962, 12-13). Indeed, what made this case exceptional was not the details, but the fact that they were revealed. Thanks to the backing of Beauvoir and respected French-Tunisian lawyer Gisèle Halimi, public attention was drawn to this woman’s private plight. Before the case went to trial in 1962, Halimi and Beauvoir would together publish a chronicle of the case up until Boupacha’s hearing in a text entitled *Djamila Boupacha* (1962). Halimi composed the majority of the text while Beauvoir wrote the Introduction, but lent her name to the whole book to share in any repercussions that its publication might have. Beauvoir and Halimi’s text would include a series of *témoignages* from contemporary intellectuals and activists (including Henri Alleg, Françoise Sagan, and the wife of Maurice Audin, amongst others). Picasso would sketch Boupacha’s portrait, and Matta would paint “La question Djamila.”<sup>80</sup> The international press would eventually take up the story, and demonstrations in support of Boupacha would take place in Paris, Tokyo, and Washington, D.C. Before analyzing the larger stakes of the case, I will provide a brief summary of the events leading up to the publication of Beauvoir and Halimi’s text.

After learning that Algerian girls would be prevented from earning certificates from the University of Algiers, Djamila Boupacha decided to join the FLN. In Boupacha’s words, “J’ai décidé de lutter pour l’indépendance de mon pays... parce que c’est juste et que, de toute manière, nous y arriverons...” (Beauvoir 1962, 50). In order to help the cause, she stole medical supplies from a hospital where she worked and hid FLN members in her home. On the night of February 10, 1960, fifty *gardes mobiles*, *barkis*, and *inspecteurs de police* raided the house that Boupacha shared with her parents and she, along with her brother-in-law and father, was taken into custody. After being held for a period

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<sup>78</sup> For a summary of these charges and a well laid-out defense of Beauvoir’s work, see Mary Caputi, 117-121. See also Julien Murphy for an analysis of Beauvoir’s postcolonial ethics.

<sup>79</sup> “I expected a sister-in-arms... I discovered more and more an entomologist” (cited in Murphy 1995, 283).

<sup>80</sup> I have not been able to ascertain whether the painting’s title is “La question Djamila” or “La question, Djamila,” as it has been referred to as both in different places. While each title calls to mind the other contemporary torture scandal (that of Henri Alleg), the inclusion of a comma after “question” dramatically changes the significance of the title. Matta also painted “Le supplice de Djamila,” which is included as a frontispiece (along with Picasso’s portrait) to *Djamila Boupacha*.

without charges, she was eventually falsely accused of having planted a bomb (that, incidentally, was defused before it could explode) at a cafeteria at the University five months earlier.

Boupacha was initially brought to El Biar (the same prison in which Henri Alleg was infamously tortured), but five days later was transferred to Hussein Dey, where she was given what was called the “*second degré*.” In the text of her civil indictment, Boupacha summarizes the treatment:

J’ai appris alors ce que cela signifiait : tortures à l’électricité d’abord (les électrodes placées au bout des seins ne tenant pas, un de mes tortionnaires les colla sur ma peau avec du papier collant ‘scotch’), on me brûla de la même manière aux jambes, à l’aîne, au sexe, sur le visage. La torture électrique alternait avec des brûlures de cigarettes, les coups de poing et le supplice de la baignoire : pendue sur un bâton au dessus d’une baignoire, l’on me faisait boire jusqu’à étouffement. (Beauvoir 1962, 218)

At one point during her incarceration, her brother-in-law and father, both visibly tortured, were presented to her. Not only did this allow her to see the further pain that might be inflicted on her own body were she not to cooperate, it also served to break the men, as the sight of her destroyed body could function as psychological torture for them. The French military effectively positioned these men as powerless to save their daughter/sister-in-law, highlighting the power maintained by the colonial forces who held this woman’s life in their hands.

After 33 days of torture, Boupacha ultimately “confessed” to having planted the bomb. A psychiatrist stated that she was not responsible for her criminal actions, and she was offered a plea bargain. Instead of accepting the offer, however, she actually retracted her earlier confession and pursued her own case against her torturers. Djamila’s brother contacted Maître Gisèle Halimi, who at this point had already been known for her human rights work, and she immediately began putting together a case against General Ailleret, the commander-in-chief in Algeria, and Pierre Messmer, ministre des Armées, for wrongful detention and torture in violation of Article 344 of the Penal Code.<sup>81</sup> After taking up the case, Halimi approached Simone de Beauvoir in hopes that she would lend her influential support to the case. As Beauvoir writes in her memoir, Halimi’s request conveniently came at just the moment she was contemplating potential actions in support of Algerian independence. In her own words: “I wanted to stop being an accomplice in this war, but how?”<sup>82</sup> Together, they decided that Beauvoir would write an incendiary editorial piece entitled “Pour Djamila Boupacha” for *Le Monde* with the goal being to “couper brutalement les Français de leur confortable indifférence à la question algérienne” (Beauvoir 1962, 63). As Halimi stated, “Il fallait rompre ‘ce qu’il y avait de plus scandaleux dans le scandale: l’habitude du scandale’” (Beauvoir 1962, 63). On June 3, 1960, the day

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<sup>81</sup> The original hope was to prosecute Boupacha’s torturers, but General Ailleret refused to provide photographs of the military personnel involved in Boupacha’s interrogation. In his words, it would risk provoking “des répercussions fâcheuses dans leur état d’esprit et sur le moral des corps et services dont il font partie” (Beauvoir 1962, 10).

<sup>82</sup> *Force of Circumstance*, 382. Cited in Ranjana Khanna, 81.

that Beauvoir's editorial condemning the government's and military's actions was published, there was public uproar. The French military in Algeria immediately confiscated the newspaper issue in hopes of preventing a crisis in public opinion. Soon after, Beauvoir and Halimi established the Comité Djamila Boupacha with clear goals of garnering public support: "Son activité devait être concrète: Djamila Boupacha pouvait devenir un symbole; le châtement de ses tortionnaires devait être effectif. Et surtout *public*" (Beauvoir 1962, 68). Their first task was having the case moved to France, away from the corruption in the Algerian court system. (The case was eventually moved to Caen.) Ranjana Khanna describes this call for a fair trial as "a medical call – to heal a psychological illness of the French people and of a sick legal system that failed to represent Algerians..." (80). Echoing the discourse of colonialist pathology mentioned in my analysis of *Les belles images*, this medicalized approach to Boupacha's body and mind would be taken up by both sides of the legal case.

### Discourse of Sexuality and Virginity

*L'exceptionnel, dans l'affaire Boupacha, ce ne sont pas les faits: c'est leur dévoilement.*  
-- Simone de BEAUVOIR

As Boupacha herself stated: "Je ne suis qu'une détenue parmi des milliers d'autres" (Beauvoir 1962, 10). While torture of the kind she experienced was, likely, rather common, her story becomes unique in its detailed exposure of the commonplace abuse inflicted on many Algerian women and men. Boupacha endured torture of all kinds, sexual torture being one of them, but most accounts of her story privilege this aspect of her abuse over all others. Even to this day, the most repeated detail in the limited number of scholarly accounts of the case remains her rape – not "ordinary rape," but rape with a bottle. For example, in his brief mention of her case, French-Algerian War scholar James Le Sueur provides an awkwardly worded summary that underscores the sexual aspect to her abuse and highlights the ways in which many descriptions of Boupacha's case condense 33 days of torture into the act of rape with a bottle. He writes: "...another infamous case of torture involved Djamila Boupacha, a young Algerian woman who lost her virginity after she was tortured and raped by French soldiers with a beer bottle" (2006, xviii).

Boupacha does, however, admit that the rape was the most horrific of the abuses: "Après quelques jours, on m'administra le *supplice de la bouteille*, c'est la plus atroce des souffrances. Après m'avoir attachée dans une position spéciale, on m'enfonça dans le vagin le goulot d'une bouteille. Je hurlai et perdis connaissance pendant, je crois, deux jours" (Beauvoir 1962, 218). Despite the fact that she names it as "la plus atroce des souffrances", in Halimi and Beauvoir's comprehensive account of her torture in *Djamila Boupacha*, it is ironically her rape that, in comparison to the detailed descriptions of other forms of abuse, lacks representation. Aside from what Boupacha could recollect prior to the rape, there are no details of the torture instruments (likely more than just a simple beer bottle) or of the effects that they would have on her. In contrast to recent scholars' hyper-analysis of Boupacha's rape, Ranjana Khanna offers a possible explanation for its relative

absence in Beauvoir and Halimi's text: "The internal pain and humiliation of the rape is the only torture represented by speechlessness—by a literal loss of consciousness..." (84).

As the above statements also suggest, Boupacha's virginity became central to the case, and Beauvoir and Halimi were strategic about their deployment of this trope. Beauvoir's choice to include the fact that she was a virgin in her editorial provoked a heated debate with Hubert Beuve-Méry, founder and director of *Le Monde*. As Beauvoir writes in *La force des choses*: "Beuve-Méry trouvait choquant... que j'aie écrit: 'Djamila était vierge'; il souhaitait une périphrase. Je refusai. Ils imprimèrent ces trois mots entre parenthèses."<sup>83</sup> By including this detail, Beauvoir positioned Boupacha as both "innocent" and sympathetic to the French public. As some scholars have pointed out, the self-exposure of her rape also carries particular weight given her status as a Muslim woman. Halimi summarizes: "Interrogée sur le sens et la valeur de la virginité, Djamila est absolue: c'est un totem, une magie. Malheur et déshonneur à l'impure qui a des rapports avec un homme avant le mariage! (...) Un musulman de bonne famille n'épouse pas une fille déflorée" (Beauvoir 1962, 141). By having her virginity taken from her, she also risked losing access to a whole set of cultural privileges, including marriage and respect.

Indeed, leading up to her trial, the most important debate seemed to become not her guilt or innocence of the alleged crime, but her status as a virgin. Medical professionals poked and prodded her body in hopes of proving or debunking her assertion of sexual abuse and prior virginity, thereby enacting more violence on her body. Even though the team of doctors decided that Boupacha might have indeed suffered from "une défloration traumatique"<sup>84</sup>, definitive proof of the manner in which this occurred remained inconclusive; as the report stated, "étant donné qu'après cinq mois, la cicatrisation rapide des tissus vulvo-vaginaux ne permet en général pas de préciser les modalités d'une défloration" (Beauvoir 1962, 140). However, in the psychiatric portion of her examination, psychologist Dr. Hélène Michel-Wolfron responded without hesitation that she had the "psychisme correspondant à celui d'une vierge": "Djamila dans ces contacts affectifs difficiles, dans sa pureté, dans son orgueil atavique et dans ses convictions religieuses, agit comme une vierge" (141).

Perhaps more noteworthy, though, is an observation made by Dr. Michel-Wolfron (and one on which she undoubtedly based her assessment of her claims of sexual abuse and prior virginity): Boupacha "était incapable de simulation ou de mensonge" (138). Halimi summarizes Dr. Michel-Wolfron's opinion: "Ce qui l'avait frappée, c'était l'authenticité de la jeune fille: 'je la crois incapable de mentir', affirmait-elle." (138). While such statements would have been important to Boupacha's defense, presenting her as incapable of lying further highlights the rhetoric of "purity" that became central to the case. Turning again to Michel-Wolfron: "...c'est une fille formidable, d'une pureté, d'une

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<sup>83</sup> The full context in the *Le Monde* article is as follows: "Un témoin dont on connaît le nom et l'adresse l'a vue à Hussein Dey, évanouie, sanglante, trainée par ses geôliers. (Djamila était vierge.)" The surrounding text and the addition of parentheses inadvertently (or not) seems to draw attention to this detail that *Le Monde's* editor wanted to suppress.

<sup>84</sup> The report stated: "Oui, Boupacha Djamila a pu subir l'introduction d'un goulot de bouteille dans le vagin" (Beauvoir 1962, 140). As Mary Caputi points out, this case "encapsulated so much about the perversions of the colonial relationship", and Boupacha's "traumatic defloration" may serve as an allegory for the tragic Algerian experience of French rule. (110)

vérité...” (138). Although being seemingly applauded as “une fille formidable”, the evaluation that she is unable to engage in the very human act of lying simultaneously infantilizes her.

In examining Boupacha’s legal case and its surrounding rhetoric, it becomes clear that her sexuality itself becomes figured not only as a tool for the defense, but also a weapon for the prosecution. Contrasted to Dr. Michel-Wolfron’s belief that Boupacha was “une fille formidable, d’une pureté, d’une vérité” are statements made by Maurice Patin, who, as the Président de la Commission de Sauvegarde in Algeria, functioned as a sort of ombudsman between the Ministre de la Justice and the courts. He stated to Beauvoir and Halimi: “Vous prétendez qu’elle était vierge. Mais enfin, on a des photos d’elle, prises dans sa chambre: elle est entre deux soldats de l’A.L.N., armes en main, et elle tient une mitraillette.” His assumption that militancy (or even anti-colonial resistance) and virginity are mutually exclusive is strategic, albeit problematic, as is the familiar cultural trope that female sexuality is naturally dangerous and to be controlled. Patin’s reluctance to give weight to Boupacha’s case was constant, and he consistently constructed problematic equations to justify his lack of concern. Speaking to the Comité Boupacha, he professed: “...votre Djamilia Boupacha, elle n’est pas sympathique!... Elle veut l’indépendance de l’Algérie!” (105-6). Patin’s logic seems to be that Boupacha wants to be free so she must not be “sympatique”. And the further corollary, she must not be a virgin.

Perhaps even more egregiously sexist were statements Patin made questioning the validity of Boupacha’s claim of having been tortured at all. After realizing that she was raped vaginally and not anally, he stated: “Il ne s’agit donc pas du véritable supplice!” (103). In Beauvoir’s Introduction, she cites further remarks made by Patin: “J’avais craint... qu’on ne l’eût *assise* sur une bouteille, comme on faisait en Indochine avec les Viets; alors les intestins sont perforés et on meurt. Mais ça ne s’est passé ainsi...” (1-2). The relationship between gender and torture (which, we could argue, is always already gendered in that torture lays bare the power relationships – often structured around traditional notions of masculinity and femininity – between bodies) is evident.<sup>85</sup> The assumption here is that being raped anally (which both men and women could experience) is inherently more serious than being raped vaginally. In his logic, being forced to sit on a bottle (a form of anal rape) would constitute “un véritable supplice,” while having a bottle inserted into one’s vagina would not.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Masculinity and femininity play a significant role in all forms of torture, regardless of the gender of the actors involved. For example, in his analysis of Henri Alleg’s *La question*, Ross Chambers gestures towards the ways in which torture calls up traditional notions of manliness: “Alleg’s testimony... demonstrates the archaic dimension of the appalling experience he underwent, and underscores its significance as an up-to-date version of an age-old, hyper-masculine ordeal of pain. Structured as a version of the ancient initiatory topos of the descent into hell as a close encounter with death, his narrative explores the practice of modern torture as an unholy alliance of industrial rationality and ancient trial by ordeal, a man-to-man encounter mediated by pain” (209).

<sup>86</sup> In her extensive study of torture during the French-Algerian War, Rita Maran elaborates on the relationship between gender and human rights: “As an adherent of French traditions of the ‘rights of man,’ Patin appears to have made a distinction between ‘rights of man’ and ‘rights of woman,’ despite the fact that the constitution then in force had juridically erased that

Boupacha's legal case ended in March 1962 (four months prior to Algerian independence) when de Gaulle granted amnesty to French military personnel, preventing any further prosecution of war crimes. Her story, however, does not end there. What often escapes analyses of her case is that she was ultimately kidnapped by the FLN just after being released in March 1962 and brought back to Algeria, further serving as a pawn in the masculine fight for political control. In her memoir *Le lait de l'oranger* published 25 years after the Boupacha case had concluded, Gisèle Halimi writes: "Enlevée, séquestrée par les frères de la Fédération dans un appartement H.L.M. de la banlieue parisienne pendant plusieurs jours. Puis, mise dans un avion, sous bonne garde. Destination: Algiers. Pour le F.L.N. d'après les combats, mission accomplie." (1988, 321). When Halimi relayed this news to Beauvoir, she received a surprising response: "Vous avez été imprudente, Gisèle" me dit-elle. Je n'avais pas, nous n'avions pas, nous Français, à intervenir pour une Algérienne indépendante."<sup>87</sup> While Beauvoir was willing and eager to critique French treatment of Boupacha, she did not see it as her place to intervene in FLN matters. As Sonia Kruks states, "Beauvoir would not speak out for Boupacha against the FLN. She would speak out for another against her own government, but not against a Third World independence movement that she supported" (2005, 193). Beauvoir's stance further fuels the critique that she was more concerned with the larger cause (ending torture and granting Algeria independence) than she was with Boupacha's personal situation. (In fact, she never even met Boupacha, despite the fact that she had opportunities to do so.)

Beauvoir's words regarding what rights (or lack thereof) the French have over certain bodies (even if acting with benign motives) echo the point I would like to make in the next section of this chapter, namely that Algerian female bodies were sites on which anxieties over French national identity were being worked out at this decolonial moment. In order to reach a French audience (much like those whom we saw in *Les belles images's* caricatural portrait of French society coming to terms with the loss of Algeria), Simone de Beauvoir had to be strategic about rhetoric.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, in addition to calling up the above-discussed role that sexuality played in the case, Beauvoir also employed calculated discourses of shame, nationality, and collective responsibility.

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distinction... we find in the Preamble of the Constitution of 27 October 1946: 'The law guarantees to the woman, in every area, rights equal to those of the man.' However, actors of that time were not, understandably, intimately familiar with French law on rights, whether dealing with gender rights or the right to be secure from torture." (163-4).

<sup>87</sup> In *Djamila Boupacha*, Halimi writes of Boupacha's growing despondency over being held in France prior to her trial: "Le contrecoup de [sa] solitude s'était d'abord traduit chez elle par une violente envie de retourner en Algérie, même en prison, mais dans son pays, avec des sœurs qui avaient souffert comme elle et des geôlières qui parlaient parfois l'arabe" (136).

<sup>88</sup> She was also calculated about her actions around the case. For example, her choice to never meet Boupacha, although criticized by others, likely served a purpose for Beauvoir. Whether due to personal or political reasons, she felt it necessary to keep her distance from the subject/object of her activism, prompting the criticism that she used Boupacha and her ordeal as a convenient opportunity to oppose the French position in Algeria. She finally agreed to meet with her once the case was resolved and Boupacha was released, but they of course never got the chance to see one another since Boupacha was kidnapped by the FLN the day before their planned meeting.

## Shame, Nationality, and Collective Responsibility

As Beauvoir details in her memoirs, her participation in Boupacha's case coincided with a personal crisis of sorts, a crisis that stemmed from her philosophical beliefs about collective responsibility and her own misgivings about her status as citizen of a colonizing nation.<sup>89</sup> In *La force des choses*, Beauvoir writes of the existential feelings this provoked in her: "J'avais besoin de mon estime pour vivre et je me voyais avec les yeux des femmes vingt fois violées, des hommes aux os brisés, des enfants fous: une Française" (125). This idea of being seen by others is central to Beauvoir's notion of the ambiguity of human existence and to her philosophical project as a whole. Sonia Kruks summarizes this key existential concept of *le regard*: "To be subjected to a gaze that one cannot reciprocally return is, indeed, to experience objectification, or an alienation of one's subjectivity. I experience a loss of my immediate, lived subjecthood as I become fixed or immobilized *in my own eyes* as the object that I am (or believe myself to be) in the eyes of the one who looks at me" (2006, 63). In reference to a lack of action on the part of the French public once learning the truth about torture during the war, Sartre would also make use of this idea, but would take it a step further and force ordinary French citizens to see themselves in the mirror: "tout s'est fait insensiblement par d'imperceptibles abandons, et puis, quand nous avons levé la tête, nous avons vu dans la glace un visage étranger, haïssable: le nôtre." (1958, 100).

In light of this notion of the gaze, it is worth returning to the passage with which I began this chapter. In seeing herself being seen, Beauvoir places herself at a distance that then allows for both self-critique and critique of her fellow French citizens: "j'étais la sœur des tortionnaires, des incendiaires, des ratisseurs, des égorgeurs, des affameurs". But implicit in this self-evaluation, particularly through phrases like "je ne supportais plus cette hypocrisie, cette indifférence, ce pays, ma propre peau" and "je méritais leur haine," is a profound sense of shame. Indeed, one line later she refers to her feelings of "honte": "les seuls moments dont je n'avais pas honte, c'était ceux où je ne pouvais pas [dormir, écrire, profiter d'une promenade ou d'un livre]" (1963, 145). Sartre too would appeal to the French by employing the rhetorical device of shame in the conclusion to his essay "Une Victoire": "Si nous voulons mettre un terme à ces immondes et mornes cruautés, *sauver la France de la honte* et les Algériens de l'enfer, nous avons qu'un moyen (...): faire la paix" (emphasis mine, 122).

Kruks defines Beauvoir's (and Sartre's) brand of shame as "a relation to oneself, in the presence of another, in which one *evaluates* oneself negatively through the look of the other..." From shame emerges feelings of guilt: "The experience of shame... involves not only seeing myself as the object that the other sees, but seeing myself as the other will judge me: as reprehensible, faulty, inferior" (2006, 63). It was Beauvoir's feeling of being seen as a Frenchwoman (i.e., a citizen of a colonizing nation), and therefore, reprehensible, that evokes in her such shame and then culpability: "Ces gens dans les rues, consentants ou étourdis, c'était des bourreaux d'Arabes: tous coupables" (1963, 145).

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<sup>89</sup> These feelings are somewhat analogous to those of Laurence of *Les belles images* whose crisis was, in part, also provoked by feelings of how to act in the face of war and conflict.

Although writing a decade and a half earlier in a very different context, Hannah Arendt similarly made the bridge between shame, nationality, and collective responsibility in her 1945 essay “Organized Guilt and Collective Responsibility”:

For many years now we have met Germans who declare that they are ashamed of being Germans. I have often felt tempted to answer that I am ashamed of being human. This elemental shame, which many people of the most various nationalities share with one another today, is what finally is left of our sense of international solidarity... [T]he idea of humanity, when purged of all sentimentality, has the very serious consequence that in one form or another men must assume responsibility for all crimes committed by men and that all nations share the onus of evil committed by all others. Shame at being a human being is the purely individual and still non-political expression of this insight. (131)

Beauvoir echoes Arendt regarding the role that we all have when confronted with atrocities like torture, rape, murder, and genocide. For Beauvoir, turning shame into ethical and political action is essential. Shame and its corollary collective responsibility becomes a motivating force for her involvement in the Algerian cause, and one she hoped would carry over to her fellow French citizens.<sup>90</sup> In consistently maintaining an existential ethics predicated on a responsibility to helping others realize freedom, Beauvoir was also invested in showing how freedom – in this case the freedom of the average French citizen – was necessarily bound up with the freedom of the other – the freedom of Algerians: “[l]a liberté ne peut s’accomplir qu’à travers la liberté d’autrui” (1946, 193). Although this proved to be a difficult point to bring home, the Boupacha case lent itself well to Beauvoir putting this philosophy into practice.

In her *Le Monde* editorial, Beauvoir further elaborates on her notion of collective responsibility. She writes:

...soit que nous les ayons choisis, soit que nous les subissions à contrecœur, nous nous trouvons bon gré mal gré solidaires de ceux qui nous gouvernent. Quand des dirigeants d’un pays acceptent que des crimes se commettent en son nom, tous les citoyens appartiennent à une nation criminelle. Consentirons-nous à ce que ce soit le nôtre? L’affaire Djamila Boupacha concerne tous les Français. (1962, 223)

As Karen Shelby notes, Beauvoir’s invocation of collective responsibility for actions with which many were not directly connected “leads us to examine the demand of extraordinary times for understandings of the political responsibility we bear in those times. What happens when most people, in fact, fail to act? What collective responsibility

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<sup>90</sup> Annabelle Golay echoes this point: “La honte: moteur du dire, moteur de l’écriture autobiographique de Beauvoir. Honte de soi, honte des autres, honte du colonialisme français, honte d’être Française, honte de ses origines bourgeoises, de ses privilèges, de sa complicité avec la guerre. Dire sa honte, écrire sa honte, constitue pour Beauvoir le point de départ pour une morale solidaire et de la relation à l’autre” (418).

is entailed by this failure?” (93-94). Not only was Beauvoir interested in fighting for Algerian independence and denouncing violence done to female bodies during the conflict, she was also dedicated to forcing ordinary French citizens to look at the effects of their own complicity and lack of action.<sup>91</sup> In June 1960, Beauvoir had opened her *Le Monde* editorial with a wake-up call to the French public “Ce qu’il y a de plus scandaleux dans le scandale c’est qu’on s’y habitue.” For Beauvoir, passivity and ignorance in the face of unethical state practices and systematic atrocities would imply complicity and culpability. Two years later, she would conclude her Introduction to *Djamila Boupacha* with the following statement: “La vérité vous attaque de partout, vous ne pouvez plus continuer à balbutier: ‘Nous ne savions pas...’ ; et, sachant, pouvez-vous feindre d’ignorer ou vous borner à quelques inertes gémissements? J’espère que non” (13).

In addition to underscoring collective responsibility, Beauvoir also appeals to national pride and cultural decency. In *La Force des choses*, Beauvoir repeats statements made by Ministre de la Justice Edmond Michelet regarding the French military’s use of torture:

C’est terrible, cette gangrène qui nous vient du nazisme. Elle envahit tout, on n’arrive pas à l’enrayer. Les passages à tabac, c’est normal: pas de police sans passage à tabac: mais la torture!... J’essaie de leur faire comprendre: il y a une ligne à ne pas franchir... Il haussa les épaules pour indiquer son impuissance: ‘C’est une gangrène!’ répéta-t-il. (301)

Only a decade after France was liberated from the German Occupation, the French found their own status as occupier/colonizer placed in question, but tracing the origin of torture to the Nazis actually became a way of avoiding a more incriminating examination of the role the French government played in sanctioning (and subsequently covering up) acts of torture.<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile, many were engaged in a recuperative act, for the good name of French national identity was being threatened by the actions of the military. Beauvoir appealed to the French by drawing upon the nation’s long history of human rights and its principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity that were simultaneously being threatened. Rita Maran writes: “in a moment of urgency, she relied on the most direct appeal, one that required no explanation and that offered hope that the force of public opinion of the sort that the Boupacha Committee considered necessary would be unleashed. She called up benevolent aspects of France’s civilizing mission as expressed in national pride” (167). As Beauvoir stated in the above quote: “Quand des dirigeants d’un pays acceptent que des crimes se commettent en son nom, tous les citoyens appartiennent

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<sup>91</sup> Sartre echoed this sentiment: “Heureux ceux qui sont morts sans avoir jamais eu à se demander: ‘Si l’on m’arrache les ongles, parlerai-je?’. Mais plus heureux encore ceux qui n’ont pas été contraints, à peine quittée l’enfance, de se poser l’autre question: ‘Si mes amis, si mes frères d’armes, si mes chefs arrachent devant moi les ongles d’un ennemi, que ferai-je?’” (1958, 100-101).

<sup>92</sup> While not blaming the Nazis for the French military’s use of torture, Sartre echoes the parallel between Algeria and the German Occupation: “nous regardions les soldats allemands qui se promenaient dans les rues d’un air inoffensif et nous nous disions parfois: ‘Ce sont pourtant des hommes qui nous ressemblent. Comment peuvent-ils faire ce qu’ils font?’ Et nous étions fiers de nous parce que nous ne comprenions pas” (1958, 100).

à une nation criminelle. Consentirons-nous à ce que ce soit le nôtre?” Indeed, there was a profound discord between international opinions of “civilized” French culture and the reality that the French used torture, as the following letter sent to Beauvoir by an anonymous foreigner captures: “A mes yeux d’Américain vivant en France, ce qui se passe actuellement dans votre pays est plus horrible que ce qui se passait en Allemagne sous Hitler, pour la bonne et simple et évidente raison que je considère la France comme le seul pays civilisé du monde” (Beauvoir 1962, 69).

French journalist Henri Alleg, who underwent one month of torture at the hands of the French military, seemed to be engaged in a similar protective task, beginning his memoir with the following epigraph attributed to Jean-Christophe: “En attaquant les Français corrompus, c’est la France que je défends” and concluding it with the following words:

Tout cela, je devais le dire pour les Français qui voudront bien me lire. Il faut qu’ils sachent que les Algériens ne confondent pas leurs tortionnaires avec le grand peuple de France, auprès duquel ils ont tant appris et dont l’amitié leur est si chère. Il faut qu’ils sachent pourtant ce qui se fait ici EN LEUR NOM. (112)

Although Alleg’s and Boupacha’s cases were, in some ways, dramatically different, his personal account may serve as a useful point of comparison in looking at the ways in which exposing torture activated a nationalistic response. Alleg’s choice to capitalize “EN LEUR NOM” highlights the importance that nationality had in debates over torture (while also echoing Beauvoir’s above use of “en son nom” in her direct appeal to the French). Similarly, his epigraph clearly captures the paradoxical way in which critiques of French actions became defenses of French culture.

In *Djamila Boupacha*, Halimi and Beauvoir gathered a series of appeals made by public figures in hopes of alerting the French population to what was happening. Much like Beauvoir’s and Alleg’s chosen rhetorical strategies, a sense of national pride runs throughout these *témoignages*. For example, Former Finance Minister and Minister of National Economy André Philip states that the Boupacha case “est le symbole même de la corruption des buts par les moyens qui risque de pourrir totalement notre pays; c’est l’honneur même de la France” (269). National Assembly Deputee Jacques Fonlupt-Esperaber asks how torture could be practiced “dans un pays qui ‘a proclamé, sinon inventé, les Droits de l’homme” (254). He also balances between reviving a sense of national honor while appealing to potential feelings of shame in stating: “De ces faits odieux et si contraires *au génie de notre nation*, nous porterons en commun, même sans y avoir pris aucune part, mais comme Français, par l’effet de la solidarité qui unit tous les fils d’une même patrie, la lourde honte devant les générations qui nous suivent et qui jugeront notre temps” (emphasis mine, 253).

Frantz Fanon wrote that “[t]he gravity of the tortures, the horror of the rape of little Algerian girls, are perceived because their existence threatens a certain idea of French honor. This attitude is worth meditating... It belongs to that form of egocentric, sociocentric thinking which has become the characteristic of the French.” (71). According to Fanon, French intellectuals, like Beauvoir perhaps, were more concerned with

protecting their nation's reputation than with the bringing about justice for the victims of these crimes. While it has not been in the scope of this chapter to debate the rightfulness or wrongfulness of Beauvoir's involvement in the Djamila Boupacha case, it is nevertheless important to recognize the ways in which the accompanying rhetoric of both sexuality and nationality did in effect objectify Boupacha. Additionally, for Beauvoir the case was clearly about more than just this one person; indeed, in her writings we witness this woman's plight becoming emblematic for a contentious debate about torture, nationality, and civility. But in representing these larger issues (which was not necessarily something Boupacha chose), we may actually view Beauvoir and Halimi's strategy as "appropriat[ing] the people of Algeria insofar as it deflected attention away from them and back to the needs of France" (Kruks 2005, 194).

Nevertheless, Beauvoir was able to use this case in order to reach those who were previously able to turn a blind eye to the conflict's realities. As both her memoirs and her contemporary writings around the Boupacha case (namely her *Le Monde* editorial and the Introduction to Halimi's text) attest to, she admitted to sharing in the complicity and culpability of the average French citizen. In inserting her own personal position into the discussion, she was invested in exposing the responsibility we all bear in these times: "Par cette abdication c'est la France entière qu'il trahirait, c'est chacun de nous, c'est moi, c'est vous" (Beauvoir 1962, 223). Through her use of the discursive devices of shame, collective responsibility, and national pride, Beauvoir effectively shifted the frame of the war from torture as a given to torture as something that concerns us all, something that must be ended.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Hidden Memories: Retracing October 17, 1961  
in Michael Haneke's *Caché* and Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*

*Mid-October, sixty one, the French police were having fun  
Cutting down Algerians, breaking heads all over town  
Yet no-one saw, no-one knew and no-one dared to speak the truth  
200 dead became just two, sweep them in the river  
The witnesses were run to ground, put the bastards underground  
Round up every black in town who dared to show their face*  
--“When the Stars Fall From the Sky,” STIFF LITTLE FINGERS

An Irish punk band might seem an unlikely source for commentary on colonial conflict in the francophone world, yet the lyrics from Stiff Little Fingers that are my epigraph aptly summarize the complex politics at the center of one of France’s most hidden acts of colonial violence, an event that occurred in Paris on October 17, 1961, and claimed the lives of hundreds of Algerian-born French citizens. Occasionally called the Paris Massacre of 1961 or the 1961 Paris Pogrom,<sup>93</sup> but normally denied a proper name<sup>94</sup> and simply called “October 17, 1961,” the event was, according to historians Jim House and Neil MacMaster, “the bloodiest act of state repression of street protest in Western Europe in modern history” (1). In a war that had already proven to be a battleground of identity politics where issues of citizenship, gender, race, class, and religion converged in often explosive ways, the 1961 massacre demonstrates the pervasive brutality of the French-Algerian War, a “conflit aux trois visages,” as literary scholar Michèle Bacholle-Boškovic states, that pitted French against Algerians, French against French, and Algerians against Algerians (969). Meanwhile, traces of the war, some remembered and others forgotten, further exemplify how violence comes in many forms, often not visible until decades later.

Only somewhat recently have memories of October 17, 1961, finally begun to (re)surface. Beginning in the late 80s and early 90s, October 17 started to enter into

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<sup>93</sup> Regarding the uniqueness of the event and subsequent naming, Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Les temps modernes* wrote: “Ces hommes désarmés furent massacres, laissés agonisants dans les ruisseaux, achevés dans les centres de tri. Pogrom: le mot, jusqu’ici, ne se traduisait pas en français. Par la grâce du préfet Papon, sous la Ve République, cette lacune est comblée” (cited in Stora, *La gangrène*, 98). Papon would actually seize the issue of *Les temps modernes* in which this was published.

<sup>94</sup> Because the practice of naming is often important to a process of mourning and remembrance, I have generally read the lack of moniker as a desire to forget and a refusal to remember. However, this could be read differently in that a certain power is actually maintained by using the date to name the event. Much like 9/11, not only does the event resist any single word, but in using the date to speak of the massacre, we are forced to confront it on October 17 of every year. Indeed, October 17 has very recently become a day of remembrance in France.

French public consciousness and historical memory. Films about the event were produced,<sup>95</sup> while novels discussing the massacre were published.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, historical accounts and testimonies began to appear, and restrictions on access to related police archives were relaxed.<sup>97</sup> Even a song by French rapper Médine was recently devoted to the event (“17 Octobre”). Associations like “Au nom de la mémoire” and “17 octobre 1961 contre l’oubli” also emerged, creating websites in order to post testimonies of participants and victims of the massacre in hopes of healing the wounds of the past.

The efforts made by writers, artists, and historians to rescue October 17 from oblivion reflect a much more global cultural and literary obsession with remembering (and forgetting) the past. While this “memory boom” may seem a new phenomenon,<sup>98</sup> we can trace its legacy back to sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’ early twentieth-century work that posited memory as a collective rather than individual experience. In the preface to his seminal *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs states: “If we enumerate the number of recollections during one day that we have evoked upon the occasion of our direct and indirect relations with other people, we will see that, most frequently, we appeal to our memory only in order to answer questions which others have asked us, or that we suppose they could have asked us... Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs” (38). In this chapter, I will examine two recent treatments of October 1961, one literary and one cinematic, that each reflect this notion of collective memory and its corollary, collective amnesia. I will begin with Austrian director Michael Haneke’s French-language film *Caché* (2005), a work that struggles with the physical and symbolic violence enacted on bodies due to repression of individual and collective memories like October 17, while simultaneously signaling how individual and collective memories are inextricably linked. I will then turn to Leïla Sebbar’s *La Seine était rouge: le 17 octobre 1961* (1999), a novel that grapples with remembering October 17 – not only by those who were involved but also by subsequent generations. In addition to treating the problem of remembering a disavowed past, Sebbar also exposes the complex politics at the heart of memorializing an event that most seem to want to forget. Both Haneke’s film and Sebbar’s novel pose questions around anamnesis and commemoration, albeit in different ways. While *La Seine était rouge* is interested in reconstituting memories of October 17 itself (through a literal retracing of the event) and its legacy in France and Algeria, *Caché* takes this notion a step

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<sup>95</sup> *Drowning by Bullets*, Philip Brooks and Alan Hayling (1992); *Nuit noire: le 17 octobre 1961*, Alain Tasma (2005); *Caché*, Michael Haneke (2005).

<sup>96</sup> *La guerre des gusses*, Georges Mattei (1982); *Meurtres pour mémoire*, Didier Daeninckx (1984) (which was also made into a television movie by Laurent Heynemann in 1989); *Le sourire de Brahim*, Nacer Kettane (1985); *Bastille Tango*, Jean-François Vilar (1986); *Une fille sans histoire*, Tassadit Imache (1989); *La Seine était rouge*, Leïla Sebbar (1999). William Gardner Smith’s *The Stone Face* (1963) seems to be the earliest literary treatment of the massacre. Interestingly, it was written by an African-American expatriate living in Paris in the early 1960s.

<sup>97</sup> *Les ratonnades d’octobre*, Michel Levine (1985); *La Bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961*, Jean-Luc Einaudi (1991); *Le 17 octobre 1961: Un crime d’état à Paris*, Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, ed. (2001); *Paris 1961: Algerians, State, Terror, and Memory*, Jim House and Neil MacMaster (2006).

<sup>98</sup> For a recent discussion of the hypertrophy of memory in contemporary culture, see Andreas Huyssen’s “Memory Culture at an Impasse” in *The Modernist Imagination* (2009).

further and makes the massacre metonymic of a whole host of forms of state-imposed violence and hidden national memories that are not unique to France. *Caché* also speaks to the damaging and destructive effects that October 17 had on physical bodies, but leaves the viewer uncertain about what to do with this troubling information; *La Seine était rouge*, however, proposes a more future-directed approach that writes October 17 back into history while educating future generations on the mistakes of the past. In their different takes on the same event, each of these representations of past violence demonstrates the subjective nature of memory, history, and truth. Before moving to a more comprehensive analysis of Haneke's film and Sebbar's novel, I will now sketch out a brief summary of the events of October 17, 1961, grounding my intervention in human rights discourse.

By late 1961, French relinquishment of Algeria seemed almost a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, the last months prior to Algerian independence saw an increase in attacks and bombings in both North African and in the *métropole*. As historian Benjamin Stora points out, three massacres took place in Paris and Algiers between October 1961 and March 1962 (92). On October 5, Paris Police Chief Maurice Papon (who had previously served as prefect of the Constantine *département* in Algeria) announced the introduction of a curfew that forbade Algerians from being out of their homes between 8:00 pm and 4:30 am: "Il est conseillé de la façon la plus pressante aux travailleurs algériens de s'abstenir de circuler la nuit dans les rues de Paris et de la banlieue parisienne, et plus particulièrement entre 20h et 4h30 du matin" (Stora, 94). While the *couvre-feu* targeted "Algerian Muslim workers," "French Muslims," and "French Muslims of Algeria," the new law in effect became a form of racial profiling, as any individual who *appeared* Algerian was subject to arrest if found in the streets at night. Moroccans and Tunisians were heavily targeted, but there are also accounts of Europeans, including "French French" (as opposed to "French Algerians"), with darker complexions being stopped. Of course these targeted groups were legally French citizens, and nearly two centuries after the ratification of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, their rights as such (which had already been slowly stripped away over the course of the war) were undeniably violated with the curfew's establishment and the subsequent strict limitations of movement.

Hannah Arendt's seminal work on the twentieth-century failure of "human rights" appears especially pertinent here. While I am not sure that we could draw an exact parallel between the context for Arendt's concept of "refugee" and the contemporary status of Algerians, there are, nevertheless, parallels to be observed. As Ayten Gündoğdu writes:

Arendt's resignification of "statelessness" allows us to come to an awareness of various categories of people such as the undocumented migrants, asylum-seekers, or even naturalized and birthright citizens whose status is precarious because of the ethnic or racial identifiers that the dominant majorities attach to them. "Statelessness" understood in its broad sense also allows us to grasp "denaturalization" as a real possibility (as suggested by Arendt's term "potential statelessness") even in liberal democracies whose legitimacy relies on human rights. (6-7)

Algerians, by virtue of their precarious status at this historical moment, fell into the category of "statelessness." Their loss of citizenship resulted in a loss of humanity that

paradoxically deprived them of rights. In her article “The Anti-Human: Man and Citizen Before the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” Susan Maslan commented: “For Arendt, the tragic irony of human rights is that when one loses one’s status as a citizen—a process that often entails a loss of fixed residence, a loss of community, a loss of occupation or profession, a loss of one’s place within a known social structure—one ceases to be human” (362). Indeed, with the instatement of the curfew, Algerians risked losing all these things and, with/because of these deprivations, they were metaphorically and literally (although not exactly legally) confronted with the most significant loss of all, that of citizenship. It is also worth noting that many Algerians arrested during and after the October 17, 1961 protest were sent back to Algeria, the land that France was trying so desperately to hold onto. This “repatriement immédiat” (Stora, 100), as it was termed, becomes rather ironic and prompts the question: how can one be repatriated from France to Algeria when Algeria is French?

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt states: “The point is that a complete condition of rightlessness was created before the right to live was challenged” (296). Having been deprived of the benefits of French citizenship, many Algerians found their right to life also threatened (particularly on October 17). Maslan comments: “For it is all those ways in which one’s life is qualified, Arendt argues, all those products of human creating or artifice, that lend human life its humanity. When the individual is reduced to mere humanity, to the mere fact of birth, of biological or, to use Arendt’s term, animal existence, he or she is no longer perceptibly human and risks extermination” (362). In having their rights slowly stripped away, Algerians were indeed seen less and less as “human” and more and more as “animal” – “*raton*,” for example, became a favorite pejorative to refer to North Africans – but this animalism also conveniently served as a justification for less-than-equal treatment. In the words of a fictional police officer in *La Seine était rouge*: “C’est comme des rats... C’est de la vermine, il faut les écraser, ces rats...” (102). And as Maslan’s Arendtian formulation points out, it was this process of dehumanization that made Algerians seem more disposable, that justified their murder (often without discrimination of age or gender as seen in the October massacre).

Returning to the events of October 17 – the French branch of the FLN called for a peaceful demonstration to protest the curfew, and between 30,000 and 40,000 Algerian men, women, and children marched in the streets of central Paris<sup>99</sup> to assert their place as French citizens deserving of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Regarding choice of venue, organizer Ali Haroun later stated, “Pourquoi sur les grands boulevards? Parce que les Parisiens, les étrangers, les journalistes, seraient là” (Levine, 83). The FLN’s more lofty goal was to attract domestic and international attention to the injustices that the French government was imposing on its own citizens, while simultaneously claiming physical space and, as Dawn Fulton writes, “redrawing colonial cartographies” (32). In a rewriting

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<sup>99</sup> As Joshua Cole points out, one of the difficulties in relating the event nearly 50 years later is that it is not easy to discern whether it was about “Algerians demanding independence or French people demanding the rights to public space in the city or simply frightened laborers and their families with few options, caught between the fear of punishment by the FLN for not participating and the fear of certain violence from a police force that had been unhinged by attacks on its members” (134).

of visibility through movement from the Parisian periphery to the city center, the protesters attempted to rewrite citizenship.

What began as a peaceful protest (by all accounts, the demonstrators were unarmed and the FLN demanded this) soon turned into a bloody massacre; many police officers, all of whom were armed with sticks capable of cracking open a skull in one swift swing, were encouraged to take matters into their own hands and violently handle their personal “grievances” with Algerians.<sup>100</sup> As cultural historian and literary scholar Kristin Ross details, officers were exonerated in advance of any “police excesses.” Police Chief Maurice Papon gave *carte blanche* to his force, saying: “Settle your affairs with the Algerians yourselves. Whatever happens, you’re covered... Even if the Algerians are not armed, you should think of them always as armed” (Ross 2002, 43). The level of violence enacted by police on that night is shocking: 11,538 individuals were arrested (totaling 14,000 by the end of the week), and many of those were rounded up and transported to large stadiums like the Palais des sports.<sup>101</sup> Others were deported back to Algeria and held in detention camps until the end of the war, while many were taken back to police headquarters where they were beaten to death in the station’s courtyard. Numerous unconscious demonstrators were infamously thrown into the Seine River, hands tied, and left to drown.<sup>102</sup> In an event that, by FLN estimates, resulted in 200 Algerians being killed, 400 disappearing, and 2,300 being injured, not one police officer was ever charged with a crime. (Whether this was in line with the general amnesty of prosecution for war crimes or was a cover-up by Papon is not clear.) Police reports only acknowledged three deaths, two caused by police agents in self-defense and the other due to cardiac arrest. Years later, an officer involved in the massacre would continue the public denial, stating: “Des noyades d’Algériens? Ça n’a jamais existé. Mais, peut-être voulez-vous parler de ce que nous appelions les ‘courettes’? Quand on poursuivait les meneurs du FLN sur les quais de Paris, il arrivait que ceux-ci se lancent à la Seine en tentant de fuir” (Tristan, 101).

Despite the FLN’s goal of emphasizing the violence and prejudices being directed at Algerians, the protest and massacre were virtually “forgotten” on an individual and collective level. Even Algerians seemed to have a strong desire to forget this day. As one of the main characters in Leïla Sebbar’s *La Seine était rouge* states: “Qui veut entendre parler de cette histoire, de ce jour du 17 octobre 1961? Qui? Ni les Français, ni les Algériens, ni

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<sup>100</sup> It is worth keeping in mind that many officers of this police force were those that collaborated with the Gestapo during the Vichy regime. Paris Police Chief Maurice Papon who ordered the attacks would later be convicted for crimes against humanity for his role in the deportation of 1500+ French Jews during World War II. In a bizarre trial, October 17<sup>th</sup> scholar Jean-Luc Einaudi would be called to the stand to speak against Papon (who would later unsuccessfully sue Einaudi for libel).

<sup>101</sup> Police made sure, however, that all prisoners were vacated by October 20, when a Ray Charles concert was scheduled to take place at the Palais. On the day of the concert, *France-Soir* wrote: “Ray Charles pourra chanter ce soir. Après le passage des services de désinfection, le Palais des sports a retrouvé son aspect habituel” (Tristan, 91).

<sup>102</sup> See Jean-Luc Einaudi for testimonies of seeing people being thrown into the Seine, 172-4 and 192-4.

les immigrés, ni les nationaux...” (117).<sup>103</sup> Yet this forgetting added another layer of violence to the event. Returning to Halbwachs, literary scholar Jonathan Crewe aptly summarizes one of the significant implications we can draw from his theory of collective memory: “the alienation or exclusion of any individual from social memory will be tantamount to both social extinction and deprivation of identity” (75).

As I stated at the outset of this chapter, literature and film play an especially significant role in rescuing events like October 1961 from oblivion. Crewe elaborates on this relationship between literature and memory:

...literature—and consequently literary history—remains curiously underestimated in prevailing discourses of cultural memory. That deficiency, as I see it, remains evident even when, for example, emergent genres of testimonial fiction and postcolonial writing are recognized as important bearers and construction sites of cultural memory. In many instances, the cultural memories inscribed in these genres are at odds with official history... Insofar as communal fictionalizing, idealizing, and monumentalizing impulses significantly determine cultural memory, efforts to maintain a strict separation between literature and cultural memory will surely be unproductive as well as ineffectual (76).

As Crewe states, literature (and film) cannot be ignored, nor their influence understated, for artistic production is in a unique position to challenge “official history.” These emergent sites of counter-memory can fill in the blanks in this postcolonial epoch and give voice to the silenced.

While leaving conspicuously absent many official and unofficial historical details of October 1961, Michael Haneke’s *Caché* responds to this call by highlighting the pervasive divergence of (de)colonial memory in the minds of today’s neo-liberal subject. While Algeria is largely unnamed in *Caché*, the bloody massacre of colonial oppression and collective responsibility haunts the narrative, demonstrating the far-reaching effects of the episode many decades later. Garnering three awards at the Cannes Film Festival and starring two of the biggest stars in French cinema, Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche, the film was marketed as “a psychological thriller about a TV talk show host and his wife who are terrorized by surveillance videos of their private life.”<sup>104</sup> According to director Haneke, though, the film is ultimately about a more universal concern: “the repression of historical memory and its relationship to the repression of personal memories” (Porton, 50). It is also concerned with the role that the media, and images in general, play in our “decision” to remember or to forget the past and confront the present and future. A growing saturation of new media and entertainment aids and abets a diversion of attention from those other images – bloody battles, dead bodies, and incomprehensible violence – that could potentially threaten sanity and stability. Therefore, throughout this chapter I

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<sup>103</sup> Flora, another main character in the novel, similarly states: “...toutes ces histoires (...) je t’assure, elles n’intéresseront plus personne, seulement les vieux, les vieilles qui les auront vécues et encore, combien veulent les oublier, les oublient.” (27)

<sup>104</sup> DVD backcover to American edition. Also included are quotes like: “Like Hitchcock, only creepier” and “Suspense has a new master.”

will be examining the complex ways in which certain images – real, fantasized, mediated, recuperated, remembered, and forgotten – complicate a postcolonial “safe space” wherein anything unpleasant is kept out of the frame of viewing, a notion which Haneke ultimately subverts through his film’s multiple uses of the device of *mise-en-abyme*. Additionally, I will scrutinize *Caché*’s commentary on the relationship between construction and destruction of postcolonial masculinities and the presence of physical and symbolic violence in our neo-colonial, post-9/11 global society. The film also allows for reflection on the complex ways in which safety has been negotiated and renegotiated in the postcolonial period where, with borders shifting and identities alternately reifying and collapsing, discussions of “security” are ubiquitous. As the film demonstrates, in the face of postcolonial diversity and difference, there is a growing tendency to retreat behind walls (both literal and figurative) in hopes of protecting national identity, physical safety, domestic privacy, and bourgeois masculinity.

*Caché* tells the story of the Laurents, a Parisian bourgeois family who one day receives a package on their doorstep containing a mysterious videotape that shows the comings and goings outside their home, which, with its gates and walls, had up until now physically and symbolically protected the safety of their privileged life.<sup>105</sup>



Similar monitoring tapes soon arrive, and are followed by childlike drawings depicting bloody scenes of violence. Confusion turns into fear as Georges, Anne, and their adolescent son Pierrot’s previously insular lives are threatened by the inexplicable surveillance they are now under, collapsing the borders of private and the public that they have worked so hard to maintain. Through a series of disquieting images in the form of nightmares, daydreams, and flashbacks, we learn that the tapes and drawings are, in some way, tied to Georges’ past. George himself experiences a growing uneasiness as he silently comes to realize that he is perhaps being forced to pay for a past wrong committed at a young age. New tapes, and some detective work on the part of both Georges and Anne,

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<sup>105</sup> The inverse to this idea, as Ezra and Sillars state, is that they are “prisoners of their own making” (218).

lead him to a Parisian housing project where, as he secretly suspected, he finds Majid, an Algerian man of a similar age. Georges hides the meeting from his wife, telling her that the apartment is unoccupied—a lie which will soon be uncovered when the family (and eventually Georges' boss) receive a videotape of the heated conversation between Georges and Majid. (Georges was of course oblivious to its recording, as Majid may have been, but its existence and circulation highlight the “threat” that the Laurents are constantly under.) Thanks to this initial encounter, as well as a conversation that Georges has with his bed-ridden mother (who has blocked out any memory of this personal and historical moment), we learn that Majid was the son of an Algerian couple who worked for Georges' family decades earlier when the two were young boys. A brief yet explanatory allusion to the Algerian War is made half-way through the film, when Georges finally tells his wife how he knows this man that he believes is behind the tapes: “His parents worked for us. Dad liked them. I guess they were good workers. In October '61, the FLN called all Algerians to a demonstration in Paris. October 17, 1961. Enough said. Papon. The police massacre. They drowned about 200 Arabs in the Seine. Including Majid's parents most likely. They never came back.”

Now more than forty years later, this disturbing event (or rather the consequences of it) has come back to torment Georges. Literature and film scholar Max Silverman has writes: “What returns to haunt Georges are his, and his country's, stereotyped fears and fantasies of the Algerian buried deep within the French national psyche whose most profoundly repressed moment is 17 October 1961, when these fears spilled over into naked aggression by French forces of law and order on the streets of Paris” (246). Through filmic devices, subtle statements, and half-truths, we are slowly able to reconstruct Georges and Majid's relationship: following the disappearance of Majid's family, Georges' parents decided to adopt the boy, but six-year old Georges suddenly feels threatened by this new familial arrangement and resolves to have Majid sent away by telling his parents that he saw him coughing up blood. When the threat of tuberculosis doesn't work, he decides to trick Majid into getting himself banished by telling him to cut off the head of the family's rooster, a request that the young Majid obeys. Georges then runs to his parents to tell them what Majid has done, saying that he now feels scared and threatened by the boy. The plan works and Majid is sent away to an orphanage, a decision that will dramatically alter his life path, denying him certain forms of cultural capital and resulting in him now living in the sparse apartment in which Georges meets him these many years later.

The receipt of more tapes and the false suspicion that Majid has kidnapped his teenage son ultimately leads Georges back to his apartment four times. Each time he tries to intimidate Majid, uttering statements like “If you try to interfere with my life, scare my family or damage me, you'll regret it, I swear.” But then Georges receives a phone call from Majid requesting him to come over. On this fifth visit, Majid states: “I called you because I wanted you to be present,” upon which he slits his own throat and dies right in front of Georges' eyes. Majid's body, previously relegated to an invisible sphere for it threatened young Georges' familial security (and postcolonial French national “security”), now becomes hyper-visible through his shocking suicide. Georges is literally touched by

this body's blood as it spurts across the room,<sup>106</sup> echoing the sanguinary fear that the young Georges had manipulated in order to get Majid expelled from his biological family circle. The scene's camera angle (one we have come to associate with the surveillance tapes) suggests that the encounter has been taped, creating an indelible memory for anyone who might see the tape, as well as evidence that Georges may have something to hide.

Even though *Caché* has been marketed as a thriller and whodunit, the source of the surveillance tapes and harassing drawings will never be revealed. Because we never know who is behind the terrorizing and none of the available candidates seems particularly plausible (both Majid and his son deny any participation and we are sympathetically led to believe them), the images seem to take on a life of their own, functioning apart from any human control or volition. As Asbjørn Grønstad insightfully states, *Caché's* images "behave as if they were animated beings with drives, desires, and demands of their own" (135). Indeed, the goal of the film is not to uncover the culprit, as the tapes actually serve to force Georges to look at his past actions and their ramifications.<sup>107</sup> Through constant lies, evasions, and statements like "I am not responsible," "I am not to blame," "You'll never give me a bad conscience," "What do you want me to do, apologize?", Georges refuses to take responsibility for the violence he enacted previously, while also seeming condemned to repeat those violent enactments in revised form. His inability to confront the meaning of the past also proves allegorical of the far-reaching individual and collective repercussions of France's colonial project and its subsequent repudiation.

Violence appears in complex and multiple forms throughout *Caché*. Physical violence and bloody images (both real and imaginary) pervade. The cartoonish depictions of violence and murder sent to the Laurents; the flashbacks (though potentially imagined or fantasized) of young Majid slitting the rooster's throat, and then, as an adult, doing the same to himself; and, of course, the evocation of October 17, 1961, all point to the physical violence of that historical moment and to its violent sequelae. Although the 1961 massacre resulted in the deaths of hundreds and, as the film demonstrates, forever altered and even destroyed the lives of many more, violence also functions on another overlapping, level. The surveillance and discipline of bodies that "disobey," question, or violate proscribed norms combined with the hiding, forgetting, and not remembering of this historical moment substantiates the myriad ways in which violence is symbolically incorporated in and reenacted on and by the bodies and minds of postcolonial subjects.

Like physical violence, symbolic violence takes various forms throughout the film. For example, the act of sending Majid away and thereby denying him access to resources like education is a prime example of the infliction of a non-physical violence. Following sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, I define symbolic violence and domination as the unconscious process of imposing modes of thought, perception, and behavior by the dominant group or class on to dominated individuals or groups. As Bourdieu states, "The effect of symbolic domination (sexual, ethnic, linguistic, etc.) is exerted (...) below the level of the

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<sup>106</sup> The blood spatter becomes iconic and will be used to "sell" the movie as it is figured on posters and DVDs.

<sup>107</sup> Libby Saxton suggests that they might also serve to force us to look at our own past actions and their ramifications: "Indeed the search for rational explanations for the tapes may distract us from the political and ethical questions the film poses to us as spectators" (13).

decisions of the conscious mind and the controls of the will” (2000, 170-171). Symbolic violence is intricately linked to the reproduction of social and cultural categories, and its modus operandi involves those with more symbolic capital wielding power over and shaping the thoughts, actions, and even bodies of those with less capital. In Bourdieu’s framework, symbolic violence especially perpetuates itself through the school system, the mode of social and cultural reproduction *par excellence* from which Majid had been excluded. Structures like education and other knowledge-ordering practices that encourage social and cultural reproduction and inheritance are able to function invisibly, allowing the perpetuation of forms of social and cultural domination. Therefore, the act of sending Majid away and depriving him of an education and other advantages associated with a mainstream bourgeois life denies him a future that could have been as privileged as that of his almost adoptive brother, Georges.

In *Caché*, Georges’ parents attempt to subvert the dominant mode of cultural and social reproduction by adopting the young Algerian boy and providing him with a French bourgeois education. But this is not allowed to happen, and it is Georges who, at the age of six, ensures that the status quo is maintained. The young Georges makes use of perceived dangers (namely violence, sickness, and terror) in order to block his parent’s attempt at undoing a certain kind of colonial violence. Even these many decades later, Georges continues to engage in symbolic violence against Majid: instead of regarding Majid’s suicide as “the mirror-image of his own (and his nation’s) racialized projection” (Silverman, 246), Georges interprets the act as childish, almost immature, revenge for Georges’ past actions. By not accepting his own role, he again transforms an act of physical violence (albeit self-directed) into symbolic violence (other-directed), further highlighting the ways in which these two forms of violence are overlapping and often mutually constitutive.

We are witness to another form of symbolic violence in the film’s present-day narrative. The surveillance under which this seemingly in-control bourgeois family finds itself also represents a form of violence, as it seems to violate the security and privacy that they believe to be an inherent right by virtue of their social class (even though they actually go to lengths to construct their privacy and their security, as is proven by their professions and possessions, including their gated home). But the sort of “violence” perpetrated against the Laurent family is subversive. The surveilling lens, formerly an instrument of power used by the French army during the war to regulate and control,<sup>108</sup> is turned on the “colonizer”; the “colonized,” previously the object of surveillance, takes this method into their own hands. In both form and content, the mysterious tapes subvert the desire to look away, as they literally and symbolically force Georges to look at himself (and to look at himself being looked at). The panoptic gaze has shifted, resulting in the normally dominant group’s inability to locate the source of the “terrorizing” gaze.

As some film scholars have pointed out, despite the Laurents’ feeling of being violated, it is Georges who can be read as the real figure of violence in the film (Macallan and Plain). Indeed, Georges can be read as a symbol for France and its inability to come

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<sup>108</sup> As Michael Rothberg notes, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of surveillance in the early colonial era. As his 1847 “Rapport sur l’Algérie” demonstrates, “French colonialism in Algeria was driven by the desire to ‘put under surveillance’ the Algerian people, so as to ‘penetrate their techniques, their beliefs, and... the secret to governing them’” (2009, 358).

to terms with (or even to confront at all) its colonial and potentially racist past *and* present. Of course this issue is not unique to France. As director Haneke has pointed out, with only minor adjustments, this story could have taken place anywhere, as every nation has its secrets: “I don’t want my film to be seen as specifically about a French problem. It seems to me that, in every country, there are dark corners—dark stains where questions of collective guilt become important” (Porton 2005, 50).

On three separate occasions Georges is, in fact, urged to confront his racisms, prejudices, and privileged status as French, upper-class, heterosexual, white male, each time by a figure “representative” of France’s colonial past. And invariably, Georges becomes angry and attempts to shift blame from himself to the other. This notion of “looking away” and avoiding blame is highlighted in an early scene when Georges and Anne go to the police to try to do something about the intrusion of privacy and “campaign of terror” that is being waged against them through the videotapes and unsolicited mail. (Incidentally, they have no luck, as no real threat is perceived by the police who seem only to recognize physical and not symbolic violence: they will not intervene until someone is bodily harmed.) As they are leaving the police station, they begin to cross the street without looking and are nearly hit by a bicyclist, who happens to be black. Georges immediately becomes furious, accusing him of carelessly almost running into them. The man looks directly at Georges who lectures him on his seeming disregard for others and their space and boundaries. Despite the fact that Georges and Anne were the ones in the wrong, they take all of public space as their own private space. Their very ways of being and moving in their bodies, as well as the expectation that others will defer to them, constitute another form of inherited symbolic capital, a sign of their privilege. Bourdieu writes: “...being the result of the inscription of a relation of domination into the body, dispositions are... the recognition of the magical frontier between the dominant and the dominated, which the magic of symbolic power only serves to trigger off” (2000, 169). In this scenario, however, the cyclist (and figure of the previously dominated) questions this “symbolic power,” prompting Georges and Anne to quickly turn away, seemingly unable to look him in the eyes, despite the fact that they are the ones doing the accusing.



The confrontation soon escalates, and the cyclist eggs Georges on: “Yell at me, yell at me some more.” His words and bodily disposition speak to the changing power dynamic, impelling us to question the unstated privilege that Georges and Anne unconsciously carry with them in their everyday movement through the world. In the face of this newly empowered postcolonial subject, Georges can only walk away, unable to confront either the underlying power structures and their history, or the simple fact that in the present circumstance he is in the wrong. In their literal looking away, Georges and Anne echo a larger turning away: they become metaphoric of France’s inability to confront the repercussions of its imperial past, including struggles around citizenship, immigration and racial and ethnic diversity.<sup>109</sup>

Another scene in which Georges must face his privilege and prejudices occurs in his first meeting with Majid. Majid, seemingly calm and unfazed at seeing his almost-brother forty years after being doubly-orphaned, encourages Georges, who is standing over him and harshly accusing him of terrorization, to “threaten me.” This will be echoed in one of the final scenes, where Majid’s son (the film’s only main character who is not named) arrives at the television station where Georges works and confronts him. His father having just committed suicide, he wants to know “what it feels like to have a man’s life on his conscience.” In order to protect his self-cultivated image of honest and liberal television commentator and literary critic, Georges attempts to hide this encounter from his colleagues so escapes to the bathroom where Majid’s son follows him. (Georges actually states: “I won’t argue with you in public!”) When Georges becomes aggressive and increasingly attempts to escape blame for Majid’s suicide, his son demands violence, yelling “Go ahead, hit me!” Georges responds by quickly turning his back to Majid’s son, then states: “You’re sick. You’re as sick as your father!”

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<sup>109</sup> This image of Georges and Anne with the cyclist, like that of the blood spatter, has become iconic for the film. After a quick online search of posters and other marketing materials, one notices, however, that in some versions, the cyclist actually disappears. The decontextualized image now consists of only Georges and Anne looking off in the distance. Georges’ stance now takes on a multivalency. Is he pointing or gesturing? Could his outstretched hand even be interpreted as welcoming or inviting? Underlying this choice of imagery is the continued relegation of the uncomfortable colonial past and postcolonial present.



The scene is, in fact, one of the most violent in the entire film, but not because of Majid's son's words or presence – Georges's refusal to take responsibility for the effects that one's actions have on other individuals (and future generations) proves to be the ultimate violation. In his attempt to make Georges look at the past, Majid's son explicitly draws attention to the violence that is done both on an individual- and on a state-level in denying certain groups access to resources and forms of real and symbolic capital. Because the educational system perpetuates forms of social and cultural domination, it is not surprising that it is education that Majid's son alludes to as the way in which Georges destroyed his father's life: "You deprived my father of a good education. The orphanage teaches hatred not politeness." In this emphasis on "politeness," the film emphasizes how when the dominated cease to accept tacitly certain limits, they will be perceived as impolite and disruptive for doing so, a notion that inevitably harks back to France's self-described *mission civilisatrice*: the idea that it sought to "civilize" and "educate" the colonized.<sup>110</sup>

Violence is further replayed symbolically through acts of forgetting, thereby allowing blindness and avoidance of responsibility to be perpetuated. Ezra and Sillars state, "the film both participates in and dramatizes the mediation between collective agency and the sets of structures in which individuals live, operate and turn a blind eye to what is going on around them. This blindness manifests itself in the midst of the post-spectacular, media saturated society of surveillance, in which 'onlookers' routinely overlook their own responsibility as witnesses" (219-220). Whether carelessly walking across the street or even playing a role in the death of another individual, the scenes analyzed above demonstrate that, even in the face of the racialized other's challenges, Georges, as privileged, white, French male, is an apathetic figure in his refusal to take responsibility for his actions. Repeatedly, his way of coping is to take a sleeping pill (a 'cachet'), pull the curtains, and go to bed so as to shut himself in a dark room. But, as the film's penultimate scene reveals, even in sleep, Georges cannot flee. His nightmares of a

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<sup>110</sup> See Anne Donadey: "Education is a privileged means of creating civic consciousness in young citizens, and the teaching one receives in school, especially where history is concerned, still retains the central purpose of reinforcing a sense of national identity" (2001, 5-6).

young Majid being forcefully dragged from his home and taken off to the orphanage invade his only hope of a safe space.

While not immediately evident, underlying the film's discussion of violence, memory, and responsibility is a less developed commentary on postcolonial gender constructs. While female characters are largely absent from the film, the limited deployment of women is, however, significant. The only notable female presence is that of Anne, who is kept in the dark and, because of her husband's lies, unable to see the "truth" and react accordingly. Georges' mother also makes a brief appearance, but, as previously stated, she barely even remembers the young Majid and does not comprehend why Georges would want to think about him these many years later. While the actual status of women is certainly more complex than the film suggests, the limited portrayal of female characters presents women as guardians of a "safe space" (not so different from an idealized domestic space) wherein unpleasant postcolonial repercussions are brushed under the carpet. While Anne claims to want answers to the bizarre surveillance, she still serves to draw attention to the other mode of being where ignorance could be bliss. Georges' mother, on the other hand, actively pushes out traces of France's colonial past (and perhaps even more violently than did Georges, who at least struggles on some level with the haunting past). Not only did she have Majid forcibly removed from the family home, she has erased all memories of the boy who almost became her adopted son. Haneke's restricted representations of female characters do, however, force us to ask: how can women "see" in the postcolonial state? Is there a symbolic violence going on in the domestic space, beyond the camera?

While the film speaks in a glancing way to the roles of women in the postcolonial moment, it is even more interested in commenting on contemporary masculinities. Georges' fragile masculinity is threatened in his encounters with the postcolonial other. His body defies mastery, and his sighs, twitches, heavy breathing, night sweats, and general corporeal tension betray the faultlines running through a dominant masculine presence. A colonial masculinity<sup>111</sup> that aimed to control, surveil, and discipline colonized bodies fails in the postcolonial epoch where the previously colonized can subvert the instruments of oppression, terrorizing the terrorizer and asserting agency through control of one's own body, even if that comes in the form of self-annihilation. Georges' only recourse to protect some semblance of masculine mastery becomes an active refusal of any awareness of his role in the perpetuation of symbolic violence.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Following Hema Chari, I take "colonial masculinity" to not refer to "a single pattern of control but to specific practices of male domination" (282).

<sup>112</sup> It is worth noting that *Caché* opened weeks before the infamous riots of November 2005 (to which I will return in the dissertation's Conclusion) and were framed as a distinctly "masculine" (specifically adolescent masculinity) response to racism and oppression. While girls (and women) most certainly participated in some capacity, their role has been overlooked (similar to how North African female revolutionaries are now forgotten). Like *Caché*, the social unrest is presented as originating in male bodies – violent acts like car burnings and bombings could only be seen as the work of men, just as the women in *Caché* are in the dark or on the sidelines (consciously or not), ironically being forced to assert postcolonial agency in acts like purposeful forgetting. The coincidental timing of the film's opening also forces us to

This denial appears in many different forms throughout the film, and in some we cannot help but see our own complicity reflected back at us. For example, late in the film Haneke presents a scene wherein Georges and Anne are concerned about their absent son Pierrot's whereabouts. They begin to anticipate the worst: that he has been abducted by Majid.<sup>113</sup> Meanwhile, they are completely unaware of the drama unfolding on the TV screen in front of them: images from the Iraq War (and more specifically, the Abu Ghraib torture scandal) followed by coverage of the Israeli occupation.



The scene is strategically shot with the television in between them, suggesting that images of present reality are constantly mediating and interfering in our interpersonal interactions, even if we choose to ignore or turn away from them. The *mise-en-abyme* forces the viewer to reflect on how domestic/interior crises effectively occlude the international/exterior ones. When these temporally and geographically distant realities become unpleasant, we can simply distract ourselves with other images (including books, which, in the scene, physically and symbolically surround Georges and Anne who both work in the publishing world). As Michael Rothberg interprets, “Via *mise-en-scène*, *Caché* suggests that postcolonial attempts to address unmastered colonial history find themselves perforce tied to various contemporary reassertions of empire as well as heterogeneous emanations of the past. The film also implies that that history will remain unmastered so long as it remains ‘unseen’ and therefore outside the circuits of memory and responsibility” (284).

*Caché* presents an allegory for both French colonial history and present American domestic and international policy. Through visual and narrative juxtaposition of Iraq and Algeria, the film suggests spectator guilt and compels a process of self-reflection. The

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realize that neither France nor any “first-world” nation and/or former colonial empire can escape the repercussions of oppressive actions, much like Georges can never shut out his past.

<sup>113</sup> It turns out that he was merely at a friend's house. Pierrot, perhaps representative of the next generation, does not stay in the “safe space” (not dissimilar from Majid's son who shows up at Georges' workplace demanding answers).

mutilated bodies recall that of Majid, who, like those on the television, is a casualty of colonial oppression. Just as Georges is forced to look at himself, so, by virtue of watching this film, are we forced to look at ourselves. How are we complicit? How might we be just as invested in protecting a safe space where far-off wars are unthreatening to our comfortable existences and where media serves as entertainment, not as menacing surveillance?

*Caché* presents no resolution. As the title suggests, its own meaning is hidden. (And it is doubly “hidden” from a U.S.-based non-French speaking viewer, since the film was marketed using the French title and not its English translation of “hidden.”<sup>114</sup>) The final scene quickly subverts any outstanding expectation we might have had of figuring out who was behind the tapes. On the front steps of a school, the mark of symbolic capital, we see Majid’s son walk up to Georges’ son and begin talking, as if they know each other. (Up until this moment, we had no reason to believe that they had any relationship.) Perhaps most significantly is that the scene is shot with a still camera and has the marks of another surveillance tape. *Caché* itself seems to evolve into the videos that it includes, forcing reflection on the status of media and symbolic/virtual terrorism, while also obliging us to wonder what more is to come.

While this image could be interpreted as hope for future generations working together (whether to combat injustices, or to terrorize their elders), it also suggests that the story has just begun. We have probably only learned a small portion of Georges’ lies and questionable actions. But the film offers no hope that Georges will take responsibility, and we, as viewers, are not given any direction as to how we might ourselves begin to accept responsibility for our own participation in various inflictions of symbolic violence. *Caché* is, however, successful in provoking us, on both an individual and a collective level, to ask ourselves the following questions: How do we remember? What do we forget? And how do we resist using media to obscure physical and symbolic violence of a postcolonial past and present? The answers to these questions are in fact hidden, and perhaps, yet to be determined.

### *La Seine était rouge : le 17 octobre 1961*

*While the concept of repression suggests that we forget,  
it is also based on the idea that memory retrieval is not only possible but healing.  
Yet recovered memory demands that we ask,  
What is an experience that is not remembered?  
What is a memory that doesn't need an experience?*  
-- Marita STURKEN

These questions, posed by cultural studies scholar Marita Sturken, are, in essence, the complex conundrums to which Leila Sebbar attempts to respond in *La Seine était rouge: le 17 octobre 1961* (1999). Whereas Haneke uncovers repression’s disastrous implications,

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<sup>114</sup> The film was marketed with the title *Hidden* in the UK and Australia.

Sebbar points to the productive and therapeutic nature of remembering memories repressed by both individuals and the nation. Like *Caché*, the novel presents the consequences that the 1961 massacre would have on a diverse group of individuals, in this case a trio of young individuals – one French, one Algerian, and one Beur – coming to terms with the event 35 years later. The backgrounds of these characters allows the novel to represent the complex identity politics at play in both 1960s and present-day France.

As Anne Donadey writes, Sebbar's literary output focuses largely on "the lives of Beur teenagers born during or after the war, who negotiate a space for themselves between two territories, languages, and cultures" (2001, xix-xx). *La Seine était rouge* is no exception, as its opening lines make clear. The first chapter is titled "Nanterre. Amel. Octobre 1996," and it begins: "Sa mère ne lui a rien dit, ni la mère de sa mère. Elles se voient souvent, la mère et la fille, elles bavardent en français, en arabe, et Amel ne comprend pas tout" (13). Having been born and educated in France, sixteen-year-old Amel struggles to understand her French-Algerian identity and literally lacks a common language with her mother and grandmother who use Arabic to keep her from the harsh truths of their pasts: "Si elle demandait ce qu'elles se disent dans l'autre langue, 'la langue du pays' dit Lalla, sa grand-mère lui répondrait, comme chaque fois: 'Des secrets, ma fille, des secrets, ce que tu ne dois pas savoir, ce qui doit être caché, ce que tu apprendras, un jour quand il faudra...'" (13). As the words of Amel's grandmother, Lalla, make clear (and as we witnessed in the first half of this chapter), some things must be kept "hidden". In *Caché*, it is the forsaken and the repressed that is hidden, whereas in this text, as the above quotation signals, "ce qui doit être caché" is that which is remembered and eventually revealed.

Like *Caché*, Sebbar's text takes October 17, 1961, as its originary moment in order to explore the lasting repercussions that the event would have not only on its participants and witnesses, but on subsequent generations as well. Despite the growing number of literary works of the past twenty-five years that reference the massacre, Sebbar's novel is the first to take the event as its primary narrative and central storyline (Donadey 2001, 29). Sebbar begins the text with a dedication to the victims of October 1961 and to those who have come before her in the struggle to resurrect memories of the massacre, including Didier Daeninckx, Jean-Luc Einaudi, Elie Kagan, Nacer Kettane, Mehdi Lallaoui, François Maspéro, Georges Mattei, Jacques Panijel, Paulette Péju, and Anne Tristan. In dedicating the novel to such courageous writers, historians, journalists, and photographers, Sebbar immediately reveals the text to be informed by the collective contribution to reconstitutions of October 17. This accumulation of voices will thread through the entire novel, calling to mind Halbwachian notions of memory as collective and socially constructed. Indeed, the table of contents (with its list of characters, locations, and dates) serves as a physical and temporal map of the journey that the novel's protagonists will eventually embark on, while also foregrounding the various testimonies included in the text. From FLN militant to Paris police officer, from French *porteur de valises* to *baraki*, from nearly-drowned victim to good Samaritan, from those involved in the protest to those attempting to reconstruct events hidden from them, Sebbar's multi-vocal text lays bare the alliances forged and the conflicts waged between nationalist groups and political factions. Perhaps more importantly, this literary strategy points to the fact that one voice will never be enough to communicate the event, its legacy, and corresponding conflicting emotions. Anne Donadey reads the multitude of perspectives "across generations, genders, political

persuasions, and ethnic origins” (2001, 29) as lending itself to an anamnestic pursuit: “anamnesis becomes a way of resisting the occlusions created by official history, of recovering the traces of another, submerged history in order to create a counter-memory” (1999, 112).

This notion of counter-memory is at the heart of Sebbar’s project. Published by Éditions Thierry Magnier, a collection specializing in literature for children and young adults, *La Seine était rouge* serves as a pedagogical tool, filling in the pervasive blanks left by the official history books. We may even read the novel as a preemptive antidote to the turning away from the realities of the French-Algerian War (and colonialism in general) that came in the form of the short-lived 2005 law (“Loi no. 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés”) that would have forcibly included instruction of the positive effects of French colonization in the country’s general education curriculum.<sup>115</sup> In educating a young population about events left out of the official record, *La Seine* makes an important contribution to a longstanding political and historical debate about nationality, memory, and memorialization. Its aim is to rewrite or to supplement the fallible official historical record to include diverse and necessarily conflicting perspectives.

While foregrounding the notion of inter-generational “feminine” communication, the novel begins with an evocation of that which is hidden, left out, not understood, and not translated. Just as *Caché* forced us to ask questions about communication between parents and children, *La Seine* also speaks to the difficulties in accurately recounting “the truth” to the next generation.<sup>116</sup> While in *Caché* George and his son Pierrot seem to lack a common social language (their interactions are filled with silences), in *La Seine* Amel’s Francophone monolingualism prevents her from understanding what her mother, Noria, and grandmother, Lalla, say while speaking in Arabic. Having spent her entire life in France, Amel does not readily comprehend “la langue du pays” (a phrase which positions ‘home’ as elsewhere, outside of their current location); meanwhile, Amel’s female elders seem to profit from her limited comprehension of their native language, an ignorance that protects her from “*la vérité*” that will, however, inevitably come with adulthood: “Pourquoi

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<sup>115</sup> Article 4 states: “Les programmes de recherche universitaire accordent à l’histoire de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, la place qu’elle mérite. Les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l’histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l’armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit.”

<sup>116</sup> *Caché* ends with the sons of the colonizer and colonized speaking (although we are not privy to what they say), pointing to the possibility that the next generation might be the only hope for a common understanding. Similarly, in *La Seine* the only real conversations (and debates) happen amongst the young generation that was born into a postcolonial era. Despite the fact that both works signal an inability to communicate with one’s children, there is, however, communication between cultures (between Pierrot and Majid’s son, and between Amel and Louis). In his study of transmission of memory in *Caché* and *La Seine*, Michael Rothberg writes that both texts draw attention to “the tense, if not broken, bonds between parents and children” and explore “those bonds in the name of an ethical project of remembrance” (296-7).

la vérité c'est le malheur?... Vous parlez en arabe maman et toi, pour que je reste une petite fille qui ne sait pas la langue du pays, la langue de sa mère et de son père?" (13-14). Furthermore, Amel cannot understand what could be so bad as to "tout cacher," especially in light of the fact that she lives in a multi-media world infused with images of "malheur": "On le voit tous les jours à la télé, on le lit, je le lis dans les livres..." to which her grandmother responds, "Dans les livres, à la télé... C'est pas pareil ce que je te dirai un jour, au jour dit, et ta mère aussi..." (15). In spite of her grandmother's fears, this day when Amel begins to learn the truth will, however, soon arrive. But it is neither her grandmother or mother who will impart these hidden truths. Thanks to Louis, a twenty-three-year-old amateur documentarian making a film about October 17, 1961, and Omer, a twenty-seven-year-old disillusioned and pessimistic Algerian journalist reluctantly living in exile in Paris after receiving death-threats in Algeria, Amel will discover what happened.

Whereas *Caché* presented women as willfully engaging in amnesia (as seen in the figure of Georges' mother who has virtually forgotten the boy she almost adopted), *La Seine* presents women as the transmitters and protectors of memory. But in contrast to Haneke's lack of women, women play an integral role in Sebbar's narrative. For example, the protagonists are all united through previous generations of women who fought for Algerian independence. Louis and Omer are the respective sons of Flora and Mina, close friends of Amel's mother and grandmother, all of whom played a role in, and were profoundly affected by, the events of October 1961. Louis' mother, Flora, for example, was a former *porteuse de valises* and spent years in prison for her pro-Algerian independence work. (Louis' interest in making a film about the role of women in the October protest (particularly the *porteuses de valises*) and Omer's risky decision to publish photos and text of "Algériennes dans la guerre" (55) demonstrate a continued investment by this next generation in uncovering women's voices.) Sebbar's text also points to another way in which women were left out of official history. While the October 17 protest receives attention these many decades later, there was another, less-discussed protest three days later: la Manifestation des femmes. On October 20, 1961, Algerian women took to the streets to protest in front of prisons (including La Santé that will later appear in the novel) where their husbands, sons, and brothers were held. While Sebbar refers to the oft-forgotten protest, there continues to be little attention paid to this protest in which 513 women and 113 children were arrested.<sup>117</sup>

Thanks to Louis' film, in which he has captured images of the protest and recorded testimonies of its participants, Amel begins to learn some of the secrets that have been kept from her. For his part, Louis too has been kept in the dark about his parents' anti-colonial engagement, actions that ultimately resulted in his mother's arrest and his father going into hiding. But these many years later, they, like Amel's elders, are silent about their participation. His mother, Flora, for example, never wants to respond to his questions, saying it is in the past, that there isn't even a "*vérité*" to it: "On aura oublié, ce sera flou, approximatif, sans intérêt, je t'assure... Demande à ton père, tu verras" (26). After all, people want to forget these stories: "combien veulent les oublier, les oublient"

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<sup>117</sup> Stora, 97-98. But this is virtually the only information that Stora provides on this manifestation. Anne Tristan also mentions it briefly, although her figures seem to suggest that 1000 women and 550 children were arrested.

(26?).<sup>118</sup> As Benjamin Stora writes, “Ils sont nombreux, les drames et les déchirements de ces années de guerre que les deux sociétés, française et algérienne, veulent manifestement oublier, et cherchent à refouler” (9).

As Ernest Renan famously declared: “L’oubli, et je dirai même l’erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la création d’une nation.”<sup>119</sup> In “Narratives of Recovery: Repressed Memory as Cultural Memory,” Marita Sturken agrees on the salutary effects of forgetting: “Recovered memory designates subjectivities that are constituted through forgetting as much as through remembering. Forgetting is not a threat to subjectivity but rather a highly constitutive element of identity; indeed it is a primary means through which subjectivity is shaped and produced” (243). Another character in *La Seine* echoes: “J’ai oublié, au cours des années. Il faut travailler, on travaille, on oublie” (103). Yet, despite the fact that forgetting can be necessary to collective and individual identity formation, when forgetting leaves certain groups out of the historical record, justifications for abuses arise. While this collective amnesia causes Louis to make his film, he nevertheless continues to encounter resistance from his mother who questions his reasons for wanting to make a film about a story that is not his own.<sup>120</sup> Louis responds: “Justement je veux le faire, je le ferai parce que c’est pas mon histoire. 1954-1962. Le 17 octobre 1961, à Paris et vous dans cette guerre coloniale...” (26-27). Ultimately, Sebbar’s text demonstrates that October 17, 1961, is the story of every French and Algerian citizen, regardless of their participation (or lack thereof) in the protest and/or massacre. Even though Amel, Louis, and Omer, the novel’s main characters, were born years later, they each learn that the war was, and continues to be, *their* story too.

Upon watching the film, Amel finally discovers the secrets kept from her – the events of October 17, 1961, and the role that her family played in them (her grandfather, a high-level member of the FLN, was one of the organizers of the manifestation). She is surprised to learn that Louis has convinced her mother to share with him her testimony (presented in six segments throughout the novel, each in chapters entitled “La mère”) in which she details her memories of the massacre from her childhood eyes. After watching Louis’ film “plusieurs fois,” Amel is moved to respond to what she has learned and brings Omer with her on a journey across Paris to retrace the protest, starting at Nanterre, the site of the bidonvilles, to Concorde, la Défense, and the Pont Saint-Michel, where numerous Algerians were massacred and thrown into the Seine. Their retracing of the protest is reminiscent of the urban redrawing that occurred in the actual event, as tens of thousands of Algerians previously relegated to shantytowns outside the periphery descended on Paris to reclaim public space, space that was rightfully theirs as French citizens. In their physical and temporal journey, Amel and Omer will not only follow the October 17 route, but will leave subversive commemorative traces to mark the protesters’ actions and lives.

As discussed in the previous two chapters, World War II occupies a significant place in France’s twentieth-century memory landscape. In *Muriel*’s montage of WWII commemorative plaques and memorials, for example, Alain Resnais makes reference to

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<sup>118</sup> Both sides participated in this forgetting. See Donadey, 4-5 and Stora, 122, 141-4, 151, 162, 304.

<sup>119</sup> *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* (1882, 89).

<sup>120</sup> “Tu as vraiment besoin de faire ce film? C’est pas ton histoire...” (26).

the ease with which the Occupation and Resistance can be spoken of, while Simone de Beauvoir reveals the ways in which a postwar technocracy glorified the valiant aspects of this more distant war (in combination with idealizing a utopic future) as part of an effort to occlude the colonial present. Sebbar's text, too, responds to the commemorative obsession attached to World War II and reveals, to use Michael Rothberg's phrase, the multidirectional nature of memory. Rothberg devotes a portion of his compelling study to *La seine était rouge* (and *Caché*) and highlights the overlapping nature of history and memory in the novel as it tackles a number of historical events, not only the French-Algerian War and World War II, but also Indochina, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, May '68, and the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s.<sup>121</sup> As Rothberg writes, "The pedagogical impetus of the narrative goes beyond even those multidirectional evocations; ultimately, it concerns itself with the very structures of collective memory" (298).

Like other texts that invoke the massacre (particularly Daeninckx's *Meurtres pour mémoire*<sup>122</sup>), Sebbar addresses the imbrications and parallels between the violence of October 1961 and Nazi oppressions of two decades earlier. As Amel and Omer's journey will reveal, it is nearly impossible to walk around Paris, without seeing commemorations of World War II everywhere. These physical markers to the French Resistance, including monuments, plaques, and statues, are tools of political, national, and rhetorical communication, playing a role in the construction of a national identity. They serve to shore up a sense of national solidarity and patriotism while, often artistically, reminding passers-by to remember the dead and those who fought for freedom. In his recent study of national memory cultures in France and Germany, Peter Carrier draws the distinction between empirical memory and inherited memory in relation to memorials:

...it is precisely the heuristic value of museums, exhibitions, or memorials that facilitates broad social participation in the formation and understanding of memory cultures.... [W]hile the individual memory of the Second World War derives from witnesses' direct experiences of events and their subsequent interpretations, public memory of this event is inherited entirely indirectly via symbolic and rhetorical communication, and may therefore be acquired by all those who relate to the history of the Second World War via images, symbols, words and resulting exchanges of ideas about these media and the events to which they refer. (209)

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<sup>121</sup> Rothberg's reading of *La Seine* and of *Caché* differs from my own in that his overall approach to investigating literary and cinematic representations of October 17, 1961, is imbued with a desire to expose the event as intimately tied to the Holocaust. He writes: "By paying particular attention to the massacre's connections to the Nazi genocide, as well as to more recent returns of extreme, racially inflected violence, one can see that the Holocaust has played a crucial role in the response to the 1961 events *from the very start*" (228).

<sup>122</sup> See Donadey, "Anamnesis and National Reconciliation: Re-Membering October 17, 1961" in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France* for a discussion of how Daeninckx's text, while purporting to be, in part, about October 17, actually obscures the massacre with WWII memories: "While Daeninckx's novel deals with the erasure of French memory, it has little to say about immigrant memory and thus unwittingly participates in the continued silencing of the October 1961 massacre" (2001, 50).

While many have no memories of the memorialized conflicts, everyone gains the possibility of access to these pasts through public memorials, or *lieux de mémoire*, subsequently allowing for dialogue about memory and nationality. James Young similarly regards WWII monuments as catalysts for public discussion of memory and states that they provoke “the activity of remembering together” (7), “mak[ing] visible the activity of memory” (14). However, the proliferation of monuments can have another effect. As Panivong Norindr argues, France’s ubiquitous war memorials paradoxically lead to “selective remembering and historical amnesia.” In his study of *tirailleurs indigènes*, he discovers that there are very few memorials dedicated to these colonial subjects, and the ones that exist do not name the victims who “remain anonymous, at the same time remembered and forgotten” (Donadey 1999, 113).

*La Seine* calls attention to this discordance, ultimately demonstrating that the sort of social memory inherent to monuments is always linked to social forgetting. While memories of World War II and the French-Algerian War undoubtedly overlap – the figure of Maurice Papon, for example, highlights the imbrication of these historical moments<sup>123</sup> – commemorations to the former far outweigh those to the latter. Indeed, memorializing WWII often comes at a cost. Returning to Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory, a corollary may be proposed, “Every act of recall entails an act of oblivion” (Crewe, 75). In celebrating the Resistance, it was not only Vichy that was forgotten, we might say, but Algeria as well.<sup>124</sup>

It is this other diversion of memory (or, as Donadey terms it, the “Algeria syndrome”) to which Amel and Omer actively respond by creating their own memorials to October 17, “counter-monuments” that literally rewrite history: “brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being” (Young 1992, 271). Their first intervention occurs outside of Louis’ apartment, which is situated next to the ironically named La Santé prison, a site of multidirectional memory where members of both the WWII Resistance and the Algerian resistance were incarcerated. They come upon a white marble plaque that reads:

« EN CETTE PRISON  
LE 11 NOVEMBRE 1940  
FURENT INCARCÉRÉS  
DES LYCÉENS ET DES ÉTUDIANTS

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<sup>123</sup> Sebbar’s novel uses Papon to explicitly make the connection between WWII and Algeria (specifically October 17, 1961): “Une manifestation pacifique pour protester contre le couvre-feu imposé aux seuls Algériens, par le préfet de Paris, Papon... celui dont on parle et qui sera jugé pour avoir envoyé des Juifs dans les camps nazis, on parle beaucoup, c’est le même” (42).

<sup>124</sup> It is worth noting that another event, that of the Charonne Métro Massacre in which nine French men and women were killed by Paris police during an anti-war protest on February 8, 1962, would also cover over memories of October 1961. Anne Tristan states that in burying the victims of the Charonne massacre, so too did the Left bury guilt over lack of engagement after the October massacre of four months earlier: “Toute la gauche est réunie pour enterrer ceux qu’elle appelle les martyrs de la liberté. Et peut-être, certains enterrent-ils aussi la culpabilisant souvenir de leur passivité, au lendemain du 17 octobre” (132).

QUI À L'APPEL DU GÉNÉRAL DE GAULLE  
SE DRESSÈRENT LES PREMIERS  
CONTRE L'OCCUPANT »

On the spur of the moment, Omer takes out red spray paint and alters the plaque to read:

« 1954 – 1962  
DANS CETTE PRISON  
FURENT GUILLOTINÉS  
DES RÉSISTANTS ALGÉRIENS  
QUI SE DRESSÈRENT  
CONTRE L'OCCUPANT FRANÇAIS »

While the syntactical and thematic similarities between the original plaque and this historically additive defacement are obvious, Omer's graffiti (itself traditionally seen as a subversive tool for the disenfranchised) invokes a number of differences from the earlier memorial. Although the actors in both commemorations are named as "résistants," their identities are different. The actions of the Algerian *résistants* in the amended plaque appeared to be self-directed, while in the original it appears that General Charles de Gaulle's call to resist functioned as motivation to the *lycéens* and *étudiants* (implied French) to protest the German Occupation on the anniversary of the end of WWI.<sup>125</sup> In the original, the abuser is understood to be the Nazis, while in Omer's version, the occupant is very clearly named as French, even if the "occupation" is actually going on in Paris. Another obvious difference is the intentional choice to change the preposition "en" to "dans". While "en" follows the formerly proper language of memorialization, the more colloquial use of "dans" here marks the writer as younger, while also signaling that acceptable ways of memorializing past events (here symbolized by language) is changing. Of course the most conspicuous change, however, is the change in verb's past participle: "incarcérés" becomes "guillotiné." The level of violence is further underscored by the temporal duration in Omer's syntactical reversing of time and location. His choice to begin the new memorial with "1954 – 1962" contrasts the extended violence of an eight-year war with the oppressive abuses of one day. Finally, the original plaque's naming of November 11 serves to point out the absences of other less remembered days, particularly that which this novel treats. While Armistice Day is hyper-memorialized, October 17 is not.

In addition to highlighting and accounting for the silenced (Algerian) voices, the palimpsests that Amel and Omer leave behind symbolize the palimpsestic nature of memory itself. In their rewriting, they question an idea that Marita Sturken puts forth: "by the time memory has been prodded into coherent form, its veracity is no longer under consideration" (237). In fact, the pervasive blanks of "official history" (symbolized by the

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<sup>125</sup> As a sidenote, it is worth mentioning de Gaulle's response (or lack thereof) to the October massacre. As historian Michel Winock writes, he remained strangely silent: "pour la légende du gaullisme, le silence de l'Elysée en ces jours-là est resté comme un meurtrissure" (cited in Stora, 100).

plaque) actually leave space for these amendments (although their addition would necessarily lead to a complete overhaul of the historical record).<sup>126</sup> In this way, I interpret their palimpsestic actions as *performing* a sort of cultural memory – that is, actively engaging in the reiterative and recursive process of linking the past with the present in order to heal wounds of the past while productively directing a future.

In their retracing of the October 17 protest, Amel and Omer encounter additional sites of memorial convergence. Arriving at La Défense, they cannot miss the imposing statue of Marianne, this “femme géante, debout, comme dressée face à l’ennemi, courageuse” (55), inaugurated to commemorate “le courage des Parisiens pendant le terrible siège de 1870-1” (56). A less notable fact to most is that this statue was also the meeting point for Algerians on October 17. Marianne stands at the center of the French Republic, just as the Algerian protesters stood there, asserting their place in history. Anne Tristan echoes this historical tension: “A la Défense, la statue est toujours là, à cet endroit précis où la République, en 1871, s’est défendue de l’invasion des Prussiens. Peu de monde se souvient, mais Marianne le rappelle. 1961 : la défense du pont de Neuilly est totalement oubliée. Marianne n’a jamais voulu témoigner” (63).

After meeting at the starting place of the *manifestation*, the majority of Algerian protesters took the métro to main squares in various parts of the city, including Concorde, l’Opéra, la République, Richelieu-Drouot, l’Etoile, and Bonne-Nouvelle. Upon leaving the stations, protesters were met with extreme police violence. We are reminded of the video testimony of Amel’s mother, Noria, who details her memories: “Sur le quai du métro, des hommes, des Algériens, sont parqués, les mains sur la tête, c’est une rafle, on va les conduire dans des centres de détention, comme mon père au palais des Sports. Jusque devant un hôtel fameux, je l’ai jamais vu, Flora m’a dit son nom, ça ressemble à ‘Grillon’... les flics ont raflé les Algériens” (86). The “hôtel fameux,” and the infamous site of police brutality, to which Noria refers is the Hôtel de Crillon. Thanks to Amel and Omer, there now exists a memorial to the attacked protesters:

« ICI DES ALGÉRIENS ONT ÉTÉ MATRAQUÉS  
SAUVAGEMENT PAR LA POLICE DU PRÉFET PAPON  
LE 17 OCTOBRE 1961 »

Continuing their trek, they come to the Saint-Michel fountain, but Omer’s positioning hides a plaque laid there, and Amel can only read an incomplete version:

« A LA MÉMOIRE  
DES SOLDATS DES FORCES FRANÇAISES  
DE L’INTÉRIEUR ET DES HABITANTS DES V ET  
ARRONDISSEMENTS QUI SUR CES LIEUX  
LA MORT EN COMBATTANT »

It is significant that it is an Algerian immigrant body that hides this memorial to the past, not allowing Amel to read the full text from her vantage point. No longer does he

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<sup>126</sup> This is also reminiscent of the “double chronologie” found in Benjamin Stora’s *La gangrène et l’oubli* in which the histories of France and Algeria are presented side by side.

need to write anonymously over plaques to World War II – his corporeal presence asserts itself, demanding to be seen.

Towards the end of the novel, Louis comes upon another amended WWII memorial at the Pont Saint-Michel, surely left by Omer and Amel:

**« ICI DES ALGÉRIENS SONT TOMBÉS  
POUR L'INDÉPENDANCE DE L'ALGÉRIE  
LE 17 OCTOBRE 1961 »**

It is reminiscent of the infamous graffiti at the Pont Saint-Michel left years after the October 1961 massacre: “ICI ON NOIE LES ALGERIENS”. A significant difference between the actual and fictional memorials left at the Pont Saint-Michel, however, is that the former’s use of the present tense implied that the drowning of Algerians would continue, while Omer and Amel’s memorial commemorates the dead and places it in the past.



But Amel and Omer’s new memorial also calls to mind the future, that is, what would come after the publication of Sebbar’s novel. On October 21, 2000, at a Paris conference entitled “17 et 18 octobre 1961: massacres d’Algériens sur ordonnance?”, Pierre Bourdieu spoke directly to many of the issues related to the 1961 massacre and to the subsequent national amnesia, an appropriate call with which I believe Sebbar would concur: “J’ai maintes fois souhaité que la honte d’avoir été le témoin impuissant d’une violence d’État haineuse et organisée puisse se transformer en honte collective. Je voudrais aujourd’hui que le souvenir des crimes monstrueux du 17 octobre 1961, sorte de concentré de toutes les horreurs de la guerre d’Algérie, soit inscrit sur une stèle, en un haut lieu de toutes les villes de France, et aussi, à côté du portrait du président de la République, dans tous les édifices publics, mairies, commissariats, palais de Justice, écoles, à titre de mise en garde

solennelle contre toute rechute dans la barbarie raciste” (Le Cour Grandmaison 2001, 253).

In what may be seen as a step toward the future proposed by Bourdieu, one year later, on October 17, 2001, Mayor of Paris Bertrand Delanoë placed a memorial plaque on the Saint-Michel bridge.



As I alluded to earlier, the scholarship on monuments and memorials is vast and varied. While some scholars point to the necessity of creating structures to commemorate those who died in the name of national ideals like freedom and equality, others posit that the proliferation of monuments ironically produces invisibility. Leila Sebbar’s pedagogical novel calls us to reconceive the nature and function of memorials. In fact, the text itself becomes memorial, accounting for a multitude of diverse voices.<sup>127</sup> But, both literally and figuratively, Sebbar also allows for more voices to emerge – in the pervasive blanks on the pages of the novel, others may write their stories, just as Omer and Amel have added their own.

Given the fact that *La Seine était rouge* is, in many ways, a novel about the making of a documentary film about October 17<sup>th</sup> (and the consequences this film would have), I would like to end this chapter by considering how Sebbar’s novel poses questions about the relationship between memorialization and genre: How do different genres function as different forms of memorialization? How does a novel (like *La Seine*) differ from a documentary film (like the one Louis makes in the novel) or a commercial film (like

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<sup>127</sup> As Anne Donadey and others have pointed out, the novel can itself be seen as what Pierre Nora would call a *lieu de mémoire*.

*Caché*? How may these media interact and overlap to present a richer (and more accurate) detail of the historical record?

In their definitive history of documentary film, Jack Ellis and Betsy McLane describe how the etymology of “documentary” uncovers the goals of the medium: “documentary has as its root word *document*, which comes from the Latin *docere*, to teach. As late as 1800, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *documentary* meant ‘a lesson; an admonition, a warning’” (3). Documentary films teach, but, like the archaic definition suggests, they may also warn. Although we will never see Louis’ film, it seems evident in Sebbar’s novelistic presentation of his footage that, in uncovering individual stories about the October 17 massacre, his film serves as both teaching tool and warning about repeating mistakes of the past. In its self-reflexivity, a documentary film like Louis’ also “calls upon its audience to participate in historical remembering by presenting an intimate view or reality,” while “ask[ing] audiences to think about their place in the films’ meanings as well as their responsibility to the past and its interpretations” (Rabinowitz, 119).

In uniquely responding to “official history” by calling attention to what has been forgotten, documentary filmmaking has also functioned as an important political and cultural tool of memorialization for marginal communities. Film scholar Paula Rabinowitz comments: “The move toward cinematic self-determination by those denoted in the ethnographic film as ‘other,’ abused in classic Hollywood’s racist depictions of peoples of color, or excluded from ‘the news,’ grew out of the political struggles for self-determination by colonized peoples...” (126). In *La Seine*, for example, Louis films the subversive memorializing actions left by Amel and Omer, pointing to the idea that this particular genre could be more adept than others at expressing the voices and traces of those left out. Given the fact that documentary filmmaking can be done without access to inflated budgets and large film studios, the medium also necessarily becomes more accessible and egalitarian.

Louis’ documentary film is doing a particular type of work, perhaps with the same goal that Sebbar’s text itself has. However, a film necessarily serves a different purpose than does a novel, and it is important to keep in mind that Louis did not choose to write a book. One critical difference to which Sebbar’s text draws attention is the materiality of voice integral to the documentary format. Amel’s mother’s spoken narrative holds the film together, and while the novel attempts to do the same in its recurring chapters entitled “La mère” that transcribe her filmed commentary, it can never quite capture the materiality of physical, embodied presence. We are only left to imagine her voice’s tone and intonation, her emotional expression, her facial expressions, and her bodily gestures.

## **CONCLUSION**

As texts and films like *La Seine était rouge* and *Caché* make clear, the French-Algerian War continues to occupy the public consciousness some five decades later. Not only are writers and filmmakers still grappling with the traces that the war has left on the minds and bodies of both direct participants and later generations, there remain judicial questions about actions taken during the war. De Gaulle's 1962 amnesty, for example, would serve to cover over the past as it prevented the prosecution of any criminal acts performed during the French-Algerian War. But now that access to war archives is being relaxed, France may no longer be able to avoid a critical self-assessment of its handling of the conflict. This recent re-opening of old war wounds has, however, yielded a new set of legal and ethical quagmires in which competing memories battle for a place in the historical record.

The Paul Aussaresses case to which I made reference in Chapter Three is a prime example of the continuing legal, historical, and ethical ramifications of actions performed by French soldiers during the war. In his 2001 memoir *Services spéciaux: Algérie 1955-1957*, General Aussaresses, right-hand man to General Massu and one of the chief architects of the Battle of Algiers, stated that the practice of torture during the war was government-backed, even admitting to executing 24 Algerians under orders from the government of Guy Mollet. In subsequent interviews with *Le Monde*, he would, however, defend torture, stating that it was a legitimate means of acquiring information and a necessary evil in wartime. (In an interview with *60 Minutes*, he also advocated its use in dealing with Al-Qaeda terrorists today.<sup>128</sup>) Despite his blatant admission of committing crimes that would have violated the Geneva Conventions, Aussaresses could not be prosecuted because of the federally dictated amnesty enacted forty years earlier. Aussaresses was, nevertheless, brought to court by human rights groups on different charges. He was not tried because he committed crimes against humanity, but rather because he spoke about those very same actions. His trial became about his justification of torture, not the fact that he actually tortured and engaged in war crimes. In 2003, he was ultimately condemned as an apologist for war crimes, fined 7,500 Euros, and stripped of his army rank and Légion d'honneur.

The Aussaresses case points to the fact that the war continues to have an impact today, while also potentially serving as proof that France is reevaluating its role in Algeria's struggle for independence. Other revelations of French actions during the war also coincided with the Aussaresses case. On June 20, 2000, *Le Monde* published as its cover story the testimony of Louissette Ighilahriz, an Algerian woman who, at the age of twenty, became a member of the FLN. Her story of entering the revolution was not unlike that of Djamila Boupacha, nor was her treatment after being arrested by the French military. Soon after joining the fight, Ighilahriz was captured in an ambush in 1957, brought to a hospital and injected with Pentothal, or truth serum, and then physically tortured for three months:

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<sup>128</sup> It is worth noting that, after leaving Algeria, Aussaresses would go to the United States (Fort Bragg and Fort Benning) to train American special forces in counter-insurgency strategies and psychological warfare, including interrogation and torture.

J'étais allongée nue, toujours nue. Ils pouvaient venir une, deux ou trois fois par jour. Dès que j'entendais le bruit de leurs bottes dans le couloir, je me mettais à trembler. Ensuite, le temps devenait interminable. Les minutes me paraissaient des heures, et les heures des jours. Le plus dur, c'est de tenir les premiers jours, de s'habituer à la douleur. Après, on se détache mentalement, un peu comme si le corps se mettait à flotter. (Beaugé 2001a, 1)

She named General Massu and others as her torturers, stating: "Ce n'était pas des êtres humains. J'ai souvent hurlé...: 'Vous n'êtes pas un homme si vous ne m'achevez pas!'" Although Massu did not remember this particular woman, he admitted to torture. He confirmed in an interview with *Le Monde* two days after Ighilahriz's testimony was published that torture was ubiquitous during the war and, like Aussaresses, he confirmed that it was also government authorized: "le principe de la torture était accepté; cette action, assurément répréhensible, était couverte, voire ordonnée, par les autorités civiles, qui étaient parfaitement au courant" (Beaugé 2001b, 1). Countering an earlier defense of torture in his 1972 memoir *La vraie bataille d'Alger*, he went on to express regret: "la torture n'est pas indispensable en temps de guerre, on pourrait très bien s'en passer. Quand je repense à l'Algérie cela me désole. [...] On aurait pu faire autrement" (Beaugé 2001b, 1).

In 2001, Ighilahriz would publish a full account of her experience during the war, including details of her torture, in *Algérienne*. Now that restrictions on access to French-Algerian War archives are being relaxed and the war is finally being spoken about, testimonies like those of Ighilahriz (and even Aussaresses) are becoming more and more common, confirming the "long-lasting psychological (in addition to physical) scars that torture leaves in its victims" (Lazreg 2008, 162). In just the past several years, for example, an impressive number of literary texts, memoirs, and films dealing with the French-Algerian War have been published. In 2009, several novels about the war were heralded, including Laurent Mauvignier's *Des hommes*, Jean-Michel Guenassia's *Le club des incorrigibles optimistes*, Francine de Martinoir's *L'aimé de juillet*, Anouar Benmalek's *Le rapt*, and Amin Zaoui's *La chambre de la vierge impure*. Films, too, are being made about the eight-year war and events leading up to it, including *L'Ennemi intime* and *Indigènes*, both released in 2007.

I would now like to turn to an analysis of Laurent Mauvignier's *Des hommes*<sup>129</sup>, a novel that takes us up to present-day France and supports my assertion that the French-Algerian War goes on having an impact today. While centering on the current lives of former French conscripts who served in Algeria, the novel also uncovers the memory problems that the war still poses for later generations, including Mauvignier himself who was not born until five years after the war had ended. Although his father served in Algeria, he would not speak of his time there, and Mauvignier would rely on his mother's little knowledge of her husband's ordeals in order to make sense of what his father had undergone during his time in North Africa. His father would later commit suicide, and from this personal tragedy emerged *Des hommes*, as Mauvignier attempted to use writing to make sense of the war and his father's death: "Il m'a fallu des années pour me dire que,

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<sup>129</sup> *Des hommes* has been awarded several literary prizes, including the Prix Millepages (2009), the Prix Initiales (2009), the Prix des Librairies (2010), and the Prix Virilo (2009).

peut-être, le fait d'avoir participé à cette guerre et d'avoir vu ces choses avait contribué à son suicide. Il y est resté vingt-huit mois, ça n'est pas rien. J'ai entendu aussi l'histoire de types qui devenaient fous. Ça ressemble à un cliché, mais ça m'a aussi intéressé de trouver le moyen, techniquement, de dire ces clichés" (Kapriélian, 39).

Prior to *Des hommes*, his seventh novel, Mauvignier had received critical acclaim for earlier works, most notably *Dans la foule* (2006), a fictional account of the Heysel Stadium disaster in which 39 people were killed and hundreds injured during the 1985 European Cup Final. Throughout his oeuvre, he maintains an agenda of stylistic innovation, while exploring the themes of absence, loss, mourning, and the limits of language. In a 2009 interview, he stated: "Le roman, c'est l'art de formuler les questions" (Kapriélian, 41). *Des hommes*, in its enigmatic style, engages in this practice, continuously questioning the ways in which the French-Algerian War emerges decades later while also posing larger questions about what it means to live in a postwar, postcolonial epoch.

Mauvignier's multivalent title, "des hommes," itself provokes a host of questions: What does it mean to be a man? Who can be considered a man? It also suggests that despite the level of violence seen and enacted, these soldiers still remain "des hommes": "La guerre c'est toujours des salauds qui la font à des types bien... là il n'y en avait pas, c'était des hommes, c'est tout." The title also highlights the place that masculinity and the proving of manliness occupies during and after war: "Allez, venez, venez vous battre si vous êtes des hommes, montrez-vous si vous êtes des hommes" (233-4). The text also poses larger questions about humanity and what "man" is capable of, for example: "Parce que, c'est, de faire ce qu'ils ont fait, je crois pas qu'on peut le dire, qu'on puisse imaginer le dire, c'est tellement loin de tout, faire ça, et pourtant ils on fait ça, des hommes, des hommes ont fait ça, sans pitié, sans rien d'humain, des hommes ont tué à coup de hache ils ont mutilé le père, les bras, ils ont arraché les bras, et ils ont ouvert le ventre de la mere et –" (244). This same sentiment is echoed earlier in the text: "Quels sont les hommes qui peuvent faire ça. Pas des hommes qui peuvent faire ça. Et pourtant. Des hommes" (201).

The overall structure of *Des hommes* is rather rigid: told in four "acts" ("Après-midi," "Soir," "Nuit," "Matin"), the narrative, complying to standards for a tragedy, takes place over the course of twenty-four hours. Despite this clear infrastructure, the text often eludes comprehension in its "spirale de temps" (Amette 2009), as it attempts to locate the origin of troubling behavior in the present, plunging further into "la nuit" and its senseless (and enumerated) violence where, like in a dream, nothing makes sense.

The novel opens with a party for Solange, who has just retired and turned 60. The mood is light and jovial until the arrival of Bernard, Solange's 63 year-old brother, whose mere presence disrupts the celebratory atmosphere. Bernard, who now goes by "Feu-de-Bois" (a nickname that describes his horrid stench), was once a romantic young man with ambitions to start an automobile business. Years earlier, however, his life began to fall apart. After returning from his required military service in Algeria, his pent-up rage resulted in him slowly destroying his family life, eventually causing him to abandon his wife Mireille and two kids and to insult his dying sister on her deathbed. Now a clochard, he is a stigma to his small French village of La Bassée. Upon arriving at this party, he offers Solange (the only remaining family member from whom he is not estranged) a gold broche, a seemingly simple act that ignites a series of accounts of events that will take us decades earlier to the origin of Bernard's troubled existence. Solange refuses the gift, as

she (and everyone else) knows it must be stolen. Bernard could never afford such an object. Furious over this refusal, Bernard gets into an altercation with Chefraoui, a local villager of Maghreban origin, an altercation that then prompts Bernard to commit violence against this man's family. In the next section of the novel, entitled "Soir," we witness Bernard break into Chefraoui's house and terrorize his family, nearly raping his wife.

The first half of the novel is narrated by Rabut, a fellow conscript who served with Bernard in Algeria. Bernard's present behavior provokes Rabut to recall a forgotten past – the "vingt-huit mois" they spent in Algeria are the key to explaining his past, demonstrating how traces of the war remain just under the surface, threatening to emerge in violent ways. Through Rabut, we learn that Chefraoui reminds Bernard of Abdelmalik, a harki who betrayed their battalion during the war. This realization results in a host of memories flooding the text, as we begin to see possible explanations for Bernard's present violence, slowly understanding how his life spiraled out of control following his time spent as an *appelé* in Algeria.

In the first two sections of the novel, the writing is nervous and polyphonic, often difficult to follow. Unfinished sentences abound, and the text constantly moves between oral and written registers of language and between monologue and free indirect discourse, reflecting a larger hesitancy to speak coherently about a shameful past, particularly around the French-Algerian War. Although Algeria is not even mentioned until a third of the way into the novel and is often referred to as "là-bas," it is always just under the surface, occupying the space of "le non-dit." In this way, the novel's stylistic agenda speaks to many silences – governmental, historical, and personal – as it attempts to represent the language-defying nature of the war. Soldiers returning to France struggled to convey the unspeakable nature of war, to express themselves, to speak in coherent speech, while simultaneously wanting to bury shame around crimes committed during the war.

The text then moves from the growing darkness of "Soir" to pitch-black "Nuit," and in it, there is a temporal and geographic shift to Algeria, 1960. The narration becomes more lucid as an omniscient narrator takes over for Rabut. Not only are we presented with a clear portrait of the novel's principal characters fifty years earlier, we also become privy to the thoughts and feelings of Bernard and his fellow soldiers as they arrive for military duty. Their lives would change as soon as they boarded the boat that would take them across the Mediterranean: "...il [Bernard] perçoit un coup plus long et plus fort il lui semble, jusqu'au fond de son être, jusqu'à en avoir les mains moites et pour une fois croiser le regard livide d'un autre appelé qui, comme lui, comme eux, sait que dès cet instant toute sa vie sera perforée de ce coup de sirène qui annonce le départ" (129).

In the text's slow, psychoanalytical descent into the origin of Bernard's present-day behavior, we are, true to the title of this third act, plunged into "la nuit," the time of day when we dream (and have nightmares). The text seems to evolve into a film, as the next sequences, in which these young soldiers are thrust into a series of incomprehensibly violent acts, are told in cinematic detail. In the first episode, French soldiers invade an Algerian village, running and screaming "pour se donner du courage et pour faire peur" (133). They then begin to interrogate a young boy who doesn't speak French, demanding that he provide them with information on the location of rebel munitions. Even after threatening torture ("Tu ne veux pas parler? On va t'obliger à parler, tu sais qu'on peut t'obliger, tu le sais?"(138)), they learn nothing and eventually leave. However, moments later one of the soldiers returns and shoots the boy in the head. A series of acts of

unwarranted violence follows – kicking random women and children while their village burns, a lieutenant holding a baby by the neck, asking where its father is and then throwing the baby on the ground “comme un noyau qu’on recrache après l’avoir fait rouler dans sa bouche très longtemps” (142). In many ways, this section is like an endless nightmare of violence or, as Norbert Czarny terms it, “une litanie, un défilé d’horreurs, une sorte de cauchemar perpétuel.” The next line of the text typifies the level of violence French soldiers and Algerian civilians encountered everyday: “Alors on continuera jusqu’au village d’après.”

Still, there are moments of innocence amongst the violence, as when, for example, we see that at times the soldiers’ only pleasure is taking out of their wallets photos of their girlfriends or fiancées. Their naïveté is further highlighted in the general ignorance they had of this land in which they would spend more than two years of their lives: “On imagine ce qui arrive de l’autre côté du poste, derrière les grandes cuves de pétrole. On imagine la mer et les bateaux dont parfois on entend les sirènes, et, de l’autre côté encore, derrière les collines, on se dit qu’il y a l’étendue de ce pays dont on ne connaît que le nom et les idées qu’on s’en fait, idées toutes faites, de carte postale, le désert, les chameaux...” (149-150).

Following the nightmarish sequence of “Nuit,” we awake with Rabut from the memories of violence in the next and final short section of the text, “Matin.” Returning to his present-day narration, Rabut reflects on these forgotten memories while attempting to come to terms with how the war continues to mold the lives of this generation of men who served decades earlier. The novel concludes with an uncertainty about the past, present, and future:

Je voudrais voir si l’Algérie existe et si moi aussi je n’ai pas laissé autre chose que ma jeunesse, là-bas. Je voudrais voir, je ne sais pas. Je voudrais voir si l’air est aussi bleu que dans mes souvenirs... Je voudrais voir quelque chose qui n’existe pas et qu’on laisse vivre en soi, comme un rêve, un monde qui résonne et palpite, je voudrais, je ne sais pas, je n’ai jamais su, ce que je voulais, là, dans la voiture, seulement ne plus entendre le bruit des canons ni les cris, ne plus savoir l’odeur d’un corps calciné ni l’odeur de la mort – je voudrais savoir si l’on peut commencer à vivre quand on sait que c’est trop tard. (281)

Rabut’s desire to “voir” leads to a desire to “savoir” – his hope is that seeing Algeria will be the key to understanding the future (just as looking back to the past explained Bernard’s behavior). But his speech is choppy, broken up, and filled with short clauses, reminding us that he still lives in the post-Algeria epoch where language is uncertain and where violent acts often replace articulate speech. Although they have attempted to forget, these men are still haunted by the still-present past.<sup>130</sup>

In a recent interview, Laurent Mauvignier summarized one way in which the French-Algerian War is still so palpable today: “...la guerre d’Algérie n’est pas finie. Le

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<sup>130</sup> This is not unlike *Muriel’s* Bernard. In fact, we may read *Des hommes’s* Bernard as *Muriel’s* Bernard fifty years later.

Front national, c'est la guerre d'Algérie" (Kapriélian, 41). He elaborates on the legacy of racism and fierce national identity that the war has left in its wake:

Les propos qu'on entend aujourd'hui, cette espèce de racisme progressiste, l'idée qu'un Français ne peut pas être algérien – et donc qu'un Algérien ne peut pas être français –, c'est vraiment la question de départ de la guerre d'Algérie. Et on voit bien comment en France aujourd'hui cette question n'est pas réglée. Dans l'inconscient collectif, il y a quelque chose de ce rejet de l'Algérien qui continue, parce que cette question n'a jamais été pensée dans sa globalité sur les cinquante dernières années. Ça devient un refoulé. (Kapriélian, 41)

This continued rejection of the Algerian to which Mauvignier refers has come in multiple forms, many still felt today as tensions around religious freedom and employment discrimination mount. For example, France's November 2005 riots, caused by festering frustration and rage over racial profiling, high unemployment rates, and unequal representation, laid bare some of the ways in which issues of race, gender, and class continue to complicate discussions of what it means to be French. The series of riots and car burnings that occurred in many housing projects in metropolitan areas throughout France was in many ways provoked by attempts at defining (and limiting) who is "French" and who has access to the privileges conferred upon this national identity. While often portrayed as an "immigrant issue" by the media, a closer look at the riots reveals something quite different. The majority of the participants were indeed boys and young men of North and West African descent, but they were also French citizens. In fact, most were born and raised in France. (Hence, then-Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy's threat to deport those responsible for the violence became irrelevant.) Despite the incontestability of these youths' citizenship, questions of race and national (and personal) identity are at the forefront of this social and political debate. The events of November 2005 also inevitably hark back to France's colonialist past, for they were belated consequences of French colonial and postcolonial policy.

Ironically, at the heart of this "civil unrest" also lies a long tradition that resonates with Frenchness. Philip Cerny writes: "the French revolutionary tradition has captured the attention of the world, representing either a warning of the nefarious consequences of instability and chaos, or the hope that democracy might still contain an immanent potential for human liberation through participation and the transfer of real power to the people" (vii). While also acknowledging France's revolutionary tradition, Marie-Noelle Thibault offers another possibility. Referring to the effect Algeria had on future generations, particularly participants in May '68 (which itself can be viewed as a response to decolonization as much as it was a reaction to a lack of educational resources), she writes:

The Algerian War opened the eyes of a whole generation and was largely responsible for molding it. The deep horror felt at the atrocities of the colonial war led us to a simple fact: democracies are imperialist countries too. The most important feature... [was that] political action, including

support for national liberation struggles, was conceived of as a mass movement. (Ross 2002, 39)

Countering Cerny's view of democracy as liberatory, Thibault signals the underside of this seemingly egalitarian system of government, warning that democracy and imperialism are not mutually exclusive.

It is this continued tension between democracy and imperialism, between liberation and confinement, that we must be keep in mind as we uncover governmental practices like torture or forgotten historical events like October 17, 1961. We must not cease asking difficult questions of democracy and republicanism, questions that lie at the heart of the French-Algerian War, as well as subsequent mass movements like May '68 and November '05, and ultimately reveal the complexities of national identity and political subjectivity in a postcolonial twenty-first-century.

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