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Between History and Fiction: Algeria and Political Engagement in the Works of Albert Camus and Mouloud Feraoun

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Between History and Fiction: Algeria and Political Engagement in the Works of Albert Camus and Mouloud Feraoun

by

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Committee in charge:

Professor Debarati Sanyal, Chair
Professor Soraya Tlatli
Professor Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann

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Abstract

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Albert Camus (1913–1960) and Mouloud Feraoun (1913–1962) were two contemporary Francophone Algerian authors whose works display a vital attachment to their lived experience in colonial Algeria. The Algerian War of independence (1954–1962), moreover, is a crucial event in their development both as writers and as politically engaged public figures. Whereas the lived experience of a poor childhood in Algeria informs their autobiographical novels — Camus's *Le Premier Homme* (1994) and Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* (1950) — the Algerian War informed their modes of political engagement, particularly with regard to violence.

Between History and Fiction investigates the various ways in which Algeria figures in the works of Camus and Feraoun. Their autobiographical novels are analyzed with respect to existing theories on the genre of autobiography in an effort to show how the genre itself is modified in order to conform to the social, cultural, and historical circumstances of their autobiographers. This is particularly relevant in my first chapter's analysis of Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, which defies the Rousseauian autobiographical model and invites a reading that ascribes it a more collective than particular dimension. By recording the life of any Kabyle of his generation as much as his own, Feraoun's autobiographical novel helps to construct a fuller portrait of the Algerian communities in the first half of the 20th century and thus becomes historiographically important.

In my second chapter, my reading of Camus's autobiographical novel, *Le Premier Homme*, shows that the author challenges contemporaneous views of Algeria as a nation. Instead, Camus proposes a new understanding of Algeria, which I qualify as a *patrie*, and which I elaborate in terms of different forms of memory, of forgetting, and of a call to create a foundational moment for a new Algeria in the present instead of searching for one in its past history. Following this reading of *Le Premier Homme* is a discussion of Camus's role as a politically committed writer, an *écrivain engagé*. Beginning with the distinction between Camus's form of engagement and that of his

contemporaries, I challenge the widespread notion among critics that Camus was ultimately pro-colonialist for not standing up for Algerian independence. Instead, I defend his position as more closely aligned with the long tradition of the *écrivain engagé*, with his adamant opposition to indiscriminate violence, and with a different understanding of history.

In my third chapter, I look at Mouloud Feraoun's work as a form of *littérature engagée*. I begin by arguing that his novels perform a memorializing gesture by engaging characters, events, and forces in ways that record both the static and dynamic aspects of Kabyle society in colonial Algeria. I subsequently show that his work as an *écrivain engagé* culminates in the work he did in his *Journal (1955–1962)*, where he records the events of the Algerian War for most of its duration. I read the *Journal* as a form of engagement by virtue of the way in which it bears witness to events that escape immediate understanding. By looking at Feraoun's unrelenting opposition to violence, I also relate his form of engagement with the tradition of the *écrivain engagé*. Here, I bring back Albert Camus's position as a way to show that the two men see eye-to-eye on numerous historical and ethical questions, especially where Algeria is concerned.

Although this affinity between Albert Camus and Mouloud Feraoun is made more explicit in this last section, this entire dissertation is an attempt to (re)create and maintain a dialogue between these two figures. Taken together, their works complement the official history of Algeria and, furthermore, offer new avenues and paradigms toward understanding its cultural and political complexity from its independence in 1962 to the present.

To my parents, Niko & Shpresa Postoli.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme.
Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.
AC

INTRODUCTION

The dissertation that follows presents a new perspective on the memory of the French-Algerian colonial experience and of the Algerian War (1954–1962) that ended it. My perspective focuses on the literary and non-literary work of Algerian-born authors Albert Camus (1913–1960) and Mouloud Feraoun (1913–1962), and will consider them both as writers and as public intellectuals. The merits and stakes of this juxtaposition are discussed in the first section of this introduction, in which I justify it as a dialogue instead of a uniquely comparative or contrasting gesture. More importantly, I maintain throughout my work that this juxtaposition provides new insight into how the memory of colonial Algeria is represented and functions in their works, but also into how it informs — as I contend it does — their political commitment in the waning years of French colonial rule in Algeria.

The second section of the introduction provides an elaboration of the theoretical framework coming out of both seminal and more recent studies on autobiographical writing, memory, and history. These frameworks guide my analysis of their works in the ways that I articulate within the same section. The third and final section of the overview draws from theories and studies on writerly commitment (*engagement*, *écrivains engagés*) and its modalities in order to set a framework for the tradition of writerly commitment in the history of French and Francophone letters, with the ultimate objective of situating both Camus and Feraoun within, or with respect to, that tradition. Through my sustained analysis of the memory of Algeria as it figures in their works, and of how it informs questions of identity or political engagement, I have provided a better understanding of these two figures not only as significant within the domain of literary *engagement*, but also as historically and historiographically essential, through their works, for a more complete understanding of social, economic, institutional, linguistic, and ethnic dynamics in colonial Algeria.

It is in these second and third sections that I refer to the contents of my chapters, forgoing thus a conventional chapter-by-chapter overview of the dissertation. My first reason for doing so is because the chapters are always in conversation with one another, and therefore perform the kind of dialogue between Camus and Feraoun that I have attempted to recreate and problematize. My second reason for doing so is to better relate the substance of my analysis with the theoretical points that I present under each heading of the theoretical framework. This immediate correlation, I believe, remains true to the conversation of the chapters. Moreover, its application in readings of both Camus and Feraoun's work, calls attention to the crucial kinship between the two figures, at the center of which is Algeria.

I

The complementarity of the accounts of colonial Algeria that these authors represent in their respective works — Camus's French Algeria and Feraoun's Kabyle Algeria — is one of the main reasons for the juxtaposition of these two writers. The two sets of

accounts they provide are perhaps best articulated with respect to contemporaneous literary movements in colonial Algeria. Albert Camus, on the one hand, belongs to that generation and group of writers that came to be identified as *l'École d'Alger*. The *École d'Alger* came to prominence on the heels of the Algerianist movement already in existence, which supported the colonial hegemony by valorizing the colonial reality of Algeria while still maintaining European primacy.[1] The *École d'Alger* valorized instead the Mediterranean as both a site and symbol of the cultural exchanges that characterized not only its own history, but the history of Algeria in particular. If there was a European primacy associated with the movement, it was no longer the Latin model of the Algerianists, which was associated with military and economic dominance; it was rather a Greek model that relied on a history of coexistence of people and exchange of ideas.[2] A number of Albert Camus's early texts show the high esteem to which the author held this Mediterranean ideal,[3] as does the overall positive regard for the Mediterranean basin and its people that pervades his entire *œuvre*. Mouloud Feraoun's work, on the other hand, neither supports nor represent the Mediterranean ideal as a functioning model for colonial Algeria, despite its contemporaneity with Camus and *l'École d'Alger*. Unlike Camus's work, which almost exclusively depicts the French- or European-Algerian experience, Feraoun's work almost exclusively portrays the experience of a non-European population in colonial Algeria, specifically the Berberophone population of Kabylie, his native region. As subsequent discussions will show, Feraoun's novels treat the Kabyle experience not only in ways that document a collective experience, but also in ways that provide an analysis of colonial problems and furthermore invite criticism of the colonial system, albeit in a more restrained fashion than a number of his contemporaries.[4]

The literary and non-literary articulations of the experiences of these two factions of Algerian society serve not only as complements to each other, but also as supplements to other historical and literary accounts of colonial Algeria. Moreover, their authors' exclusive concern with one particular portion of the society invites questions about the (im)miscibility between these two minoritarian groups and about the interactions

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[1] For more information on the Algerianist movement and the period of the Colonial Novel that preceded it, see chapter 4, "The Politics of Polarity: The colonial Novel and the Algerianists," in Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 125–74.

[2] The context of the rise of the *École d'Alger*, its most prominent figures (particularly Gabriel Audisio and Albert Camus), along with its achievements and shortcomings are highlighted in chapters 5 ("Ithaca Revisited: The Mediterranean of the Ecole d'Alger," 175–217) and 6 ("A Dream Deferred: Staging the Colonial Conflict in the Novels of the Ecole d'Alger," 218–244), in Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria*.

[3] I am referring to the collection of short works by Camus grouped under the heading "Méditerranéennes" in Albert Camus, *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles*, ed. Roger Quilliot and Louis Faucon (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 1314–31, particularly the essay titled "La Culture indigène, la nouvelle culture méditerranéenne," 1321–1327.

[4] Feraoun's novels constitute a work that has been recognized as "documentaire et thématique, romanesque et artistique, et idéologique," in Jack Gleyze, *Mouloud Feraoun* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990), 58.

among all constitutive groups in Algeria. In the case of Camus and Feraoun, it is furthermore compounded by the congruous experiences they have as poor Algerians excluded from the agency and benefits of the colonial setting they inhabit, as well as by their education in the French system. One of my contentions is that the memory and regard they have for each particular experience informs not only the content of their works, but also their political commitment as public figures. At the same time, their different trajectories later in life alter their perspective on the colonial reality during the years of the Algerian War, leaving Camus with a view of colonial Algeria that is largely informed by memories of his experience there as a child and as a young man, and Feraoun with an opinion and stance that is *continually* informed by his first-hand experience in a divided colonial setting that had descended into the madness of mutual and vindictive violence. It is through these different experiences — lived and recounted in their autobiographical novels, as well as in later writings — that I consider their position and opinions on colonial Algeria and the Algerian War, giving a particular attention to questions of identity when looking at their autobiographical writings, and to their respective and shared view of violence when looking at their work as *écrivains engagés*.

My analysis of their literary work will be informed by the texts themselves as much as by their other writings of the time in which they discuss the themes in question. If I had to identify one specific objective for my dissertation it would, indeed, be to resume and further broaden the actual dialogue between Camus and Feraoun with the hopes of gaining a better understanding of their works and their position in the larger corpus of Francophone Algerian literature, of the Algeria that they knew and represented in them, of the Algeria that historiography portrays, of the motivations for and forms of commitment that they displayed during the years of the Algerian War, and of the challenges that each of these figures poses to existing and operative notions of the nation(-state) and of collective (national) memory, as well as to our understanding of writerly commitment in the 20th century.

As I have already stated, both authors and their work show a concern and dialogue with issues pertaining to memory, history, and commitment. Each chapter covers, in one way or another, these writers' understanding of and reaction to contemporaneous questions regarding the role of memory and history, modes of historiography, and writerly commitment in the face of historical events such as World War II, the Cold War, colonialism, and the Algerian War of independence. The remainder of this introduction provides the theoretical framework with which I will approach and consider the works of Camus and Feraoun: namely from within the domains of memory studies, of autobiographical writing, and of writerly commitment.

II

Theoretical works analyzing the relationship between history and memory show a significant congruence in that they recognize a transition from a state of memory to one of history, the beginning of which occurs at some point in the 19th century and

progresses well into the 20th century.[5] Although these works differ in how they distinguish between the terms "memory" and "history," their particular nuances conform nonetheless to the general idea that memory is related to the present-day recollection and representation of a past *lived* experience, and that history is a discipline concerned with the present-day *writing* of past events.[6] Crucial, in particular, is Pierre Nora's recognition that Western civilization has moved away from a form of existence that corresponds to the memory of the societies concerned.[7] When this occurs, "history" (*via* historiography) compensates for the loss by creating *lieux de mémoire* — sites and symbols of remembrance that become part of the historical, collective narrative of the nation. It is important to recognize, at this point, that what inevitably results from the historiographical selection of collective memories is a hierarchy that favors dominant groups and thereby their dominant collective memory.[8]

Concurrent with the transition recognized by Nora and Halbwachs, as well as with the strengthening of collective memory among European countries, is the rise of nationalism and its understanding of what constitutes a nation. Exactly what a nation is supposed to be was perhaps best summarized by Ernest Renan in a speech from 1882, where he defines it as "une conscience morale" wrought by "[u]ne grande agrégation d'hommes, saine d'esprit et chaude de cœur."[9] Renan's common "conscience morale" is contingent on the legacy of a past memory, on the present consent to live together, and on the willingness to allow that legacy to perdure.[10] As past, present,

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[5] See Maurice Halbwachs, *La Memoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), Pierre Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire : la problématique des lieux," in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), xvii–xliii, and Richard Terdiman's first chapter titled "Historicizing Memory" in his *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[6] Richard Terdiman will even identify history as having "increasingly" become, throughout the 19th century, "the discipline of memory," in "Historicizing Memory," Terdiman, *Present Past*, 31.

[7] According to Nora, what is lost is the "mémoire vraie" of a society, an item of information that is no longer necessary for the daily existence of a particular group, "Entre mémoire et histoire," xliii. Halbwachs makes more or less the same claim in *La Mémoire collective*: "C'est qu'en général l'histoire ne commence qu'au point où finit la tradition, moment où s'éteint ou se décompose la mémoire sociale," Halbwachs, *La Memoire collective*, 68.

[8] Halbwachs will claim that "La mémoire d'une société s'étend jusque-là où elle peut, c'est-à-dire jusqu'où atteint la mémoire des groupes dont elle est composée. Ce n'est point par mauvaise volonté, antipathie, répulsion ou indifférence qu'elle oublie une si grande quantité des événements et des figures anciennes. C'est que les groupes qui en gardaient le souvenir ont disparu," Halbwachs, *La Memoire collective*, 73. In the case of French history in particular, it is not difficult to see how those groups have not so much disappeared as they have been relegated to oblivion by historiographical forces operating since the early days of the hexagon, and particularly since the 19th century.

[9] Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1882), 29.

[10] "Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel. Deux choses qui, à vrai dire, n'en font qu'une constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le

and future co-inhabit the notion of nationhood, so do they inhabit history as it exists within the context of nation-building, where only memories of lived experiences that help a population coalesce around the same collective memories and sentiment of belonging obtain and retain a written form. National identity and the politics associated with it have, therefore, been closely intertwined with a careful selection of memories that has been in effect since the 19th century: on the one hand, collective memories that contribute to this identity and are to be recorded in the typical historiographical forms of the period, and on the other hand, those memories deemed unnecessary to the nation-building projects of concerned national authorities and therefore left outside of the national narrative.

This institutional and sustained project of unifying different people around monolithic narratives of a collective, national memory may have been successful in the context of hexagonal France. Its manifestation in France's colonial history as the assimilationist *mission civilisatrice*, on the other hand, is infinitely more problematic. Aside from Renan's ill-fitting model of a nation, French colonial societies also had to contend with the binary distinction between "colonizer" and "colonized," as well as with its numerous, often problematic, permutations that seldom — if ever — conformed to the reality of colonial societies and to the dynamics among their numerous inhabitants in the decades preceding decolonization. The case of the colonial history of Algeria alone is fraught with questions of identity and belonging that not only complicate, but even subvert Renan's notion of a nation.[11] From the perspective of collective memory, moreover, favoring a dominant narrative for the French colonial authorities meant defending the idea of Algeria as an integral part of France, along with France's *mission civilisatrice* and other pro-colonial narratives. From the point of view of the nascent Algerian nationalism, on the other hand, — the aim of which was Algerian independence — it meant favoring a national identity that was unquestionably Algerian, which became Muslim and Arab in an effort to conform to the existing notion of a nation as "one people." While supporting their own nation-building projects, these two opposing views not only perpetuated the binary division between "colonizer" and "colonized," but in the age of decolonization, became even more of a justification for mutual violence. More importantly, in the context of my project, they exclude from their respective narratives of national (or colonial) history particular minoritarian communities in colonial Algeria that do not support the "integral French" or "Arab-Algerian" identities.[12]

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présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs ; l'autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis," says Renan, 26.

[11] We need go no further than the history of the land of Algeria as a series of subsequent conquest by Phoenicians, Romans, Moors, Ottomans, and lastly the French; and no further than the many ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups that have inhabited it, notably Berber populations of Kabylie and their hybrid religious belief that borrows from Islam as much as from traditional maraboutism.

[12] Moula Bouaziz's and Alain Mahé's chapter "La Grande Kabylie durant la guerre d'Indépendance algérienne" in Benjamin Stora and Mohammed Harbi, eds., *La Guerre d'Algérie, 1954–2004 : la fin de l'amnésie* (Paris: R. Laffont, 2004) opens with a detailed

Albert Camus and Mouloud Feraoun belong to a generation of Algerian Francophone writers that defied this trenchant binarism, albeit in different ways. My contention in situating Camus's and Feraoun's work in the context outlined above and developed in the chapters that follow is that they are, at different periods and from different perspectives, conscious of these historicizing and institutionally sanctioned narratives of collective memory, and of the exclusions they signify for their poor and politically powerless French- (or European-) and Berber-Algerian populations, respectively. As a response to the binary division they witness during colonial times, to the impossibility for coexistence, and to the violence that that same model engenders during the Algerian War, they construct autobiographical novels that not only recount a narrative about two individuals and their respective communities in Algeria, but furthermore — and most importantly — create for them a site of memory, a *lieu de mémoire*, through literature.[13]

My first chapter looks at Mouloud Feraoun's autobiographical novel, *Le Fils du pauvre* (1950), which recounts the childhood experience of Fouroulou Menrad — an almost exact anagrammatic rendition of Mouloud Feraoun — and of his family in the village of Tizi in Kabylie. Present in this novel is the juxtaposition of the traditional Kabyle way of life and the more modern alternative provided by the French colonial system. The dynamic between the two is not overtly antagonistic, but rather portrayed as an unavoidable reality of the times, problematized primarily by negotiations, among the populace, of the opportunities and conditions that each system and way of life had to offer. This apparent lack of antagonism can, at first view, be explained by the recognized historical fact that the region of Kabylie was less resistant to French and modern influences than other parts of Algeria,[14] which *Le Fils du pauvre* primarily manifests in the form of emigration to France or primary French education in Kabylie.

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footnote that recognizes the extent to which French authorities had already established the division between Algerians of European descent and the collective grouping of other indigenous populations under the term "Algérien," 227. The same effacing gesture is evident from the other end of the conflict, particularly in light of the Arabization of Algerian culture in the hands of the FLN-led governments in post-war Algeria.

[13] The idea of literature as a site of memory is not entirely novel. Pierre Nora himself alludes to it at the very end of his introduction to *Les Lieux de mémoire*, where he claims that literature and history have been the two ways of legitimating memory (xlii). Literature as a site of cultural memory is also theorized and defended in Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction," *European Journal of English Studies* 10, no. 2 (2006): 111–15, where the authors also present three different modalities of such a relation. More recently, the possibility of — or need for — expanding the application of Nora's phrase, *lieu de mémoire*, has also been articulated by Michael Rothberg in Michael Rothberg, "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory. From Lieux de Mémoire to Nœuds de Mémoire," *Yale French Studies* 118–119 (2010): 3–12, and supported by contributors to the same issue of *Yale French Studies*.

[14] Bouaziz & Mahé indicate that Kabylie was "la région rurale d'Algérie où la culture française s'était le plus profondément diffusée," and where half of the population had a French education as early as the beginning of the 20th century; "La Grande Kabylie" in Stora and Harbi, *La Guerre d'Algérie*, 232.

As a different, more problematizing perspective in my first chapter shows, however, the colonial Kabyle society was already a site of negotiations between the old and new ways of life and of their antagonistic, often violent, interface.

A significant portion of my first chapter discusses the conventional model of autobiography as important genre theorists have defined it, particularly Philippe Lejeune, whose identification of Rousseau's *Les Confessions* as the first modern autobiography informs his definition of what an autobiography is.[15] Though later theorists cautiously concede on different points of the definition of autobiography in order to accommodate examples from the evolution of autobiographical writing, such as autofiction and autobiographical novels, it is Debra Kelly's analysis of autobiographical writings in the Maghreb that best accounts for autobiographical iterations in the Maghreb, where historical reality — i.e., colonial reality — acquires a greater importance as the importance of the individual autobiographer diminishes.[16] Recognizing both of these features as central in Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, Feraoun's debut novel in my reading undertakes an autobiographical project in order to present a portrait of Kabyle society that is as much his own as it is shared by his avatar Fouroulou Menrad, and thousands of others who live the realities of colonial life in Kabylie and, more broadly in Algeria. Feraoun successfully creates a collective narrative by artfully negotiating between the individual and collective in the contents of his book, as well as by relying in new ways of using formal and stylistic tropes to draw attention to the impossibility — if not absurdity — of creating the autobiography of a Kabyle writer. In addition to innovating within the autobiographical realm, Feraoun's mere act of writing from a uniquely Kabyle perspective also responds to the erasure that threatens Kabyle culture in the face of rising Algerian nationalism, which, as we saw above, is Arabo-centric in nature.

Like Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, Albert Camus's own autobiographical novel — the posthumous *Le Premier Homme* (1994) to which I turn my attention in my second chapter — also portrays life as a poor Algerian, but it also displays a significant concern toward the search for a father. Unlike Feraoun, Camus wrote the novel in question at a time of high tensions between the French army and the FLN, a time when all those concerned — including the author — were faced with the obligation of choosing between the two sides. As he was wont to do, Camus rejected binary representations — ideological or otherwise.[17] My initial assumption in turning to this text was that, by writing *Le Premier Homme* in the late 1950s, Camus is offering a

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[15] For Lejeune's strict definition of an autobiography, see Philippe Lejeune, *L'Autobiographie en France* (Paris: A. Colin, 1971); and Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996).

[16] See Debra Kelly, *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005).

[17] This apprehension on the part of Camus is apparent throughout his life as a public figure, but particularly in the post-war years, during which he penned a series of articles for *Combat* under the collective title "Ni Victimes, ni Bourreaux." It should be noted, however, that, despite his staunch condemnation of the violence witnessed during the Algerian War, Camus was *not* a pacifist.

typical *ni… ni…* response to the conflict, albeit in literary fashion; for what is favored in the book is a notion of what it means to be Algerian that is based on the lived experience narrated therein, and on the experience of growing up poor and far from the reins and coffers of the colonial order. The structure of the book's content, moreover — with its search for the father and its concern with portraying life in the poor neighborhoods of Algiers — performs, at a first glance, a gesture not unlike those of authorities at the national level attempting to create a collective identity based on a particular past experience to which they ascribe symbolic significance.

As my in-depth reading of *Le Premier Homme* in the second chapter shows, the book functions instead as a literary representation of the impossibility of tracing a lineage that will help define Algeria as a "nation" in the modern geopolitical sense. In this manner, Camus is markedly different from Feraoun. Whereas Feraoun's autobiographical novel comes across as a depiction of life in a Kabyle village (its critiques notwithstanding), Camus's *Le Premier Homme* makes different attempts that purport to define, redefine, and ultimately legitimize the presence in Algeria of poor French-Algerian families like that of the protagonist, Jacques Cormery. To do so, Camus begins *Le Premier Homme* with the birth of the protagonist and the attempt to portray an active father figure, which together promise provide the narrative equivalent of a promise to trace a lineage that the manuscript as it exists does not quite provide. This, as my reading shows, does not happen. The dearth of findings about the father as well as the abandoned chronology of his family — and, with it, the lineage of all *pieds-noirs* in Algeria — subvert the notion that there exists for Algeria a central national narrative on which to build an identity and a future. Instead, Camus draws from the history of pre-colonial and colonial Algeria in order to show that such a narrative for Algeria — or for his book — is not possible. In my reading of one of the chapters in *Le Premier Homme*, I suggest that Camus proposes instead a new model for Algeria, one that recognizes the present moment of the Algerian War itself as a foundational moment for a new Algeria that depends on all Algerian communities having to recognize it not as a nation, but as a *patrie*.

III

The second issue that will frame my dissertation, writerly commitment, is a recognized tradition in the history of French letters that touts figures like Voltaire, Victor Hugo, and Émile Zola, all of whom defend what Julien Benda qualifies as "valeurs suprêmes" or "principes abstraits supérieurs," namely the ideals related to *freedom* and *justice*.[18] In a significant work published in 1927 with the accusatory title *La Trahison des clercs*, Benda opposes these lofty values to what he calls "passions politiques" that began attracting writers and intellectuals toward particular political parties — of the left and right — that had more lowly goals in mind.[19] He calls this

[18] Julien Benda, *La Trahison des clercs* (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1965), 40.

[19] "[P]endant deux mille ans, l'humanité faisait le mal mais honorait le bien. [… À la fin du XIXe siècle] les clercs se mettent à faire le jeu des passions politiques," says Benda, 40–

nothing short of treason: the titular *trahison des clercs*. Benda's distinction corresponds, in one aspect, to Benoît Denis's theory of two forms of engagement: one more "universal," in which he includes most of the writers we consider as *écrivains engagés* who speak out against injustice, and the other more "situational," which is almost exclusively associated with Jean-Paul Sartre's form of commitment.[20] For better or worse, Sartre is also the dominant figure associated with writerly commitment in the 20th century, and in many regards can even be considered for his century what Voltaire and Zola were for their respective centuries. Propelled by his philosophy of atheist existentialism and its essential reliance on individual responsibility, Sartre defends the idea that literature can and should be a site of commitment prompted by the historical issues that a writer witnesses and experiences.[21]

Public condemnation of historical injustices is not new among a writer's understood responsibilities, but rather implicit in all forms of writerly commitment since the time of the Calas Affair, and especially since the time of the Dreyfus Affair.[22] In the 19th-century political struggles between Marxism, capitalism, and later imperialism and nationalism, the writers' betrayal was, as Benda claims, in favor of these causes. In the context of decolonization, especially in the case of Algeria, the focus is the future of colonialism as a system and, more precisely, the violence surrounding it, with the Algerian War being the exemplary case. Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* and Sartre's accompanying prefatory statement make a case for anti-colonial violence on the grounds that it is the only expiatory means of attaining a break from the

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[20] In Benoît Denis, *Littérature et Engagement : de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000), the author distinguishes between two definitions of engagement: "[…] la première tend à considérer la littérature engagée comme un phénomène historiquement situé, que l'on associe généralement à la figure de Jean-Paul Sartre et à l'émergence, dans l'immédiat après-guerre, d'une littérature passionnément occupée des questions politiques et sociales […] ; la seconde acception propose de l'engagement une lecture plus large et plus floue et accueille sous sa bannière une série d'écrivains, qui de Voltaire et Hugo à Zola, Péguy, Malraux ou Camus, se sont préoccupés de la vie et de l'organisation de la Cité, se sont faits les défenseurs de valeurs universelles telles que la justice et la liberté et ont, de ce fait, souvent pris le risque de s'opposer par l'écriture aux pouvoirs en place," 17. Denis's choice of terminology in defining the type of *engagement* associated with Sartre almost certainly alludes to Sartre's own work, but also to the latter's philosophy of existentialism, which reduces human experience to a series of situations and the choices that individuals make in each.

[21] For more on the main tenets of Sartrean existentialism, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Nagel, 1946). The central role of responsibility articulated in the latter is also elaborated with regard to the writer in Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Responsabilité de l'écrivain* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1998), and with regard to literature in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature ?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

[22] Pierre Bourdieu in his *Les Règles de l'art : genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992) finds a compromise between Benda's interpretation of a writer's responsibility and the political reality of the 19th century, by proposing the notion that Zola, caught between the two exigencies, forges the figure of the intellectual, 186.

inherently violent colonial system; that the violence against the colonizer during the *soleils des indépendances* was the accumulated violence endured by the colonized over decades or centuries. Although popular across many intellectual circles at the time, this notion of retributive, expiatory violence was not universally accepted. Albert Camus was one of the few public figures who, ever wary of binary stances and ideologies, did not subscribe to Fanon's and Sartre's view of the conflict. After his initial attempts for reconciliation failed, Camus made his stance public through a selection of articles, essays, and letters on Algeria published under the title *Chroniques algériennes, 1939–1958* (1958). Of note in the opening pages of *Chroniques algériennes* is the statement about the folly of violence when applied indiscriminately, as was the case from both sides in the Algerian War.[23] Even more telling is Camus's qualification of *Chroniques algériennes* as "une expérience," which he defines as the confrontation between man and situations,[24] but which could also be understood as his stance based on the lived and witnessed experience in Algeria.

Camus's family and their position in Algerian society are also evoked in the same opening statement,[25] as is his condemnation of those who call for violence from the comfort of their offices.[26] Camus is, therefore, diametrically opposed to Sartre, and instead of looking to the past violence of France as colonizer in order to justify a violent anti-colonialism, Camus chooses instead to look toward a future that will not be marred by its own violent past: "Je crois en Algérie à une politique de réparation, non à une politique d'expiation. C'est en fonction de l'avenir qu'il faut poser les problèmes, sans remâcher interminablement les fautes du passé."[27] Whereas Sartre disregards how violence harms certain principles of justice for the sake of eventual historical outcome, Camus remains, thus, more closely aligned with his characteristic refusal of the ideologies of the 20th century, as well as more attuned to the "classical" French model of commitment, by choosing not to overlook the resulting violence at the intersection of opposing ideologies. This fundamental discrepancy in the role that Camus and Sartre ascribe to violence in the negotiation between historical means and ends is often disregarded by those who have criticized Camus for not taking an unequivocal public stance on the question of the Algerian War. His complex position is nevertheless the object of many critiques, which merit a more focused response in a later work. In this dissertation, I return to Camus's mode of commitment in the third chapter, especially with regard to violence.

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[23] Camus makes this claim in a letter to a "militant algérien," Aziz Kessous, who had called for dialogue for the resolution of the conflict, to which Camus offers his "solidarité fraternelle," in his "Chroniques algériennes 1939–1958," in *Essais*, ed. Roger Quilliot and Louis Faucon (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 964.

[24] Camus, 900.

[25] Camus, 897.

[26] Camus, 892. Considering Camus's disillusionment and falling out with Sartre in 1952 after the publication of *L'Homme révolté*, and Sartre's vocal support for violent anti-colonialism, it is obvious how one might interpret the statement as directed at Sartre and other intellectuals who sided with him on the question of violence.

[27] Camus, 898.

Having been a less prominent figure, Mouloud Feraoun, on the other hand, does not appear to have faced the same pressure to take a position — at least not publicly. Similarly, there is little criticism on Feraoun and his relation with the French history of *engagement*, which makes the task of understanding his position within it even more enticing. For that reason, the focus of my third chapter is primarily on Feraoun's work as a different form of engagement either toward preserving a record of Kabyle experience — as he does in his literary works — or toward a condemnation of violence that attempts to undo 130 years of historical reality. For a clearer definition of Feraoun's position with respect to the latter, I turn to his *Journal, 1955–1962* (1962), which covers the years from 1955 until his assassination in 1962, virtually the entire duration of the Algerian War. Feraoun's *Journal* is an indispensable and unique chronicle of the conflict from within Algeria during its most violent period.[28] He begins recording events in a journal following the suggestion of his friend and fellow writer Emmanuel Roblès, with the ultimate goal of later using his recordings in a more elaborate text.[29] In this sense, Feraoun's *Journal* is as much his response to the conflict as *Chroniques algériennes* had been for Camus, with the crucial difference that Feraoun was a first-hand witness to the conflict and to the violence that defined it. The issue of violence in Feraoun's case earns close consideration because it informs his commitment not only during the years of the Algerian War, but also, as we have seen, throughout the colonial history of Algeria to which he is a witness. Although his critique of French colonial hegemony in Algeria and its systemic violence perpetrated on indigenous colonial subjects had not been absent in the works preceding the *Journal*, the analysis accompanying Feraoun's entries in the latter defines it in less ambiguous terms: by early 1956, Feraoun states in his *Journal* that the crisis is the result of the separation between European and native populations that characterized French colonial rule in Algeria, whereby the European settlers thought *they* were Algerian.[30]

As a last focus in the context of commitment, I explore the figure of the writer as a

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[28] Moula Bouaziz and Alain Mahé recognize Feraoun's *Journal* as an indispensable resource in reconstructing and documenting the events of the war in Grande Kabylie; "La Grande Kabylie," in Stora and Harbi, *La Guerre d'Algérie*, 230.

[29] Roblès states as much in his preface to the first edition of Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962), 9.

[30] Feraoun makes this statement in an open letter from February 22, 1956 addressed to the *Ligue de l'Enseignement*, which Roblès quotes in his preface to *Journal*: "J'ai pour la Kabylie, écrivait-il, une tendresse filiale que j'ai voulu exprimer dans mes livres. J'en ai donné une image sympathique mais non une image trompeuse. Que puis-je écrire à présent alors que l'angoisse me noue la gorge ? Dirai-je sa souffrance ou sa révolte ? […] Il s'agit seulement de comprendre pourquoi cette unanimité dans la rébellion, pourquoi le divorce est si brutal. La vérité c'est q'il n'y a jamais eu mariage ! Les Français sont restés à l'écart. Ils croyaient que l'Algérie, c'était eux […] Ce qu'il eût fallu pour s'aimer ? Se connaître d'abord. Un siècle durant on s'est coudoyé avec curiosité, il ne reste plus qu'à récolter cette indifférence réfléchie qui est le contraire de l'amour. […] Les comptes, c'est la reconnaissance de notre droit à vivre, de notre droit à l'insurrection et au progrès, de notre droit à être libres," Feraoun, 8–9.

witness. In the case of Camus, I do so by referring to Shoshana Felman's and Dori Laub's work on *La Peste* (1947) as an act of bearing witness in their co-authored *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. A central element of their theoretical work is the difficulty — and even impossibility — of bearing witness to traumatic events, particularly unprecedented violent events of the 20th century. In her chapter devoted to *La Peste*, Felman qualifies Camus's work as a prominent example of a new form of writing that she calls "narrative as testimony."[31] This is part of what Felman calls "literature in action," which not only records, but rethinks history in such a way that transforms it "by bearing literary witness" to a traumatic event.[32]

In my third chapter, I refer to the history of the *écrivain engagé* and to Camus's form of commitment for the purposes of situating him in the lineage of other committed writers, and of distinguishing his commitment from that of his contemporaries, particularly those who believed that violent means were necessary to bring about the end of colonialism. This sets up a natural juxtaposition with Mouloud Feraoun's form of commitment, which I address in two breaths. First, by looking at his fictional works as a collective effort to preserve a long moment in the history of his Berber community. To this end, I show that Feraoun's work displays a great sensitivity to the static and dynamic aspects of Berber culture during his lifetime, particularly in the years preceding the Algerian War. Though not overtly political relative to works of his contemporaries, I argue that his characters' particular traits and actions portray broader nuances of the colonial society at the time — nuances about differences and similarities that will undergo tremendous magnification during the war of independence.

My second perspective on Feraoun's work follows my discussion on the importance of literature as an act of bearing witness, as well as the history of the *écrivain engagé* that I trace by referring to the hexagonal tradition and figures. The central focus of this discussion is Feraoun's *Journal*, which he kept during the years of the Algerian War. It is in the form of commitment he displays in the *Journal* that Feraoun's position is most akin to that of Camus, particularly with respect to their disapproval of violence as a means to combat colonialism. Together, Feraoun and Camus display an awareness of the historical reality of the preceding 130 years of the history of Algeria that leads them to be cautious in what they advocate publicly. In distinguishing themselves from other committed writers on this issue, they come closer to reaching a missed dialogue — both between the two of them and among other actors during the Algerian War — which I believe my dissertation as a whole recreates to a degree.

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[31] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 95.

[32] Felman and Laub, 95. The traumatic event to which Felman refers in the original work is the Holocaust, but I take the notion of literary writing as bearing witness in a more general sense as related to other historical events, particularly traumatic ones.

Central in this dialogue is Algeria itself, though not Algeria as the "nation" that was invented by Algerian nationalism in the years preceding and during the Algerian War. Rather, it is Algeria as the lived experience that it was for those who worked and toiled in it, and learned to call it home or, to use Camus's preferred appellation for it, *patrie*. It is also Algeria as the site of encounters among indigenous populations and Europeans who settled there following the colonization of 1830. Although these encounters never cease to be problematic — or detrimental to its indigenous communities — they nevertheless become part of its history in ways that neither Feraoun, nor Camus desire or attempt to erase. Camus's efforts to portray Algeria as a *patrie* more than as a *nation*, and Feraoun's efforts to bring nuance in the face of erasure from intolerant binary distinctions amount to a joint effort to fashion a new Algeria that recognizes its troubled history and resolves to build before it destroys.

CHAPTER ONE

Defying the limits of autobiography: Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* as a collective record of Kabylie and its inhabitants

« Nous sommes voisins pour le paradis et non pour la contrariété. »
Mouloud Feraoun, *Le Fils du pauvre*

« …vous n'avez pas à nous ignorer…. »
Mouloud Feraoun, *Lettres à ses amis*

I. The book

The task of working on Mouloud Feraoun's first novel, the unambiguously autobiographical *Le Fils du pauvre*, is at once daunting and rewarding. Daunting because of the paucity of the existing critical corpus, which leaves the critic having to shoulder greater responsibility; rewarding because it allows the same critic to unfold, perhaps for the first time, the depth, nuance, and overall richness of its contents. First published in 1950 by Les Cahiers du Nouvel Humanisme, *Le Fils du pauvre* was the culmination of the author's intermittent work between 1939 and 1948. After earning its author the Grand Prix Littéraire de la Ville d'Alger on the year following its publication, and after the intervention of Emmanuel Roblès — a close friend of the author and a successful Algerian-born author in his own right — the book was published in a second edition in 1952 by the Éditions du Seuil. This is the version of *Le Fils du pauvre* that most readers know. One notable and consequential detail about this publication is the omission of its original third part covering the years of the Second World War, as well as an epilogue to the novel, both of which have been since published in separate collections. Except for the very first edition by Les Cahiers du Nouvel Humanisme, there is only one other French edition of the book that respects its integrity, published by ENAG in 2002. Because this edition is based on Feraoun's own complete manuscript and because it is more easily accessible, it is the version to which I refer and analyze in this chapter and hereafter.[33]

[33] Almost all subsequent editions of *Le Fils du pauvre* maintain the structure of the 1954 Seuil edition. The two sections omitted therein, entitled "La Guerre" and "Épilogue," were first published as an attachment to a 1976 edition of Feraoun's posthumous novel *L'Anniversaire*, and have remained thus in subsequent editions. See Mouloud Feraoun, *L'Anniversaire* (Algiers: ENAG/Éditions, 1998). The integral French edition that will be used in this dissertation is Mouloud Feraoun, *Le Fils du pauvre* (Alger: ENAG, 2002). The translator and editor of the English edition of the novel made the decision to translate and publish the first-edition version of *Le Fils du pauvre*, making this translation the second version observing the integrality of the novel. See Mouloud Feraoun, *The Poor Man's Son:*

Existing critical perspectives on the novel have been pursued along two main veins. On the one hand, the novel has been characterized by some critics as ethnographic, as a document of Kabyle life and culture — with its attachment to traditional life and values and with its struggles under a colonial system — in the interwar period. On the other hand, some critics have focused on the hardships of the life that the novel depicts and analyzed the authorial commentary surrounding them from different approaches, leading them to regard the novel as a critique of the colonial system of the period.

Generally speaking, these perspectives have yielded both valid and productive analyses of the novel, paving the way for a better understanding of the text. Upon closer scrutiny, however, one cannot help but notice that there is a tendency to consider the ethnographic aspects of *Le Fils du pauvre* as merely descriptive or too simplistic. This view further undermines any potential political import of the book when it is contrasted with contemporaneous works that stand as vocal critiques of the colonial system. More recent critics — who perhaps expect a less militant anti-colonialist work *a priori* — have made valiant efforts to educe a political dimension in different aspects of the book, leading them to conclude that *Le Fils du pauvre* is indeed political *despite* its largely ethnographic qualities.

My analysis of *Le Fils du pauvre* has certainly one foot on either of the critical veins mentioned above. What differentiates my perspective from existing criticism, however, is that it does not regard the descriptive/ethnographic qualities of the book recognized by some as contradictory or detrimental to its political critique proposed by others. Furthermore, my view posits a teleological dimension to the autobiographical novel by considering it to be analogous to an *autobiographical project*. In other words, my analysis momentarily suspends the fictional dimension of the book — its existence as a self-declared *novel*[34] — so that we may consider it simply as *an autobiography*: that is, as the result of a particular perspective and even desire, on the part of the author (now considered autobiographer), to portray an individual, familial, and, ultimately, collective experience that he deems worthy of being remembered for reasons that will be proposed. As the following sections of my chapter will show, these are widely accepted characteristics of an autobiographical project. By recognizing and analyzing them through the autobiographical approach I propose, I intend to reconcile the two dominant perspectives and ultimately argue that, when viewed as the autobiography it ostensibly is, *Le Fils du pauvre* is both descriptive and political by virtue of being historiographical.

My perspective is intended to shed light on the nominal, structural, and discursive choices that are characteristic of *Le Fils du pauvre*. As we will see, these include, but

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Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher, trans. Lucy R. McNair (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

[34] This is the case for the 1954 Seuil edition of *Le Fils du pauvre*, which is presented to the reader as a *roman*.

are not limited to, biographical details from the author's life, partition of parts and chapters, changes in style and perspective, changes in narrative voice, as well as commentary on social, cultural, or political questions. More crucially, however, my analysis will ultimately allow me to submit that *Le Fils du pauvre* functions as a literary complement to a selective national historiography (as all historiographies, arguably, are) that — for reasons that will be illuminated in the particular case of colonial Algeria — omits or neglects to consider the Berber or Kabyle experience of the period with which the novel is concerned and during which it was written.[35]

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I would like to lay the groundwork for my own analysis of Feraoun's autobiographical novel, *Le Fils du pauvre*, by briefly highlighting the existing criticism surrounding it, and this is best done by first noting the dearth of criticism on the autobiographical dimension of the book. Although the book has been hailed as unique with regard to its *autobiographical nature*, there is nevertheless little pursuit in this direction. Critics across decades have taken its autobiographical dimension for granted, merely as a descriptor more than as a new model for analysis. This is not surprising, given that the critical climate of the decades following the Algerian War favored looking at works by non-hexagonal Francophone authors through the filter of colonialism and its suffixed permutations. This, as we saw above, often meant seeking or expecting an explicit political message separately from the ethnographic — and, I would add, autobiographical — features of the book. *Le Fils du pauvre* ostensibly lacks this kind of militancy.

In addition, this filter implies an attention to the Manichean distinction between *self* and *Other* prevalent in colonialist discourse as *colonizer* and *colonized*. Consequently, it also implies efforts from interested parties to establish and enforce this dual distinction, or, conversely, to suppress it. Sociological and anthropological studies with a distinctly pro- or anti-colonial bent abound during the colonial period. In the literary field, however, there are fewer examples of such works. In the case of colonial Algeria, in particular, there is a glaring lack of literary miscegenation: that is, Algerian authors of European descent neither write about indigenous characters nor attempt to bring them out of the muted background to which they are often confined.[36]

In this context, it is, therefore, not difficult to understand the temptation, on the part

[35] The terms "Berber" and "Kabyle" are used here almost interchangeably. This ought not to suggest, however a complete conflation of the two. Whereas the latter refers to a geographic denomination, the former is ethno-linguistic. Because my analysis considers the historical-cultural experience as a whole instead of broken up in its constitutive parts, this distinction will not be observed.

[36] Most present-day readers and critics would readily cite the lack of indigenous characters in works by Algerian-born authors like Albert Camus. This is, of course, not as straightforward as some critics have thought or might continue to think. Much criticism has been written in the way of explaining the absence of indigenous characters in Camus's works in terms that go beyond the initially apparent exclusion of "the Other," of the colonized.

of critics, to want to regard works by indigenous, non-*pied-noir* Algerian authors as conscious literary attempts to overcome the absence of indigenous characters or plots in works by Algerian authors of European descent, which predate almost all works by indigenous Algerian authors.[37] This can be especially true of autobiographical works in general and of Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* in particular, which stands as one of the earliest works by an indigenous Algerian author.[38] First published in 1950, Feraoun's autobiographical novel heralds a new era of francophone literature coming out of Algeria. It comes in the wake of two chronologically sequential literary waves identified by critics today as Algerianism and the École d'Alger.[39] Together these movements span the first half of the 20th century. Moreover, they can be unequivocally characterized as *pied-noir* literary movements coming into existence after — or as a reaction to — orientalist writings about Algeria originating from authors in metropolitan France. Differing from the latter, Algerianist and École d'Alger texts are written by Algerian-born authors and recount stories from colonial Algeria, albeit from the perspective of *pied-noir* authors and protagonists alone.

The exclusion of Arab and Berber characters and experiences from these literary accounts is foremost a reflection of the *de jure* and *de facto* segregation between the indigenous and *pied-noir* populations in colonial Algeria. This exclusion also grounds the reasons for critics, like myself, to assume that this new generation of Francophone writers of Arab or Berber descent comes about as a reaction aiming to complement the Algerian experience recounted in the two literary movements that predate it. It is because of this perspective that Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* has most notably been regarded as ethnographic in both form and objective — that is, as highly descriptive in order to provide a record of the Berber experience in colonial Kabylie. Because it logically foregrounds my analysis of the book as an autobiography, it is along this vein that I would like to begin our consideration of the existing criticism on *Le Fils du*

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[37] For a more comprehensive overview and chronology of literary works during the colonial period of Algeria, see Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria.* For works by indigenous Francophone authors coming out of Algeria and the Maghreb, see Jean Déjeux's *Situation de la littérature maghrébine de langue française : approche historique, approche critique, bibliographie méthodique des œuvres maghrébines de fiction, 1920-1978* (Algiers: Office des publications universitaires, 1982) and his later work *Maghreb littératures de langue française* (Paris: Arcantère Éditions, 1993).

[38] A relatively recent thematic anthology of the North African novel even considers Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* as the work that heralded the beginning and advent of what the critic and author of the anthology calls "littérature algérienne de langue française." See, Rabah Soukehal, *Le Roman algérien de langue française : 1950-1990 : thématique* (Paris: Publisud, 2003), 13. Based on the contents of this anthology, the qualifier "algérien" in the title is referring to Algerian authors of indigenous descent — both Arab and Berber; it notably excludes *pieds-noirs*, or Algerians of European (French, Spanish, Italian, etc.) descent.

[39] For more on the Algerianists and writers associated with the École d'Alger, see chapters 4 and 6, respectively, in Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria*. More will be said about both these literary waves in later sections, where Feraoun and other indigenous Algerian writers of Francophone literature are considered and positioned in relation to them.

pauvre.

II. *Le Fils du pauvre* as ethnographic

In an anthology of the North African novel published only six years after Feraoun's death in 1962 — an untimely demise that came just days before the signing of the armistice that ended the Algerian War — and only fourteen years after the 1954 Seuil publication of *Le Fils du pauvre*, the critic Abdelkabir Khatibi discusses a number of North African novelists writing both in French and Arabic.[40] There is an exclusive focus, in Khatibi's study, on North African authors of indigenous Algerian provenance — Berber and Arab alike. His work is, furthermore, an affirmation of a clear post-independence perspective on Algerian literature, whereby more explicitly political novelists are not simply discussed in greater detail, but also favored in the tone of the critic's approach. Thus, Albert Memmi — a francophone writer of Jewish-Tunisian origin and author of the influential *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (1966) — figures as a standard against which the "political worth" of other novelists is measured.

Measured against this standard, Mouloud Feraoun's writing is subjected not only to a quicker and more superficial look in Khatibi's anthology, but is also identified, time and again, as "ethnographic" in both content and scope.[41] By contrast, other writers such as Albert Memmi, Kateb Yacine, Mohammed Dib, and Driss Chraïbi seem to belong to a category that is defined by a more prophetic — by which Khatibi means *political* — form of writing that targets, more than anything, the injustices of the colonial system in the Maghreb: "Tous ces textes, différents par le ton, comportent une caractéristique commune: ces écrivains étaient convaincus de leur mission et de leur message," states Khatibi, and continues:

> Ils entendaient exprimer le drame d'une société en crise. Bien plus, ils avaient compris qu'en incarnant une situation donnée, ils pouvaient traduire la profonde mutation apportée par la décolonisation et déboucher de cette manière sur des thèmes toujours actuels, l'aliénation et la dépersonnalisation.[42]

Feraoun's work does not obtain the same assessment by Khatibi. If a political dimension is recognized in Feraoun's writings, it is quickly dismissed as left inchoate and unexplored:

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[40] See Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin, essai*, Domaine maghrébin (Paris: F. Maspero, 1968).

[41] Once again, the premise behind this dismissal as "ethnographic" is the apparent refusal, on the part of Khatibi and other critics, to recognize the possibility of political import for works that are not explicit critiques of the colonial system or explicit defenses of indigenous people under the colonial yoke. More on this below.

[42] Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin, essai*, 11.

> Dans son dernier roman, apparaissent l'amertume et le désabusement ; le système colonial y est directement visé. *Feraoun nomme le mal, mais il ne va pas au-delà. Par prudence, par réalisme.* Ce seront d'autres écrivains qui exprimeront la révolte et feront l'analyse minutieuse des mécanismes psychologiques de l'aliénation coloniale.[43]

Khatibi's implication here is that Feraoun does not lack awareness of the problems plaguing colonial Algerian society, which leads to his implicit argument that Feraoun *chooses* not to delve deeper into the problematic and untenable nature of the colonial system: he lacks the *révolte* and *l'analyse minutieuse des mécanismes psychologiques de l'aliénation coloniale* that many of his contemporaries will adopt and elaborate. To illustrate the writer's distance from politically oriented or politically charged writing, Khatibi defers to the general nationalist perspective on Feraoun and his writing:

> Des nationalistes algériens avaient taxé Feraoun d'idéaliste puisque mettant entre parenthèses les contradictions de la situation coloniale et les conflits d'acculturation. L'écrivain maghrébin, en pratiquant une distanciation par rapport à l'événement politique risque d'être taxé d'esthète. Par contre, s'il veut servir la cause nationale en employant le roman comme moyen d'information, il risque de rater son œuvre. De toute manière, l'écrivain est condamné à avoir mauvaise conscience.[44]

This distinction between Feraoun as an "aesthete" who chooses to remain in a declarative mode (i.e., realistic, ethnographic) and other, more explicitly political, novelists conforms well to Khatibi's theory that the nascent North African novel can be categorized in three consecutive stages characterized by (1) the ethnographic form, from 1945 until 1953; (2) the theme of acculturation, from 1954 until 1958; and (3) the militant literature on the Algerian War, from 1958 until 1962.[45] The work of authors like Memmi and Dib spans across two or more of these stages. Feraoun, however, is unambiguously relegated to the first stage alone, and the thematic contents of his work are repeatedly qualified as concerning and concerned with the *quotidien*.[46]

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[43] Ibid., 51; my emphasis.

[44] Khatibi, 51.

[45] Khatibi, 27.

[46] References to the prevalence of the *quotidien* in Feraoun's works are not neutral in Khatibi's analysis. The protagonist's childhood in *Le Fils du pauvre*, for instance, is characterized as hermetic, stagnant, and passive relative to those represented by other contemporaneous authors: "Ce roman réaliste [*Le Fils du pauvre*] nous étonne maintenant par sa transparence, son aspect humble, un peu trop sage et presque misérabiliste, par ses personnages mourants qui se meuvent dans un monde clos, bien défini, où chaque objet a sa place. Trop de pitié et de bonté écrasent ce livre, c'est l'autobiographie d'un homme de bonne volonté. Voilà une différence essentielle avec des écrivains comme Kateb, Memmi, Chraïbi, qui, quand ils se racontent, ne voient qu'une suite de mutilations, et des enfances blessées et ratées," Khatibi, 50. Further down, the favored ethnographic characterization of Feraoun's works is brought up as the reason why plot suffers in them: "À vrai dire, la densité

Khatibi's error here is his failure to recognize the possibility of political implications of the quotidian itself. It can be confidently said that other critics and writers of the period who show a similar haste in dismissing Feraoun as an aesthete are guilty of the same error. For the quotidian, the everyday experience, can have its own political tones and repercussions. As a realist (and autobiographical) novel, we can claim that Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* — as well as his subsequent work — *does* play a political role. In his significant study of the theories and practices of everyday life, Michael Sheringham claims, among other characteristics and functions of the everyday, that "the everyday, as constructed in the realist work, becomes part of a wider project where the presentation of everyday reality is clearly subservient to other ends, literary and *ideological*."[47] Khatibi's understanding of the ideological, when considering Algerian authors of Feraoun's generation, is likely limited to the colonial question and the dichotomy of pro-colonial or anti-colonial stances that defined it. It is not surprising, then, that he and his contemporaries fail to see political implications beyond it.[48]

Others, those more intimately concerned with concrete uses of ideology in the newly independent Algeria, were quick to enlist the help of Feraoun's writings. Not long after Feraoun's death in the hands of the O.A.S., the ultra-conservative French army defectors who rejected Algerian independence, it became obvious to the leaders of independent Algeria that Feraoun's writings — by virtue of their poetic descriptions of the connection between Algerians and their land, their characteristic attention to artisanal processes, their emphasis on village and clan identities going back to the mists of time, and their detailed descriptions of everyday experiences — qualified as an effective means of legitimating the government's nationalistic claim of a particular and perennial Algerian experience: "[L]'homme et son village sont intégrés par la conscience nationale […]. Le discours algérien 'réintégrait' Mouloud Feraoun et son 'nationalisme' qui s'affirmait de plus en plus."[49] Christiane Chaulet Achour's survey

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dramatique passe au second plan dans les romans de Feraoun qui sont essentiellement un portrait ethnographique de la Kabylie. […] de longues descriptions sont consacrées à la vie quotidienne, faites souvent dans une forme didactique qui risque d'ennuyer," Khatibi, 50–51. Ending his perspective on Feraoun, Khatibi recognizes that "[t]axé de 'misérabiliste' pendant la guerre d'Algérie, Feraoun est réintégré après l'indépendance, maintenant que le quotidien reprend sa revanche sur l'événement politique," Khatibi, 51–52. The "misérabiliste" characterization that Khatibi might have wanted to condemn with the use of the adjective "taxé" is immediately undermined by the implication that Feraoun's writing was not made for times of war, but for times of peace. In other words, the quotidian life described in Feraoun's works refuses to recognize perturbations on a broader scale and scope.

[47] Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 41; my emphasis.

[48] For the significance of the *ideological* ends envisioned by Feraoun for his work, see further on in this chapter.

[49] Wadi Bouzar's La Mouvance et la Pause, cited in Christiane Chaulet Achour, *Mouloud Feraoun : une voix en contrepoint* (Paris: Silex, 1986), 13. The view of Algeria as a historically unified country and of Algerians as people with a unified trajectory culminating in the

of Algerian schoolbooks shows in no uncertain terms how Feraoun's work went on to become part of curricula across different stages of public education in post-colonial, independent Algeria. Her data and analysis show that Feraoun's writings became canonical in that numerous texts and passages permeated the public education curriculum. The motivation for this is recognized as political: Feraoun's works were coopted by the post-independence government as a means of legitimizing the popular myth of temporal continuity of peoples and traditions in Algeria, as a means of propagating the idea that there was one unified Algerian identity, and that this unity predated — or even motivated — Algerian independence.[50]

Because of the prevalence of long and detailed descriptions in it, Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* has also been described — still because of ethnographic merits — as a way of attempting to record and preserve an ever-changing Kabyle society that the narrator and, by extension, the protagonist perceive as being at risk of disappearing. This, too, is a valid interpretation of the scope and objectives behind the autobiographical project surrounding *Le Fils du pauvre*. A number of critical sources from a range of approaches shed light on this aspect of the book. We have already cited Khatibi's characterization of Feraoun as an author of the "ethnographic form." In thematic critiques of the Algerian novel, too, Feraoun's novelistic works are taken into account when themes such as land, religion, gender, sexuality, society, and politics are discussed, which further validate the merits of an ethnographic perspective on the author and the book in question.[51] Indeed, when it comes to *Le Fils du pauvre* itself, the ethnographic perspective gains even more traction due to the novelty of an "interior" perception of Kabyle society, different from previous, "external" descriptions of it:

> …l'important est que l'objet « d'observation » ne soit plus perçu de l'extérieur comme il l'était dans la description pittoresque des œuvres occidentales. […] de façon toute empirique, Feraoun ébauche un travail de collecte ethnographique (concernant les structures politiques et familiales, les relations entre les individus, les différents domaines de l'économie et de la culture) et même anthropologique (qui peut toucher à de nouveaux objets d'études : le corps, le rapport à l'espace, la gestuelle, la sexualité, la quotidienneté, l'imaginaire…). Son intention participe même de la conservation des arts et traditions. Cela, dans un double objectif : d'une part étayer aux yeux d'autrui la valeur de cette culture et de cette forme de société pour les faire connaître et respecter ; d'autre part fixer (sans pourtant la mythifier) une sorte de Kabylie de toujours (mais justement pas éternelle) aux yeux mêmes des Kabyles et

country's independence was heavily promulgated by the FLN, the Front de Libération Nationale that led the anti-colonial struggle resulting in Algeria's independence in 1962. It created a long historical background for Algeria's emergence as a nation-state in the modern era.

[50] See Chaulet Achour, 12–14, 19-26.

[51] See, in particular, Soukehal, *Le Roman algérien de langue française*.

> peut-être avant tout aux siens propres… avant que celle-ci ne soit profondément modifiée par le contact avec l'autre.[52]

Mathieu-Job's acknowledgement of the dual effect of Feraoun's ethnographic-anthropological work in *Le Fils du pavre* validates the book as a conservational project concerned with numerous aspects of Kabyle society and rightfully stresses the importance of the internal source of this ethnographic record. We are appropriately reminded that, for what is arguably the first time in Algerian literature, the reader gains insight into an unknown society *not* through the perspective of an outsider to it, but rather through the mediation of an individual originating from within the concerned society itself.[53] At the same time, however, Mathieu-Job's notion that the record provided in Feraoun's autobiographical novel is also a function of the historical moment recounted in it draws attention to the contact between colonizer and colonized in Algerian society at this time, which, as we saw in in the case of Khatibi, has the potential to impose limitations on interpretation.

The difference between Khatibi and Mathieu-Job lies in the latter's characterization of Kabyle society as one risking "profound modification" through contact with "the other."[54] The acknowledgment of this evolution is an explicit recognition of the dynamic nature of Kabyle society during the time in which the events in *Le Fils du pauvre* take place. As such, this is, implicitly, an operative society that is implicated in the historical moment of inter-war and pre-independence Algeria. Yet, one would not get this impression when looking at depictions of colonial Algerian society in contemporaneous accounts. By the beginning of the Second World War the colonial society of Algeria is increasingly portrayed as consisting of the quintessential duality of colonizer and colonized. The distinction between these two groups is unambiguously the equivalent of European Algerians and indigenous Algerians. As the Second World War comes to an end, however, and, as the divisions and the discriminations that define the duality of colonial society deepen, the indigenous population is rapidly assimilated under the term "Arab," which comes to mean both "Muslim" and "non-European" Algerian, with no further distinction on the basis of ethnicity, language, or

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[52] Martine Mathieu-Job, *Le Fils du pauvre de Mouloud Feraoun* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 57–58. We have not lost sight of the fact that, conventionally speaking, an ethnographer is often an outsider to the society that is the subject of their study. Mathieu-Job's evocation of *Le Fils du pauvre* as ethnographic is nonetheless valid because she rests it on the merit of faithfulness of the account in cases where the ethnographer — or, in our case, the writer — comes from within the society concerned.

[53] A prominent critic of Feraoun recognizes this unique position of *Le Fils du pauvre* in the opening lines of the chapter discussing the book in question. See Debra Kelly, "Mouloud Feraoun: Life Story, Life-Writing, History," in *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 53.

[54] Khatibi, as we remember from above, defined Feraoun's work as ethnographic based on the prevalence of everyday life, the *quotidien*. The *quotidien* itself he characterizes as static, stagnant, and unwilling to be influenced by forces greater than those of everyday existence. See Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin, essai*, 50.

socio-economic status in colonial Algeria.[55] As we know, Mouloud Feraoun and the Kabyle society to which he belonged may have been, by creed, Muslim; ethno-linguistically, however, they were Berber and desired both to remain and be regarded as such.

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Although I recognize what other critics have with regard to the rapidly evolving Kabyle society mentioned above — namely, that Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* is, in part, a response to this change and, as such, becomes an implicit recognition of the historical role of this dynamic population — I would also like to go a step further and submit that Feraoun's autobiographical novel is a response not only to the widely acknowledged change in the form of hybridization of that society, but also to the accelerated Arabization of Algerian society brought about by the ideology that informs the Algerian nationalism of the period. Ultimately, I intend to argue that the ethnographic, anthropological, and autobiographical attributes of *Le Fils du pauvre* suggest a greater concern and engagement with Algerian society and history on the part of the author than critics have heretofore recognized. The novel, in other words, does not only concern itself with the state of an evolving Kabyle society relative to the permanence it had enjoyed previously; it is also preoccupied with creating a space for Kabyle society and the Berberophone population in the ever-changing and soon-to-be-revolutionized Algerian society as a whole. In order to attain this place, I will argue, the novel not only presents itself in unmistakable ethnographic terms, as we have just seen, but also in *autobiographical* terms. These autobiographical terms conform, at times, to the widely accepted understanding of the genre we call "autobiography." But they also deviate from it — for reasons that will be considered below — to the point where an editor might choose, as did the Seuil editor, to present *Le Fils du pauvre* as a novel. By remaining within the autobiographical domain and, more importantly, by pushing against its canonical restrictions, *Le Fils du pauvre*, I will argue, assumes a necessary, if not urgent, *historiographical* role that complements existing historiographies and claims a place among literary texts coming out of Algeria.

What distinguishes my interpretation of *Le Fils du pauvre* from those of previous critics is that I choose to consider Feraoun's preoccupation with ethnographic and other cultural details not simply within the context of colonial Algeria at a vital turning point in its history, but rather within the broader social and historical contexts of colonial Algeria and of the historiography that prevailed and largely persists to this day. My interpretation, therefore, unlike existing ones, recognizes a historiographical dimension in *Le Fils du pauvre* that is not limited to the cultural (read: ethnographic) hybridization of traditional Kabyle society as it comes in contact with French culture. I therefore propose to regard *Le Fils du pauvre* not simply as a project of preserving a moment of transition in Kabyle society, but also — and, I would

[55] One notable exception to this assimilation of identities under the term "Arab" were indigenous Jewish Algerians, who, unlike Muslim Algerians, had been enjoying French citizenship rights since the passage of the *décret Crémieux* in 1870.

argue, more importantly — as a project aimed at supplementing the "official" historiography of colonial Algeria, which, for more than a century of French presence in Algeria, failed to undermine the Manichaean distinction between colonizer and colonized, opting instead for its retention and reinvention under the labels "European" and "Arab" to the detriment of crucial socio-economic and ethno-linguistic minorities. It is a project whose necessity is made even more pressing by the rise of an Arab-defined form of Algerian nationalism in the interwar period, and especially after the Second World War.

A second distinction of my approach is that it justifies these historiographical merits of *Le Fils du pauvre* by considering it as an *autobiography*. I would be remiss in claiming that other critics have not recognized the autobiographical nature of Feraoun's first book. Indeed, serious work has been done in that direction; but it has been work that merely validates the autobiographical nature by highlighting correspondences and by drawing parallels to the author's biography. My perspective starts by taking these correspondences for granted, which subsequently allows me to explore *how* the book functions as an autobiography and *what* it achieves.

III. *Le Fils du pauvre* as autobiographical

One of the most nuanced critiques of *Le Fils du pauvre* as an autobiography is the recent work of Debra Kelly, who, in her book *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French*,[56] provides a perspective on Feraoun's autobiographical novel that marks a turn away from preceding criticism that regarded the work either simply or primarily as documentary, ethnographic, and anthropological in nature. Instead, Kelly chooses to focus on how the authorial self is portrayed in this autobiographical work, how this portrayal relates to other portrayals of self in other North-African autobiographical writings of the period, and how the colonial world in *Le Fils du pauvre* is both depicted and criticized — implicitly or explicitly.

Kelly's perspective on Feraoun's autobiographical novel is aligned with her stated goals for the book, namely, to "explore the question of the relationship between the writer's self and literary expression," and to acknowledge that "[t]he work of each of the four writers studied [in the book] provides a space for a meditation on the act of literary creation and on the ways in which that act intervenes in the world."[57] The world in question, in Feraoun's case, is the rural Kabyle society of colonial Algeria in the first half of the 20th century — a world undergoing a hybridization with French culture and, consequently, vulnerable to cultural-ethnographic erasure. An implicit goal for Kelly is the recognition that these authors intend for their respective autobiographical works to become "a space for a meditation." This is important in the

[56] Kelly, *Autobiography and Independence*.

[57] Kelly, 1. The four authors Kelly considers for analysis are Mouloud Feraoun, Albert Memmi, Abdelkébir Khatibi, and Assia Djebar.

case of *Le Fils du pauvre*, especially if we are to move beyond the recognition that it provides an anthropological/ethnographic portrayal of the Kabyle society depicted therein. Kelly does precisely this and, in her analysis of Feraoun's autobiographical novel, attempts to consider the work as both a product of and a political statement on colonial Algeria and, ultimately, the broader colonial question.[58]

This recognition of authorial agency manifested in the form of a literary intervention, and of the political message this intervention purports to convey are, in my opinion, the most important aspects we can take away from Kelly's analysis of Feraoun.[59] In the chapter dedicated to the Kabyle author Kelly's analysis shows that there is a critique of the colonial system in *Le Fils du pauvre*, and that is largely implicit in the first part of the text — in which the narrator is also the protagonist — but becomes more explicit in the second part — in which there is a third-person narrative. This critique, Kelly will recognize, is even more direct in those parts of the autobiographical text that remained virtually unpublished between 1951 and 1972, which are concerned with the years of the Second World War.[60]

Kelly constructs her analysis of Feraoun's implicit critique of the colonial system around the figure of *irony*, which she attempts to find in the content as much as in the discursive forms chosen by the writer. She identifies the damaging effects of French intrusion in the Kabyle society, for instance, at a moment when the protagonist claims that money earned in France disrupts the traditional balance of his Kabyle village,[61] or when discussing Fouroulou's father's experience in France.[62] Discursively speaking, Kelly identifies a critique of the French when a distance is established between the narrator and the protagonist. This occurs when the narrator and the protagonist are one and the same, but separated by time or perspective, as well as when a third-person narrator relates the life of the protagonist in the second part of the book.[63]

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[58] As we will see, Kelly's view of Feraoun's work differs from Khatibi's view of it. Khatibi's assessment of Feraoun's work as "apolitical" is based largely on his recognition that Feraoun is not blind to the injustices of the colonial system — and, indeed, states them — but simply fails to delve into them or mount a proper critique. Motivated by the underlying premise that autobiographical writing coming out of North Africa is inherently political, Kelly sets out to show *how* each author's work becomes political, particularly as a critique of the colonial system.

[59] See Kelly, "Mouloud Feraoun: Life Story, Life-Writing, History."

[60] This discrepancy in the time of publication becomes an issue for Kelly and others who initially consider the Seuil edition of the book and have to supplement it later with the texts found in the 1972 edition of Feraoun's *L'Anniversaire*. As I have stated previously, my analysis attempts to overcome this fragmentation by working from the integral ENAG edition of *Le Fils du pauvre*.

[61] Kelly, "Mouloud Feraoun: Life Story, Life-Writing, History," 66.

[62] Kelly, 78.

[63] See ibid., 71–72. In a crucial moment, Kelly seems to argue against the need for an overt or militant political tone (as might have been expected by Khatibi, for instance): "Feraoun again inserts an ironic distance between the narrator and the young protagonist. There is no affection in Fouroulou's admiration because of the disdain with which the French regard the indigenous population. He becomes 'resigned' to a system in which he is cast as

By bringing the critical discourse on *Le Fils du pauvre* beyond the descriptive form and the ethnographic content that had motivated commentaries by preceding critics, Kelly dispels existing notions about the "simplicity" of the book and, consequently, opens up new interpretive avenues along discursive and political veins. In her introduction, Kelly proposes to look at the autobiographical works by North-African authors not as biographies, but as "autobiographical discourses," and explains that she does so in order "to widen the debate concerning the definition of autobiography" and "because it indicates the complexity of the texts under analysis." [64] The liberty she takes in moving away from canonical generic restrictions conforms to her intention to consider these texts as a literary space for political, ideological, or historical messages put forth by authors of North African origin. Her refusal to be restrained by genre, in particular, justifies, in part, my own choice to regard *Le Fils du pauvre* as an autobiography.

Though commendable for her adamant refusal to allow strict definitions of the genre of autobiography to restrict her view of North African autobiographical discourses,[65] Kelly nonetheless resorts to her own assimilation when it comes to a North African autobiographical tradition. She justly pushes back against the general consensus among Western critics that there is no tradition of autobiography in the corpus of Arabic letters and uses several examples in an attempt to trace the existence of such a tradition.[66] In so doing, she seems to conflate the different literary and oral traditions of North Africa under an all-encompassing "Arabic" literary tradition, and subsequently considers them as applicable to the four ethno-linguistically different authors discussed in her book. Needless to say, Kelly's discussion of a literary *Arab* tradition as a possible influence on a *Kabyle* author who then pursues that tradition is undermined by the simple fact that the Berberophone populations of North Africa — including Feraoun's — were sites of an *oral* tradition concerned with more collective

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inferior. Yet the simple telling of this 'resignation' highlights the effects of the colonial system. Feraoun does not need to be explicit in his criticism of the criticism to be clear," 81.

[64] "These are texts," Kelly adds, "that engage not only with the question of individual self-expression, but also with social, ideological and historical contexts, and as such they provide a form of political as well as personal discourse," *Autobiography and Independence*, 2. Kelly reminds the reader that autobiography coming out of the colonial world can even be seen and utilized successfully as a tool for "decolonizing the mind," a phrase she borrows from the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kelly, 12.

[65] See ibid., 10–11. She rejects, for instance, Philippe Lejeune's model of autobiography, which assimilates the entities of author, narrator, and protagonist with no gray area in between. She favors instead Elizabeth Bruss's definition of autobiography, resting on what Bruss calls truth value," "act value," and "identity value." For a quick summary of each of these three "values" — truth-value, act-value, and identity-value — as well as how they are applicable to North-African authors, see Kelly, 10, 12.

[66] For more on this line of argument, see Kelly, *Autobiography and Independence*, 13-23. Because Kelly relies on what she calls "the value of the individual" as typical of Western letters and as a motivating factor in the autobiographical project, she similarly tries to identify a parallel strain in the Arabic literary tradition.

matters than sites of a *written* tradition — whether of the community or of the self. On the question of influence, it would be more valid, in fact, to take the "finder" of Fouroulou's manuscript at his word and say that Feraoun was influenced by the European tradition of autobiography more than by any other.[67]

We know from studies on Mouloud Feraoun's life and works — and simply from reading his texts in parallel with his biography — that the rest of his work does refer to *Le Fils du pauvre* as autobiographical. And although the book may not conform to a Western, intransigent definition of "autobiography," it nevertheless is representative, if not foundational, of an autobiographical trend not uncommon in texts by North African authors writing in the middle of the 20th century. In my consideration of *Le Fils du pauvre*, I do not go so far as to theorize and name a new modality of autobiography; nor do I make claims that purport to characterize an entire generation of North African authors. Instead, I consider the book as an autobiography from the outset and intend to analyze its import in instances where it conforms to the quintessential model of autobiography, and especially in instances where it pushes back against the limitations of the model in order to facilitate a different kind of representation.

IV. *Le Fils du pauvre*: an autobiography

Our previous discussion of Debra Kelly's analysis of *Le Fils du pauvre* as autobiographical began to shed some light on the features associated with the genre we call "autobiography," as well as the limits placed by different theorists on the genre. I would like to start my discussion with the most unyielding of these limitations, proposed by Philippe Lejeune. Lejeune's ultimate definition of autobiography comes from *Le Pacte autobiographique*, in which he provides a slightly emended version of the definition he supplies in *L'Autobiographie en France*, which predates it: autobiography, says Lejeune, is a "*[r]écit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité*."[68] Inherent to this definition is the identification between author, narrator, and protagonist. Lejeune returns to this essential tripartite identification in order to clarify the means by which

[67] The "found manuscript" is itself a trope strongly associated with Western forms of writing, including autobiographies. Additionally, the finder of Fouroulou's manuscript explicitly lists the examples that Fouroulou chooses to emulate: "Oh ! ce n'est ni de la poésie, ni une étude psychologique, ni même un roman d'aventures puisqu'il n'a pas d'imagination. Mais il a lu Montaigne et Rousseau, il a lu Daudet et Dickens (dans une traduction). Il voulait tout simplement, comme ces grands hommes, raconteur sa propre histoire," Mouloud Feraoun, *Le Fils du pauvre* (Alger: ENAG, 2002), 6. The addition of the parenthetical *dans une traduction* in Dickens's case shows just how careful the author is in conveying his influences, highlighting the French language and French education as his sole source for the autobiographical model he attempts to follow and proceeds to modify in his own manner.

[68] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 14; original italics.

it can be obtained, namely: (1) an implicit identification between author and narrator rendered possible by the use of "ma vie" or "autobiographie" in the title, or by a prefatory intervention that establishes an identification between author and narrator; or (2) through more patent means, such as a correspondence in name between the narrator-protagonist of the contents and the author on the cover.[69] The presence of one of these identifications, claims Lejeune, qualifies the text in question as an autobiography because it provides what he calls an "autobiographical pact" — a *pacte autobiographique*. "Le pacte autobiographique," itself he defines as "l'affirmation dans le texte de [l'identité auteur-narrateur-personnage], renvoyant en dernier ressort au *nom* de l'auteur sur la couverture."[70]

The reader of *Le Fils du pauvre* will easily recognize its immediate and categorical exclusion from this strictly defined genre of autobiography by virtue of the fact that it lacks "l'essentiel" of autobiography:[71]an autobiographical pact. The text is furthermore excluded because its most widely published and read edition is identified — by the author or editor — as a *roman*. And while others may rely on the compromise of the text as an autobiographical novel for the sake of expediency, this "subgenre" of autobiography itself presents its own shortcomings upon closer analysis. Lejeune himself considers it in relation to autobiography as defined by him: "À la différence de l'autobiographie," says Lejeune, "[le roman autobiographique] comporte des *degrés*. […] L'autobiographie, elle, ne comporte pas de degrés: c'est tout ou rien," and invites the reader to define the autobiographical novel "au niveau de son contenu" instead.[72]

Dissent from this intransigent autobiographical pact begins to show even among Lejeune's devoted followers precisely on the subject of autobiographical novels. Jacques Lecarme and Éliane Lecarme-Tabone in their book titled *L'Autobiographie* initially evoke Lejeune's *pacte autobiographique* as a worthy rejection of "le redoutable 'roman autobiographique', fléau du discours critique."[73] Nevertheless, the authors subsequently make one significant concession on the non-correspondence of names between author and protagonist, holding that "*[l]e nom propre est un 'désignateur rigide' qu'il faut utiliser sans rigidité aucune*" and cite, as justification, proximal onomastic homophonies between protagonists and authors of well-established "autobiographies" such as "Beyle/Brulard, Vallès/Vingtras, Camus/Cormery, Bodard/Bonard."[74]

This concession notwithstanding, the identifications required by the *pacte autobiographique* fail to go beyond a superficial, technical identification of the genre. My argument for *Le Fils du pauvre* as a historiographical contribution to the history

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[69] Lejeune, 27.

[70] Ibid., 26; original italics.

[71] Lejeune, 26..

[72] Ibid., 25; original italics.

[73] Jacques Lecarme and Éliane Lecarme-Tabone, *L'Autobiographie* (Paris: A. Colin, 1997), 24.

[74] Lecarme and Lecarme-Tabone, 25; my emphasis.

of colonial Algeria is better served by other features of an autobiography, which go beyond the generic qualification in order to illuminate the stylistic, discursive, and rhetorical choices of the author, particularly in those instances where they "deviate" from the rigid model of autobiography as theorized by Lejeune, which, as it is widely accepted, is best suited for Western, white, male, heterosexual autobiographers. To do so, I can no longer defer a closer scrutiny of the book itself.

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With the exception of the first chapter, which functions more as a preface than as an integral part of the rest of the text, the first part of *Le Fils du pauvre* is narrated by the protagonist in the first person. Titled "La Famille," it covers the childhood of the protagonist, named Fouroulou Menrad. More than that — one could argue, based on its contents — this first part gives precisely what its title announces: a portrait of his immediate family, his greater tribal family, and his village. A first-person declension first appears in the third chapter of this first part, where the narrator-protagonist narrows the focus of his writing to his family after having described, in the second chapter, his native village as a fixture extending in both time and space. The third chapter relates family life and relations, and the focus hones in on the protagonist only in the fourth chapter. The chapters that follow tell of his relations to friends and family members, and of his admission to French school. This first part eventually concludes with the severing of certain familial relationships and the death of the protagonist's two beloved maternal aunts.

Up to this point, it seems that we can challenge the status of *Le Fils du pauvre* as an autobiography in Lejeune's strict definition on two counts: first, that discrepancy between the names of the author and narrator/protagonist does not satisfy the *pacte autobiographique*; and second, that the book does not spend enough time talking about the protagonist himself, choosing instead to address village life in what have been rightfully deemed anthropological-ethnographic terms, or to address familial life even where he is not directly concerned. His life, however, is very much the subject of the later chapters of this first part. If it is not immediately apparent, it is because the protagonist chooses to depict himself *relationally*. In other words, there is a stylistic choice at play that does not displace the subject of the autobiography, but rather portrays him as the son, brother, nephew, and grandson he was vis-à-vis other members of this close-knit family. This first part of *Le Fils du pauvre*, then, elaborates in different directions what the title announces: that in this particular clan, in this particular culture, and at this particular moment in history he is not simply his own person, but rather the son of a poor man, a qualifier that becomes more precise through context than through descriptions particular to the protagonist.[75] The title

[75] It is not unreasonable to suggest, at this point, that the focus on one's individual life and self-portrait so central to the Western notion of autobiography (as upheld by Philippe Lejeune and others) is undermined in Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* at the same time as a different portrayal is elevated: one that highlights the existential bonds between individuals of the same family, clan, or community. Feraoun, as Debra Kelly recognizes, "constructs a

and contents alike highlight and elaborate the vital interconnectivity of lives in our young protagonist's life. Hence the attention given to other familial relations, in which Fouroulou is implicated and through which his childhood is defined and made known to the reader.

As we saw above, the protagonist in *Le Fils du pauvre* is named Fouroulou Menrad. We are dealing with a protagonist whose name is an almost exact anagrammatic rendition of the author's name: Mouloud Feraoun. It helps to note, as well, that the protagonist's name alternates in the book between Fouroulou Menrad and Menrad Fouroulou, which reminds us that he is present in both a familial and formal setting. This formal setting is a result of the French colonial presence in Kabylie and demands, where formal or administrative functions are concerned, a family name followed by a given name. In the same colonial context, there are variations in how indigenous names are pronounced or transliterated, depending on whether an individual is being addressed or referred to by a family member or a representative of French colonial authority. Moreover, this institutional dimension of the colonial context is reminiscent of the arbitrariness of nominal designations among the indigenous populace — particularly family names — which are more concerned with facilitating administration than with respecting familial or clan identity.[76] The transformation of Mouloud Feraoun into Fouroulou Menrad — its quasi-anagram — is not arbitrary: it came about as a result of a conscious authorial effort. Furthermore, the pseudonym evokes a proximal homophony with the author's name, as well as reflects the familial/institutional reversal with the reversal of initials for the first and last name. In other words, these alterations suggest that the name in this particular context may be transformed or even come undone without losing its referent; that the name is secondary in importance — a notion that I retain for the remainder of my analysis of *Le Fils du pauvre*.

The book takes its most blatant distance away from a typical autobiographical discourse at the beginning of the second part. It is at this juncture that it challenges the common understanding of an autobiographical project while, at the same time, validating the particular autobiographical nature of *Le Fils du pauvre*. As we will see, this is primarily achieved through significant discursive and plot changes in the life of the protagonist that reflect equivalent changes in the life of the author.

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protagonist who forges an identity between the collective and the individual," "Mouloud Feraoun: Life Story, Life-Writing, History," 74 — arguably, the only way one could in the context of Kabyle society.

[76] Feraoun himself makes a point of this arbitrariness in a personal letter, where he says that, with the exception of the French administrative bodies that originally gave his family the name "Feraoun," nobody knows or refers to him and his family as such: "Tu t'imagines aussi que chez nous on m'appelle Feraoun. Erreur. C'est le nom français. On en a collé à chaque famille kabyle vers 1890 et qui ne correspond que très rarement au vrai nom. Peu nous chaut. Nous acceptons toutes les grimaces qu'on nous impose tout en sachant qu'elles n'ont pas de sens. Nous y gagnons la simplicité et la tranquillité," Mouloud Feraoun, *Lettres à ses amis* (Algiers: ENAG/Éditions, 2006), 22.

The second part begins with a third-person narration and quickly announces that the protagonist's parents have had a second son, named Dadar. Consequently, Fouroulou's status in the family has changed from simply "son" to "eldest son": "Fouroulou en perdant son titre de fils unique prit celui d'aîné qui comporte, lui expliqua-t-on, certains devoirs dans le futur, quand le petit sera grand, et beaucoup d'avantages dans le présent."[77] The *fils du pauvre* we came to know in the first part is now *le fils aîné*, which becomes the title of the second part of Feraoun's autobiographical novel.

The "future duties" associated with Fouroulou's role as the eldest son befall the protagonist as soon as the second part begins: his father falls suddenly ill and, once recovered, emigrates to France with the hopes of repaying the debt his family had amassed during his illness. Later in this second part, Fouroulou's father returns from France with a small pension from the company he worked for after having suffered an accident in one of their factories. At this point, the father lays out his plans for the future of the family and his son, ventriloquizing Lafontaine's "La Laitière et le Pot au lait":

> Vois-tu, mon fils, dit [le père], la paire de bœufs est à nous ainsi que l'âne et les moutons. Je peux encore acheter deux autres moutons. Nous sommes deux. Ce n'est pas au-dessus de nos forces. Au printemps, nous vendrons les bœufs pour acheter une paire plus petite. Nous vendrons aussi trois moutons, nous pourrons avoir une vache. Nous aurons également un peu d'huile en plus de notre consommation. L'été prochain, je vendrai des légumes sur notre âne pendant que tu t'occuperas des animaux et des propriétés avec tes sœurs. Bientôt nous remplacerons l'âne par un mulet. Je me livrerai alors au commerce. Tu m'accompagneras de temps en temps dans les marchés pour te mettre au courant. Je crois que, grâce à Dieu, nous ne serons plus malheureux.[78]

What the father is describing — or offering, rather — is a traditional way of life in which his son does as the father has done and known all his life. But the son has different ideas:

> Au fur et à mesure que le père développait son rêve, Fouroulou le suivait avec surprise. Il voyait s'ouvrir devant lui des horizons auxquels il n'avait pas songé, il se voyait devenir fellah, il voyait l'opulence pénétrer chez eux grâce à lui. Mais il était un peu sceptique. Il avait un autre rêve, lui. Il s'était toujours imaginé étudiant pauvre mais brillant. Il s'était habitué à cet étudiant, il avait fini par le chérir. C'était son idéal. Et voilà que son père, au bout de cinq minutes, par de solides raisons, avait réussi à le chasser come un fantôme. Pourtant, il

[77] Feraoun, *Fils (ENAG)*, 91–92.
[78] Feraoun, 109–10.

murmura par acquit de conscience :

— Et si on m'accorde la bourse ? je pourrai continuer mes études sans t'occasionner de frais. Le maître me l'a dit ![79]

Later that same day, Fouroulou finds a letter saying that he has been given a scholarship: "C'est ainsi que le hasard aime à éprouver les bonnes gens," notes the narrator.[80] The father quickly recognizes the advantages of education in his son's future and poses no resistance — no less so because of the financial benefits of having one fewer mouth to feed: "Le père Menrad n'était pas dupe," the narrator reminds us.[81] And the son himself does not disappoint. When he goes to school, a concatenation of factors allows him to spend less than the scholarship awards. There is no question in Fouroulou's mind about what to do with the remainder: it goes to supplement his family's income. The protagonist continues to support his family in the same way throughout his schooling and even more so once his schooling ends and he obtains a teaching position near his native village. It is at this point, and with Fouroulou's marriage and the founding of a new household, that the second part ends.

The events we have just recounted correspond to the first and second parts of the three-part ENAG edition of *Le Fils du pauvre*. As we have seen, the third part of his manuscript is conspicuously absent from the Seuil edition of the book, as are significant parts of the first two parts. Other critics have focused on the textual differences between the two editions,[82] or the greater political impact of the elusive third part of the book, which is titled "La Guerre" and covers the years of the Second World War between 1939 and 1945.[83] I will defer a discussion of this section until a later chapter that deals with Feraoun's role as a chronicler of conflict and turn my attention instead to a reading of the second part, in which I attempt to find reasons that explain Feraoun's discursive and stylistic challenges to the canonical understanding of autobiography.

Coming out of the first part of *Le Fils du pauvre*, the reader will undoubtedly be shocked to find a change in narrative voice from first-person to third-person in the second part. The ENAG edition of the book — which follows the author's manuscript — gives no explanation for this, nor does the book's very first edition by Les Cahiers du Nouvel Humanisme. It is tempting to think of this discursive change as signifying a generic change from a first-person autobiography to a third-person *biography*. Or, for those limiting the genre duality to autobiography and novel, it might be more reasonable to claim this as the moment in which autobiography ends and fiction

[79] Feraoun, 110.

[80] Feraoun, 111.

[81] Feraoun, 112.

[82] See, most notably, the first chapter (entitled "Un texte ou des textes ?") in Mathieu-Job, *Le Fils du pauvre de Mouloud Feraoun*, 17–47.

[83] See Kelly, "Mouloud Feraoun: Life Story, Life-Writing, History." Kelly's perspective on this part of the book as political is seen predominantly through the lens of French colonial rule, which consequently allows her to discover implicit and explicit critiques of the colonial system that she attributes to Feraoun himself.

begins. By giving no explicit reason for the voice change, the manuscript leaves these explanations as valid as they are limiting.

The Seuil edition attempts to level this ambiguity by providing an explanation for the sudden change in narrative voice. According to the opening paragraphs of the second section in the Seuil edition, the change in narrative voice is due to a change in authorship starting with the first chapter that follows this clarifying insert. Here, as in the "prefatory" section of the first half, the author makes use of a common trope in Western literature — that of the found manuscript.[84] Having announced the autobiographical work as found in manuscript form in the very beginning, its unnamed finder and sharer seems to return in order to explain the changes that the text undergoes starting with the second part:

> Tel est le fragment de confession que chacun peut lire dans le gros cahier de Menrad Fouroulou. Le narrateur qui en a eu connaissance et qui le propose au lecteur prend, de ce fait, l'engagement d'aller jusqu'au bout. Faut-il répéter que Fouroulou se tait par modestie ou par pudeur, qu'il passe sa plume à un ami qui ne trahira pas mais qui n'ignore rien de son histoire, un frère curieux et bavard, sans un brin de méchanceté, à qui l'on pardonne en souriant ?[85]

This omniscient brother assumes the responsibility of finishing the autobiography from the fact that he came to know the project and then made it available to the reader. And although he "prend l'engagement d'aller jusqu'au bout," he nonetheless says that he will not betray the author, his friend. The use of the verb "trahir" in the negative here is significant. On the one hand, if it is intended as "will not be untrue," it stands in contradiction with Fouroulou's own refusal to continue with the rest of his autobiography. On the other hand, if it is intended as "will not reveal" or "will not make known," it stands in contradiction with this narrator's aforementioned engagement to do just that. And how can he give himself that task when we are also told that it is Fouroulou himself who passes him the pen?

We begin to find an answer in the syntactical ambiguity of the possessive adjective in one of these sentences, which can be understood both as referring to Fouroulou and to the individual who takes over the narration at this point: it can be read as "qui n'ignore rien de l'histoire de Fouroulou" or "qui n'ignore rien de sa propre histoire."

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[84] This second "preamble" is an unnumbered three-paragraph section that precedes the first chapter of the second part in the Seuil edition. Mouloud Feraoun, *Le Fils du pauvre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1954), 105. The first section also begins with a singular chapter that announces this found manuscript and introduces Fouroulou Menrad — by now an adult employed as an "instituteur du bled kabyle" — both in his own words and in those of the unidentified manuscript finder (see Feraoun, 9–11; and Feraoun, *Fils (ENAG)*, 5–6.. Although numbered as a chapter, the third-person reference to the protagonist, as well as the typography in italics (at least in the Seuil edition) differentiate this as a "prefatory" chapter that announces the work and finding concerning Fouroulou Menrad's manuscript.

[85] Feraoun, *Fils (Seuil)*, 105.

This brother can just as easily, therefore, be the implicit brother in the title of the second part — a *fils aîné* is, by definition, a *frère aîné*. In other words, the narrator from this point on is still Fouroulou; and not only Fouroulou as an older brother to Dadar, but, most likely, an older Fouroulou attempting to obtain and provide narrative understanding about the life of a younger Fouroulou from the moment his life undergoes a significant change.

Having the same narrator for this second part as we did for the first explains, first, the omniscience that is retained throughout this second part. It also explains how there will be no betrayal of Fouroulou's unwillingness to relate his life beyond the point at which he concludes his first part. More importantly, the book retains, despite the discursive variation, a single narrator who is still the same protagonist and — once again, after dismissing the pseudonym — the same author. *Le Fils du pauvre*, in other words, is taking liberties in the form of narrative voices that parallel influences and changes in the protagonist's life and perform an important and initial doubling of experience.

In an essay on autobiography, Jean Starobinski claims that "le style autobiographique apparaîtra comme le porteur d'une véracité au moins *actuelle*. Si douteux que soient les faits relatés, l'écriture du moins livrera une image 'authentique' de la personnalité de celui qui 'tient la plume'."[86] If, in the first part of *Le Fils du pauvre*, it is Fouroulou himself who *tient la plume*, the relaying of this *plume* to "another" narrator can be seen as a rhetorical gesture that doubles the voice responsible for relating the autobiography. As we argued above, this rhetorical doubling does not necessarily translate into a doubling of perspective on the life of the protagonist. What it does do, as Starobinski also seems to recognize in a more general form, is to acknowledge two different perspectives on Fouroulou's own life: the first on the protagonist as a child who passively submits to the motions of a typical Kabyle life; and the second on a protagonist who recognizes the point in which he acquired authority over his own life and its subsequent trajectory.

Further on in his discussion of style in autobiography, Starobinski considers the rare occasion of a third-person narration:

> L'effacement du narrateur (qui assume alors le rôle impersonnel d'historien), la présentation objective du protagoniste à la troisième personne, fonctionnent au bénéfice de l'*événement*, et, secondairement, font rejaillir sur la personnalité du protagoniste l'éclat des actions dans lesquelles il a été impliqué. Forme apparemment modeste, la narration autobiographique à la troisième personne cumule et comptabilise la somme des événements à la gloire du héros qui renonce à parler en son nom propre.[87]

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[86] Jean Starobinski, "Le Style de l'autobiographie," in *La Relation critique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 86–87; original emphasis.

[87] Ibid., 88–89; original emphasis.

As a "forme apparemment modeste," a third-person narration would seem befitting of Fouroulou's intended project because it would reconcile his self-proclaimed modesty with his desire to emulate important figures such as Montaigne and Rousseau. More importantly, for our view of *Le Fils du pauvre* as historiographical, this change in narrative voice assigns the narrator a new role as an "impersonal historian," which subsequently elevates the events and actions that surround and shape the protagonist's life above the peculiar details of the protagonist's life. From a rhetorical perspective alone, we can say that, just as the particularity of Fouroulou's first-person narrative voice makes way for the ambiguous third-person narrative voice, so the subjective perspective of the first part seems to yield to a more objective perspective in the second part. Or, generically speaking, an autobiography becomes a biography. From a perspective more conscious of the contents of the book and of the context of the period described therein, we can also make the claim that, through the assimilation between the experience of the protagonist and that of the new narrator, the author begins to justify a doubling of experience that, as we will see below, ultimately results in a greater multiplication.

It is tempting to continue juxtaposing *Le Fils du pauvre* with Lejeune's definition of autobiography and to argue, consequently, that the book conforms to this definition despite its idiosyncratic deviations from it. As we have seen with Starobinski's more nuanced take on autobiography, we are more likely to make sense of the unique style of *Le Fils du pauvre* by eschewing the defense of the book vis-à-vis Lejeune's strict definition of autobiography. Consequently, my approach from here on out will be to focus precisely on those instances where "deviations" from his model occur, and to attempt to explain them in ways that not only validate the autobiographical nature of *Le Fils du pauvre*, but also contribute to my greater argument for the book as historiographical. To do so, I have to emancipate my arguments from Lejeune's uncompromising definition and instead consider the book through more permissive definitions of autobiography that seem to corroborate the necessary deviation from Lejeune's model.

We argued above that Feraoun's change in narrative voice between the first and second parts is primarily stylistic, and that it does not undo the identification between narrator and protagonist. In other words, the third-person narrative voice in the second part does not alter, but merely dissimulates the same Fouroulou Menrad that was the first-person narrator in the first part. If we turn our attention to the contents of the book, we will notice that the beginning of the second part also marks a more significant change: a change in the experience of the protagonist. This is the case not only within the familial circle — in which he went from an only son to an eldest son — but, more importantly, in his place and lived experience in this colonial society. Once again, we find validity in Starobinski's assertion that a third-person narration benefits the *événement* and that it also relates the protagonist more closely to the actions in which he was implicated.

The second part of *Le Fils du pauvre* traces the experience of Fouroulou Menrad in a

way that highlights not only a difference with respect to the focus in the first part — which is concerned with his childhood — but also the moment at which his life deviates both away from childhood and a traditional Kabyle way of life toward a life shaped by French education. In other words, there is a turning point in the protagonist's life, as illustrated by a greater autonomy of the self that the incongruous views of the protagonist's future between him and his father announce in the opening pages of the second part.

In a study on French autobiography — *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires, Rousseau to Perec* — Michael Sheringham argues that the significance of a turning point where autobiographies are concerned is twofold. It is first recognized as significant in the course that the protagonist's/autobiographer's life takes, but also crucial in providing a narrative understanding for the retrospection associated with the autobiographical project itself: "To look for a turning point is to examine one's life in a certain way, responding to the appeal of 'the question itself', using it to distinguish the things one has 'kept in', from those which have 'ceased to be part of oneself'," says Sheringham, adding a moment later that, by acting as "sites of meaning, turning points pertain less to prior experience than to narrative understanding."[88]

This narrative understanding corresponds to Sheringham's (and other critics') defense of autobiography as a process concerned with constructing an image of the self, rather than as a work of literature.[89] I would like to submit here that Fouroulou's experience at this point in his story — with the changes in responsibility and the radical turn away from the traditional life — corresponds to Sheringham's definition of a turning point. As such, it reminds the reader of the significance that Fouroulou's deviation from a traditional mode of life had in his eventual trajectory. It does so by inserting for the reader a perceived change like the one made possible by the change in narrative voice. Furthermore, the stylistic and discursive changes that *Le Fils du pauvre* undergoes at this point serve as reminders that the author and autobiographer is very much aware of the impact of these changes. After all, he is writing this autobiography after he has completed his studies in French schools and has, as a result, obtained a teaching position in his native Kabylie. In one regard, one can see how Feraoun credits his French education with the initial impetus behind the autobiographical project. He admits as much in the prefatory chapter to his book, where he claims to want to follow the examples of famous autobiographers and writers:

> Après avoir renoncé aux examens, il a voulu écrire. Il a cru pouvoir écrire. Oh ! ce n'est ni de la poésie, ni une étude psychologique, ni même un roman d'aventures puisqu'il n'a pas d'imagination. Mais il a lu Montaigne et Rousseau, il a lu Daudet et Dickens (dans une traduction).

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[88] Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires: Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1993), 10–11.

[89] For more on this and Sheringham's parsing of similar notions in other critics, see Sheringham, 15–21.

> Il voulait tout simplement, comme ces grands hommes, raconter sa propre histoire. Je vous disais qu'il était modeste ! Loin de sa pensée de se comparer à des génies ; il comptait seulement leur emprunter l'idée, la sotte idée de se peindre. Il considérait que s'il réussissait à faire quelque chose de *cohérent*, de *complet*, de *lisible*, il serait satisfait.[90]

The author's consideration here amounts to his aspiration, which is to produce a *coherent*, *complete*, and *legible* work that will leave him satisfied. One could argue that an autobiography fulfills the three criteria he sets out to accomplish: an autobiography is not only a written work that follows one's trajectory, but also a retrospective work that allows the writer to give a particular meaning and interpretation to his past life.

For Feraoun, a crucial part of this meaning lies in the transformation that his life undergoes when he strays from the traditional Kabyle lifestyle. We see this reflected in the trajectory of the life of the protagonist and his quasi-namesake in *Le Fils du pauvre*, as well as in the discursive changes that the book undergoes when it reaches the turning point in the protagonist's life. More interestingly, however, Feraoun reveals to us the personal benefit that his autobiographical work will yield: *satisfaction*. "Satisfaction" is an ambiguous choice of word that relates not only to feelings — the pleasure stemming from a state of accomplishment (made even more significant in the context of a writer) — but also to the reparation of damages that one's offense might have caused — to another person or to God.[91] Though I remain careful not to delve into the psychology of the autobiographer, we can at least draw a comparison between this etymological meaning of "satisfaction" and the word "confession" that we often associate with autobiography. But whereas Augustine and Rousseau attempt to exculpate themselves and address God in their confessions, one can argue that Feraoun has no reason to apologize, and that his addressee is much more concrete than the God of Augustine and Rousseau: "Il croyait que sa vie valait la peine d'être connue, tout au moins de ses enfants et de ses petits enfants."[92] Coming on the heels of the long quotation given above, this statement shows how Feraoun's autobiographical project deviates from the confessions of his autobiographical predecessors by seeing filiation as readership and by becoming instead a demonstration. The fact that he sees his life as worthy of being known by his children and grandchildren expands the temporal scope of his life-writing, giving it a historical dimension. I would go a step further and claim that he is attempting to indemnify not a damage brought on by a personal offense, but a damage brought on by the historiography that surrounds him, which neglects his personal lived experience and his place in this colonial society so distracted by the dichotomous and antipodal distinctions of *colonizer* and *colonized* that we have already alluded to.

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[90] Feraoun, *Fils (ENAG)*, 6; my emphasis.

[91] Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, "Satisfaction," in *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, accessed April 24, 2016, http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?27;s=635067045;r=2;nat=;sol=1;

[92] Feraoun, *Fils (ENAG)*, 6.

This defiance of the historiography that surrounds him becomes apparent in the prefatory chapter to the second section of the book. In identifying the narrator who takes up the project that we are told has been abandoned by Fouroulou Menrad, the passage draws a crucial parallel between the protagonist and the new narrator. This new narrator is described as "un ami qui ne trahira pas mais *qui n'ignore rien de son histoire*, un frère curieux et bavard, sans un brin de méchanceté, à qui l'on pardonne en souriant."[93] This crucial sentence was interpreted above as a means of arguing that the narrator is one and the same — that the original *fils* of the first part of the book is, by now, the *frère* of the second part its title, as well as its narrator. In the lines that follow this sentence, an indirect, almost internal, dialogue appears to take place between these "two" narrators — the narrator/protagonist who refuses to pursue his autobiographical narration and the new narrator who has just been characterized, if not identified:

> Lorsque tout sera dit sur ton compte, Fouroulou, tu auras peut-être cessé de vivre car la vie n'est pas longue, décidément. Tes enfants, les enfants de tes enfants, sauront-ils que tu as souffert ? Oui, il serait bon qu'ils le sachent, mais ils auront à souffrir, eux aussi, à aimer, à lutter. Quelle leçon conviendrait-il de leur donner ? « Une leçon ? Il n'y a pas de leçon », murmures-tu. Je vois ton sourire doux et résigné. Tu voudrais que le narrateur se taise. Non, laisse-le faire. Il n'a pas beaucoup d'illusions mais il t'aime bien. Il racontera ta vie qui ressemble à des milliers d'autres vies avec, tout de même, ceci de particulier que tu es ambitieux, Fouroulou, que tu as pu t'élever et que tu serais tenté de mépriser un peu les autres, ceux qui ne l'ont pas pu.
>
> Tu aurais tort, Fouroulou, car tu n'es qu'un cas particulier et la leçon, ce sont ces gens-là qui la donnent.[94]

I am choosing to quote this passage at length because it concerns not only the discursive transition from first-person to third-person narration, but also — and, as I will argue, more importantly — because it performs an assimilation between the protagonist of the book and the "milliers d'autres vies" with which he shares the trajectory of his lived experience.

My interpretation of this passage rests first on the ambiguous meaning of the word "leçon," which follows two sentences relating the experience of the protagonist to his children and grandchildren. The new narrator then asks, "Quelle leçon conviendrait-il de leur donner?" which Fouroulou the autobiographer dismisses by saying that there is no lesson to be given. The half-heartedness of this protestation — he murmurs it with a smile that is described as "doux et résigné" — supports the notion that the main purpose of this autobiography is not didactic, that it does not purport to be instructional to its author's children and grandchildren. I would argue that, given its place in the literary domain, *Le Fils du pauvre* is presented instead with another

[93] Feraoun, *Fils (Seuil)*, 105; my emphasis.
[94] Feraoun, 105.

meaning of the word "leçon"; specifically, as a written account of a version of a particular experience.[95] For reasons relating, in part, to the recurring modesty of the author,[96] this account changes hands and goes from an obvious autobiography to what appears to be still an autobiography, albeit masked as a biography. The shared perspective of the two narrators was discussed above in the context of arguing that the book remains an autobiography despite the apparent change in narrator and narrative voice. Here, I would like to reconsider the shared perspective more closely as I relate the book as a "leçon" to the historiographical dimension for which I am arguing.

This new narrator, we are told, is both a friend and metaphorical brother of the original autobiographer, Fouroulou Menrad. This new narrator knows all there is to know about the protagonist and cannot help but continue the account of his life even after Fouroulou gives it up. One reason for doing so is suggested in the prefatory page to the second part of *Le Fils du pauvre*, where the new narrator's omniscience seems to be ascribed to the fact that Fouroulou's life "ressemble à des milliers d'autres vies." In the same sentence, the new narrator also identifies a fear of showing contempt for those who failed to rise like Fouroulou as a reason for the latter's abandonment of the autobiographical project. The new narrator's "response" to this presumed fear is that Fouroulou is wrong in thinking he is a special case by virtue of the fact that he has succeeded and others haven't: "Tu aurais tort, Fouroulou, car tu n'es qu'un cas particulier et la leçon, ce sont ces gens-là qui la donnent."

Although this last sentence speaks of the singularity of Fouroulou's experience, it is also the third time in as many paragraphs that an assimilating gesture is performed between Fouroulou and countless (or thousands of) other Kabyle peers who have trodden the same trajectory and lived the same experiences, including the third-person narrator who, after announcing that it is "ces gens-là" who provide the lesson, simply goes on to narrate the rest of Fouroulou's story. The fact that the book is not so much a guide for future generations of descendants as it is an account of his experience freezes the temporality of the project in the time frame narrated in the book. The protagonist's experience in this fixed temporality is then assimilated and doubled, as we saw, as an experience also shared by the narrator of the second part. Ultimately, the same experience — by now more objective and historical in both perspective and form — is presented, through a series of assimilations, as a collective one. What we are left with is a qualification of *Le Fils du pauvre* not only as an autobiographical project begun by Fouroulou Menrad, but also a *historiographical*

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[95] Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, "Leçon," in *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, accessed April 24, 2016, http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=3743477265;. Two of the *Trésor*'s definitions of the word "leçon" belong to the philological and literary domain and are given, respectively as "Texte ou fragment de texte tel qu'il a été lu par le copiste ou l'éditeur. Synon. *variante*" and "Manière de raconter un fait."

[96] Fouroulou's modesty is a point that is made both ironically and non-ironically in a number of instances in the text, and most importantly in the prefatory sections to both the first and second sections of *Le Fils du pauvre*.

project aimed at recording and giving an account of an experience limited in time, but not in examples. The lesson — with its meaning as a written account of a version of a particular experience — is not simply Fouroulou's: it also applies to the thousands of others who share his trajectory.

At this point, the universality of the book's contents matches its title, which is not "Le fils d'*un* pauvre," but the more general *Le Fils du pauvre*. The book is therefore not about the son of *one* poor man, but about *the* son of *the* poor man. The use of the definite article suggests that both individuals in the title are *types*. And although they may not be perennial, these two types refer to a multiplicity beyond the father-son dyad found in the book. The poor man's son is very obviously Fouroulou Menrad, but — as the passage above shows — he could just as well be the fictional narrator who continues Fouroulou's life story and, with it, that of thousands of others who followed the same trajectory. Fouroulou is therefore a named placeholder for a type that, despite being restricted to a specific trajectory related to a specific time and space — i.e., the path followed by a young Kabyle boy growing up in colonial Algeria in the first half of the 20th century — is nonetheless universal by virtue of the multitude of these young Kabyles who, like Feraoun's protagonist and alter ego, struggle with and, through their ultimate choice, overcome the dilemma between a traditional and more modern way of life. The change in narrative voice occurring with the beginning of the second part is a reminder that the narrator of this project — initially an autobiographical project — could just as easily and effectively have been any named or unnamed Kabyle peer of Fouroulou Menrad. Moreover, the change from first- to third-person narration — without any apparent change in subject (i.e., protagonist), without a diminution of omniscience, or without any additional doubt as to one's ability to faithfully recount Fouroulou's experience — performs a leveling of experience in the way historiography does when it considers not individuals, but entire groups of people in both synchronic and diachronic fashions.

When we look at historical texts from both distant and recent histories, it becomes obvious that the collective history — of a group of people defined in accordance with the advent or popularity of different categories — undergoes indeed a leveling of experience: historical texts, one will concede, speak often of the life of the serf, peasant, courtesan, soldier, etc.. In the case of colonial Algeria, as we have seen, historiographical agents both before and after independence seem to reduce the groups concerned to the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized. It is in this context that Mouloud Feraoun not only begins to write an autobiography, and, by the time of its publication, manages to create a first-hand account of a collective experience that he narrates, in part, in the historical third-person narrative voice.

This unique account is historiographically important in two ways. First, it provides a first-hand account of Kabyle society in the first half of the 20th century, as experienced through the protagonist Fouroulou Menrad and, by extension, other Kabyle boys and

their families who shared their particular experience.[97] As its narrator and protagonist announces — even before he identifies himself — his perspective on Kabylie and its people will be different from that of the tourists who experience it as poetry and as a dream.[98] By contrast, the narrator of *Le Fils du pauvre* will anchor his narration on the reality of the lived Kabyle experience — "sa vulgarité" — as analogous to the "banalité" that awaits its visitors upon their return to their country of origin.[99] His perspective, moreover, will be that of an individual implicated in the quotidian dimensions of the Kabyle experience, in this very "vulgarité." Once again, this stands in stark contrast against the perspective of the tourist, as he describes it in the very first paragraph of his second chapter:

> Le touriste qui ose pénétrer au cœur de la Kabylie admire *par conviction ou par devoir*, *des sites qu'il trouve merveilleux*, *des paysages qu'il se dit pleins de poésie* et éprouve toujours *une indulgente sympathie pour les mœurs* des habitants.[100]

As if the substantive *touriste* were not enough to denote the latter's detachment from Kabylie, the narrator finds it necessary to speak of determination and duty as reasons for his or her being there, of sites s/he has marveled at and landscapes in which s/he has found poetry, and of mores for which s/he experiences sympathy. It is as if the narrator is telling the tourist that he or she views Kabylie as a workplace (when present there in his or her function as a colonial administrator), as a site of novelty and inspiration for artistic creation, or as a subject of ethnographic work that elicits mere sympathy. The critique that the narrator so deftly gives by implication is that there is a more valid set of perspectives to be had on Kabylie: not as a place of work for colonial administrators who do not share the indigenous experience, but a place of subsistence; not as artistic inspiration, but as quotidian existence; not one of sympathy, but one of identification. In other words, what is very tacitly but successfully advanced in the book's opening lines is a defense for an account that gives primacy to the lived experience without ignoring the people's intrinsic relationship with the land: we are witnesses to the groundwork that the narrator/protagonist lays for a defense of the biographical and autobiographical perspectives.

And yet, in the very first bit of narration that follows this contrast of perspectives, the narrator assumes the more technical style of a geographer or ethnographer: eschewing sites of interest and landscapes, he offers a perspective that begins as an aerial

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[97] The feminine counterpart of this experience will not enter literature until later, most notably through the literary interventions of Assia Djebar.

[98] "C'est parce que vous passez en touristes que vous trouvez ces merveilles et *cette poésie* à la nature. *Votre rêve* se termine à votre retour chez vous et la banalité vous attend sur le seuil," announces the narrator/protagonist as he extends a thousand apologies "à tous les touristes passés et à venir" Feraoun, *Fils (ENAG)*, 7; my emphasis.

[99] Feraoun, 7. Given the predominance and persistence of the French orientalist tradition through the middle of the twentieth century, it is not difficult to imagine the provenance of these tourists as hexagonal French.

[100] Ibid.; my emphasis.

overview of the village constructed on the vertebrae of a mountain range; he then leads the reader along the main artery, stopping at the nodes that he names — one poetically — *la "place aux musiciens"* and — the other unapologetically by its local appellation — *la "tadjemaït,"* giving the reader a simultaneous taste of art and novelty (if not exoticism).[101] The narrator attempts to imitate the passing visitor in the distance he gives his perspective; yet it is a distance that changes, as the gaze and focus move to smaller units of the village. More visibly, the narrator attempts to imitate the ethnographer's language when describing the population, topography, and other technical details of the village. This technical language, however, is peppered with references and word choices that evoke, more generally, an organic development, and, more specifically, anthropomorphic anatomy — even when referring to inorganic features such as mountains or dwellings:

> Tizi est un village de deux mille habitants. Ses bâtisses *s'agrippent* l'une derrière l'autre sur le sommet d'une crête *comme les gigantesques vertèbres de quelque monstre préhistorique* […]. [La] rue principale garde sa largeur d'origine aux endroits où elle n'est murée que d'un côté : *six bonnes coudées* au moins. Comme, ailleurs, on a construit des deux côtés, alors forcément *elle a été grignotée* et *elle fait pitié dans sa prison* de pierre. *Elle étoufferait*, si elle ne laissait s'épanouir, de distance en distance, tantôt à droite, tantôt à gauche, *de petits bras capricieux*, des ruelles encaissées qui vont se sauver dans les champs. […] Quant aux ruelles, *elles lui ressemblent puisqu'elles sont ses filles*.[102]

It serves to note in the passage that the author does away with the technical language of an objective observer when it comes to measuring distance or spatial infringement of one kind of another: instead of "meters," width is given *coudées*; instead of "encroached upon," the street is described as *grignotée*; instead of appearing "dilapidated," we are told *elle fait pitié*; instead of having "irregular offshoots," the street extends its *petits bras capricieux*, etc.. Just as the quintessential features of autobiography are modified and made to conform to an experience heretofore untold, the descriptive, ethnographic language itself is modified in a way that fits the new perspective from which this experience is narrated. Specifically, unlike the aestheticized, museum-like, or static image that might be conveyed by the descriptions of a tourist or ethnographer, the protagonist's description provides an element of life and temporal dimension to the village, which seems to have developed organically, much like the "polygone quelconque" of *la "place aux musiciens"*.[103]

This oscillation in descriptive language is not without a purpose. Despite the self-recognized humility of the protagonist/narrator — who, as we saw above, claims to be satisfied with leaving only a manuscript — the author of *Le Fils du pauvre* has a specific reader in mind: the French public. The use of a language familiar to this public

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[101] Feraoun, 7–8.
[102] Feraoun, 7–8.; my emphasis.
[103] Feraoun, 8.

when introducing a new place is a conscious authorial attempt to reach it and appeal to it. In order to do so, the narrator assumes the role of autobiographer, historian, and ethnographer all at once, as if to assure the hexagonal reader that what they are reading about an unknown society comes from a valid source and its veracity should not be questioned. This triple role precludes the need for an external accompaniment providing a cultural or historical context for this experience. As James Gusdorf notes in an important essay on what autobiography can and cannot achieve, such a context plays a necessary hermeneutic function:

> Recourse to history and anthropology allows one to locate autobiography in its cultural moment. It remains to examine the undertaking itself, to clarify its intentions, and to judge of its chances for success. The author of an autobiography gives himself the job of narrating his own history; what he sets out to do is to reassemble the scattered elements of his individual life and to regroup them in a comprehensive sketch. The historian of himself wishes to produce his own portrait, but while the painter captures only a moment of external appearance, the autobiographer strains toward a complete and coherent expression of his entire destiny.[104]

Mouloud Feraoun's narrator seems to leave no room for distortion or misunderstanding of the life of the protagonist in *Le Fils du pauvre*. He anticipates his reader's need for an exegetic supplement and chooses to provide it as an integral part of the autobiography he relates.

But that is not all. As the inclusion of anatomical and biological terminology in his descriptions suggests, the author also intends to provide a more organic and dynamic view of the village and its existence. This choice of imagery is not surprising when we recall that this place is home to Fouroulou Menrad, and that the reality of life in it — in the cultural past, pressing present, and precarious future — is *his* reality, which would not exist without the village as a substrate. Life, then — with its spatial, temporal, and experiential dimensions — is immediately put forth as a rebuttal to accounts provided by visitors who are merely tourists in the village, and whose accounts are static, distant, and romanticized. At the same time, life is also announced as the subject of the book, and that is true on the individual scale (i.e., the life of the protagonist), but also on the greater scales of familial, clan, and village life.

The presence of this multi-layered portrayal of Kabyle life — from the individual to the familial, and to the communitarian — challenges the status of *Le Fils du pauvre* as merely an autobiography. Indeed, as we have seen, the protagonist does not make his appearance until the third chapter, and, furthermore, his particular life does not become the primary subject of the book until the beginning of the second section. When

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[104] Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. and trans. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 35.

it does take center-stage, the life of Fouroulou Menrad, although peculiar, is not presented as a *unique* trajectory. On the contrary, as we also noted above, it is assimilated to countless others. Together, the overwhelming presence of familial and community life and the shared trajectory of the protagonist challenge the prevalent understanding of an autobiography by shifting the focus from a particular individual onto many. *Le Fils du pauvre* does this, specifically, by constantly shifting the attention from the linear life of the protagonist: through narration that branches out to relate details about his family and their community in the first part, and through the similarity of experience that the extrapolation from an individual to "des milliers d'autres" announces from the very start of the second part.

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To understand why this is the case in *Le Fils du pauvre*, we first have to consider the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the events recounted in it and analyze how it conforms to but also challenges the conventional definition and iterations of autobiography. In a second instance, we have to consider the literary climate of the time when *Le Fils du pauvre* was written and explore how it relates to the lived experiences that other books at the time choose to recount.

Debra Kelly's extensive work on North-African autobiographers treads outside of the restrictive canonical domain of autobiography and chooses instead, as we have seen, the appellation "autobiographical discourses" when discussing, among others, Mouloud Feraoun.[105] In Feraoun's particular case, Kelly conducts what she calls a "motivated reading," which is mainly concerned with the act of "reading for difference" and, consequently, of seeing books as a form of representation.[106] Kelly's crucial recognition is that "many of the writing strategies used by the writers [whose work she analyzes] are conscious attempts to write themselves out of the dominant system of representation, and to find another way of being."[107] To write oneself "out of the dominant system of representation" implies a number of different approaches that are employed in the early stages of North African autobiographical texts. The (not so) simple act of writing from the space outside of the "dominant system of representation" is itself an essential difference, which is made even greater by the fact that these authors are among the first to write about themselves and their

[105] Kelly, *Autobiography and Independence*, 2–4. By changing the generic designation of what would otherwise be considered "autobiographies," Kelly is stepping out of the conventional understanding of the genre of autobiography just as much as she is making a claim for a different, additional space within it. Her rationale, as she explains throughout, is that the social, cultural, and historical factors concerning North African writers warrant a less deterministic and uniform perspective than European autobiographical texts, if the critic's aim is to understand them and their role in the body of literature coming out of North Africa. Unsurprisingly, colonialism for Kelly is the primary factor through which we are to see and analyze these texts if we expect to understand their authors, the texts themselves, and their reasons for being.

[106] Kelly, 45–46.

[107] Kelly, 45.

communities from a perspective internal to that community and to that experience.

Kelly's chapter on Feraoun submits for analysis not only the autobiographical *Le Fils du pauvre*, but also his other works, the sum of which constitutes what Kelly calls "a life-writing project," which uses as its foundation the "power of culture, of cultural understanding, of a multi-faceted cultural memory."[108] Feraoun, Kelly claims further on, "writes in order for the Kabyle culture to be acknowledged and valued both within Algeria and outside it."[109] Kelly's subsequent analyses — her "motivated readings," if you will — proceed as a function of this form of thinking and of continually situating the author and protagonist of *Le Fils du pauvre* in the context of cultural intersections typical of colonial Algeria. Although Kelly's chapter on Feraoun quite effectively navigates the social, cultural, religious, and ethnic domains germane to colonial Algeria, and although it adequately argues for a place for Feraoun in the corpus of Algerian literature, it nevertheless remains bogged down by a tendency to view Feraoun's life and works primarily as a navigation of this space and as a conscious conciliation of cultural contrasts. As a result, Kelly's argumentation strains, at times, to position Feraoun as a critic of the French colonial system in Algeria and of French authorities in his native Kabylie — a stance that she sees in him not explicitly, but by implication and omission.[110]

Despite these limitations in the portrayal of Feraoun as a *bona fide* critic of the French colonial system, Kelly's approach to his work — including *Le Fils du pauvre* — yields a helpful model for an individual who negotiates an individual identity at the interface of traditional and modern ways of life, particularly in its relation with a collective identity:

> The relationship between collective and individual identities is complex. The individual is a part of a community whose values he upholds and continues, but which he also sometimes criticises. His education marks him out as different. And education also plays a role in the balance of the power relations between coloniser and colonised; such an individual has the means to make his voice heard, a voice that privileges the individual, for that is the currency that the coloniser

[108] Kelly, "Mouloud Feraoun: Life Story, Life-Writing, History," 58, 65.

[109] Kelly, 65.

[110] By recognizing this weakness in Kelly's argumentation I do not intend to claim the opposite — that Feraoun is supportive of the French colonial system and authorities in Algeria. On the contrary, I, too, recognize that Feraoun is critical where immediate criticism is warranted — be it toward French authorities, local authorities, or even elements of his beloved Kabyle tradition. Unlike Kelly, however, I do not labor to view this criticism to the degree she does in his implications, use of irony, or outright omission. Nevertheless, I do not lose sight of the fact that her attempts to attribute a critical attitude to Feraoun are informed by Kelly's initial (and rightful) dismissal of critics who consider Feraoun's work as "assimilationist," by the post-colonial school of thought to which she belongs, as well as by her tendency to view Feraoun's work as a form of representation both on the individual and collective scales.

> values, while at the same time representing a traditional cultural heritage and community-based value system. Feraoun thus constructs a protagonist who forges an identity between the collective and the individual, giving form to the individualism discussed in the introduction.[111]

It goes without saying that Feraoun's life — lived almost exclusively in Algeria between 1913 and 1962 — was one that had to contend with the French colonial system and its manifestations in Algeria. For a long time, the tendency among critics was to regard his attitude in this climate as assimilationist or, at best, as passive. It is against this view that Debra Kelly's book aims her portrayal of Feraoun as a critic of French colonialism in Algeria. Although I am more inclined to agree with Kelly's view, neither of these portrayals is especially helpful for my analysis. When considering Feraoun's life and works — *Le Fils du pauvre* in particular — against the colonial backdrop, his position as a French-educated Kabyle still living and working in his native region becomes more precarious and, at the same time, more significant. As Kelly noted (see quote above), Feraoun has to negotiate between the individual and the collective not only where it concerns identity, but also where it concerns representation.

The representation at stake, as we have seen, oscillates between the protagonist and his family. Through this interplay, Feraoun is not only providing an account of his protagonist's life — ostensibly Feraoun's own life — but also an account of the life of his family and his community. Feraoun's own transformation into an autobiographer is reflected in the protagonist's realization that he is able to translate the language, customs, and lived experience of his family into a written work that ultimately gets printed and published not only for his personal satisfaction, but primarily as a means of offering that reality to his reader. To demonstrate this, I turn my attention again, under a different light, to the second part of *Le Fils du pauvre*.

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The second part of *Le Fils du pauvre* begins with the ambiguous change in narrator we discussed earlier in this chapter, which constitutes a discursive demarcation of the experiential turning point associated with autobiography. Specifically, the protagonist — by now older, attending school, and promoted to the role of older brother — realizes that he needs to assume different and greater familial responsibilities. More importantly, from an experiential perspective the second section of *Le Fils du pauvre* begins to show that the protagonist realizes progressively that he is not simply embedded in a hybrid Kabyle-French society but crucially learns that he can play the role of an intermediary between two cultures as he negotiates between the two in

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[111] Kelly, "Mouloud Feraoun: Life Story, Life-Writing, History," 74. The individualism in question is one that goes beyond the autobiographer as protagonist: it crucially entails an engagement with socio-historical factors, as well as questions of collective identity that are not necessarily germane or typical of autobiographies in the European tradition.

matters of personal identity, as well as relate the lived experience of his community in writing — be it for a hexagonal reader or for Kabyle and Algerian posterity.

This double realization for Fouroulou begins with a crossover between the two cultures that constitute his immediate upbringing: the familial and the educational. After his father falls suddenly ill,[112] he is visited by an old sheikh whose incantations the narrator describes as the equivalent of "vade retro, Satanas."[113] Although it is glaringly out of place in this Muslim/Maraboutist culture, this phrase is nonetheless appropriate in the context of a book destined — as its language clearly indicates — for a French-speaking, and likely hexagonal, reader. The phrase, therefore, functions as an authorial footnote intended to transcribe an unknown cultural detail into one familiar for the target reader.[114]

Conversely, in the following paragraph, we are told that Fouroulou assuages his own fears and those of his siblings by telling them a story he has learned from his school teacher, in which Jean de la Fontaine's "La Cigale et la Fourmi" serves as a stronger amulet than one a sheikh could give. "Seulement," the narrator tells us, "pour faire ouvertement cette audacieuse critique, il a attendu le départ du cheikh et l'assoupissement du père. On ne sait jamais ce qui peut arriver."[115] The protagonist's hesitation on this seemingly trivial transgression underscores his entry into unknown territory — not one where he simply imbibes what his schoolteachers tell or teach him, but one where he becomes an agent of cross-cultural communication, and where he posits a consequential effect for each intrusion.

This cultural crossover is occurring in the microcosm of Fouroulou's own experience and in how he applies it to his family. Soon enough, the reader learns that an even broader form of crossover has already occurred in the Kabyle society of the protagonist's family. Immediately after the illness brought about by his exhaustion, Fouroulou's father, Ramdane, is forced to take a drastic measure to begin to repay the debt that has accrued during his illness and subsequent convalescence: he emigrates to France. It was, the narrator tells us, "l'ultime ressource, le dernier espoir, la seule solution."[116] The tautology of the superlatives in this sentence leaves no doubts about the dire state of the family's finances and resources: they are in a position where they are poised to lose not only their few possessions and plots of land, but with them their

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[112] Suddenly, though not inexplicably, since the narrator suggests that his father, who "démène comme un diable," falls gravely ill because he is "exténué par la fatigue." Feraoun, *Fils (ENAG)*, 92.

[113] Feraoun, 94.

[114] We have already seen how Feraoun modifies the language of ethnographic writing to better suit his perspective as ethnographer who is at once a member of the community he describes. This form of glossing embedded in the narrative is not uncharacteristic of Feraoun's later work, in which he makes more overt attempts to transcribe, transliterate, and translate into French words or phrases referring to both abstract and concrete features of Kabyle culture. For more on this, see Chapter 3.

[115] Feraoun, *Fils (ENAG)*, 94.

[116] Feraoun, 96.

meager means of subsistence, as well. This is not surprising, considering the vital inextricability of the Kabyle people and their land that becomes more central in later works by Feraoun. What is somewhat surprising, however, is that French intrusion in the form of emigration, albeit extreme, functions as a recourse for the Kabyle population. Without delving into the political significance of this action or the broader and complex implications of the colonial project in this society, we can at least recognize that this French intrusion becomes salutary, if not vital, for the Kabyle population when the traditional and quotidian means of existence have become compromised. It is a type of hybridity that may be antagonistic on other levels, but requires some level of conciliation on an existential level, not only of the individuals involved, but also of their traditional society. As the narrator tells us — aware of the irony, no doubt — the father has to leave the native Kabylie in order to save "le modeste *héritage familial*."[117]

The third stage of this hybrid experience implicates language and writing in a way that seems to lead the protagonist of *Le Fils du pauvre* toward a significant role as an agent of more than just (inter)mediation between these two cultures: it leads him to the realization that he can transcribe and translate the reality of that existence into what becomes an autobiography as much as a chronicle of the period in the Kabyle society: *Le Fils du pauvre*. When the family in Kabylie receives its first letter from the father who is working in France, there is a depiction of the letter as an extension of the father, Ramdane: "Vite, montre-moi mon père," says the younger brother Dadar, and the narrator adds that the father "donne ses ordres exactement comme s'il était là."[118] "La famille entière," we are told, "voit le papa à travers la feuille de papier."[119] For the young Fouroulou, the realization goes one step further: as the older student who has been called to translate the letter — it has been written in French by a third party — reveals its contents, "Fouroulou se rendait compte qu'il pouvait en faire autant."[120] The young Fouroulou, who was the one who had felt the need to enlist the help of the elder student, knows that there are certain "formules d'usage" to writing a letter that he does not yet know; he nevertheless recognizes his own ability to learn these formulas and to write letters, and, consequently, "[i]l se promet in petto de les apprendre et de ne plus avoir recours à qui que ce soit pour faire sa correspondance."[121] The correspondence in question is, on a first level, the exchange of letters between the family and the father. On a second level, I'd like to propose that it also refers to the correspondence that Fouroulou realizes is possible between writing and experience; namely, that experience can be represented in language and, in his case, in writing.

Whereas the rest of the family sees the letter as a stand-in for the father — a physical being contained within a physical object — Fouroulou realizes that his knowledge of the French language and writing can transcend the physical and describe the

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[117] Feraoun, 96; my emphasis.
[118] Feraoun, 98.
[119] Feraoun, 99.
[120] Feraoun, 98.
[121] Feraoun, 99.

experiential or represent reality. Upon writing the first letter to his father, the narrator tells us, Fouroulou "était surpris et heureux de constater qu'il savait le français."[122] More importantly, we learn that Fouroulou sees in his command of the French language a unique ability to translate reality: "Comme [la lettre] *traduisait la réalité*, elle lui parut plus belle encore et digne de sortir de la plume d'un nouveau diplômé."[123] This is the reality of a world heretofore confined to a recurring, traditional experience that, by this moment in the history of Algeria — in this hybrid world that the protagonist inhabits, lives in, and even embodies — hinges in a complex way with an almost antipodal experience made possible by the French colonial presence in Algeria.

This newly revealed correlation between experience and writing, the third stage of the realization we've been discussing, coincides with a crucial moment in the education of the young protagonist. When he faces the choice of whether to quit or further pursue his French education, Fouroulou chooses to return to school to prepare for the "concours des bourses familiales," which is the *sine qua non* of any further studies:

> Ayant sacrifié le gibier pour l'étude, il ne lui restait plus qu'à réussir au concours. C'est ce qu'il fit brillamment. Il ne pouvait pas en être autrement. La rédaction s'adressait exactement à lui : « Votre père, ouvrier en France, est ignorant. Il vous parle des difficultés qu'y rencontrent ceux qui ne savent ni lire, ni écrire, de ses regrets de n'être pas instruit, de l'utilité de l'instruction. » Son père est justement dans ce cas. *Il peut imaginer* son embarras quand il fait son marché, quand il cherche du travail, quand un contre-maître lui donne un ordre. *Il peut le supposer* s'égarant dans un métro ou dans une rue. *Il lui reconnaît* l'impossibilité de garder les secrets de famille puisqu'il fait écrire ses lettres par d'autres. Bref ! *les idées ne manquent pas*, il fait une bonne rédaction.[124]

The dreaded *concours* no longer seems a cause for dread when the protagonist discovers that it demands nothing that is too far removed from his own reality. It is as if the essay prompt had been written with him and his experience in mind; it demands that he merely consider the experience of those around him who, unlike Fouroulou himself, cannot read or write. But we also see that Fouroulou goes beyond this initial understanding — "les idées ne manquent pas," says the narrator — and puts his own creativity to use: he *imagines* embarrassment, *supposes* confusion, and *recognizes* difficulties that are not his in a world that he has only known through books. The essay, then, functions as a *mise en abyme* of the experience recounted in *Le Fils du pauvre*, where the first part relates the immediate lived experience that corresponds to the traditional lifestyle of Fouroulou's community, and where the second part establishes a distance from it to relate instead a life that the protagonist

[122] Feraoun, 100.
[123] Ibid., 99–100; my emphasis.
[124] Ibid., 102–3; my emphasis.

has to create himself, as the first in his family and among the first in his community, by negotiating between the traditional and modern ways of life.

Earlier in this chapter we discussed this distinction between the Kabyle and French way of life as a function of the discursive change that occurs in the transition from the first to the second part of *Le Fils du pauvre*. By returning to the same distinction here, I'd like to reconsider it as a turning point characteristic of autobiographies from a different perspective. Namely, as the moment in which the protagonist — a patent *alter ego* of the author — realizes that the Kabyle experience of his community, just as much as his own experience in this community and with the French education he is obtaining, can be translated into writing and reach a wider audience. This single act of essay-writing for the *concours*, then, functions for Fouroulou — and, I would add, for the author, Mouloud Feraoun — as a performative precursor to the formation of a writer and to the writing that results in *Le Fils du pauvre*.

What is strikingly curious about this result is that it assumes, as its primary genre, the autobiography. There is an obvious and pragmatic reason for this: the neophyte author simply chose to write about what he knew best. I would like to argue, however, that pragmatism of this sort is secondary to a more pressing reason for choosing autobiography. As any reader of autobiography will concede, the genre lends itself effectively to comparisons with memoirs, chronicles, and other historical accounts. I would like to propose that, by reading *Le Fils du pauvre* as an autobiography, we should read it precisely with this historical dimension and function in mind. When we read the autobiographical *Le Fils du pauvre* as historiographical, we become privy to an account of a life that is as particular as it is collective. The life of the protagonist, as many critics have assiduously demonstrated, conforms to the biography of the author almost to the letter. Additionally, as we have already argued in our discussion of the discursive change, the book purports to account for an experience that is applicable beyond the life of the protagonist. This is certainly true about the first part of *Le Fils du pauvre*, where the focus is not on the protagonist but on his family and families beyond it as an established and dynamic community sharing a traditional Kabyle experience; it is also just as true about the second part of the book, where the life of the protagonist does come into focus, only to be subsequently brought into comparison with the lives of countless others who tread and create their path at the interface of the traditional Kabyle way of life and the trajectory offered by the French education available to them. As a collective account of these experiences, the book provides insight into the lives of communities of individuals united by a shared experience, but otherwise ignored by the general history of Algeria. As an individual account, the autobiography validates itself as a first-hand testimony about the life of the protagonist and those who surround him.

The unique perspective of an individual narrating his or her own life —writing one's autobiography, in other words — has been rightfully recognized as one requiring a

selective perspective on the self,[125] one that is meant to convey, at best, a deliberate good-faith perspective on the subject or, at worst, a revisionist falsification. In the case of *Le Fils du pauvre*, this first-hand account of the self (and more, as we have seen with regard to young Kabyles like the author or narrator, or with regard to greater portions of Kabyle society) — however biased — is propitious in three ways that relate it to broader elements of Algerian historiography, literature, and the genre of autobiography.

V. More than an autobiography

First, the immediacy between the subject and author in *Le Fils du pauvre* lends credence and authority to the experiences recounted therein. This is a particularly crucial attribute when we consider that the book comes at a time when the Kabyle experience — just as much as the hybrid experience typified by the protagonist — is not the subject of historical accounts coming out of or being written about Algeria. This omission becomes even more inimical at a time when rising Algerian nationalism vying for Algerian independence strove for Algerian unity under the Arabo-centric umbrella in concurrence with an essentially antagonistic view of French presence in Algeria. The resulting irreconcilable dichotomy did not allow or account for further fracturing of the Algerian experience and, with it, Algerian identity; the nationalistic movement's very existence depended on a portrayal, propagation, and acceptance of the image of Algerians as all Arab, all Muslim.[126] In the two decades prior to the beginning of the Algerian War of Independence, it is difficult to think that the propulsion of these views could have escaped the attention of Mouloud Feraoun, who was not only a Kabyle, but also implicated in the coexistence — however problematic — of traditional Algerian cultures and modern modes of life made possible by French colonial presence in Algeria. Consequently, it helps our understanding of the import and motivations of Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* to think of it as a response, in part, to

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[125] This is a general consensus among theorists of autobiography. On this feature of autobiography and others related to the perspective of the autobiographer on his or her own life, see, more specifically, Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," 35–38; Philippe Lejeune, *L'Autobiographie en France* (Paris: A. Colin, 1971), 17; James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 35–37; and Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 5, 9, 15–19.

[126] This goal of attaining Algeria unity was not simply pursued through this leveling of the religion or ethnicity of the indigenous Algerian population; it also enlisted a historical revisionism that extended this unity as far back as ancient times. In this unique historical view, Algerians had always existed and would continue to exist in these lands — where they belonged — despite the series of conquests that had prevented the creation of a proper Algerian state. The French colonial conquest was simply another one in the series — the last one. For more on the numerous ideologies concerning Algerian independence in the years before World War II and the eventual prevalence of the so-called *arabo-islamiste* movement, see Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale : 1830-1954* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 68–80.

this particular climate. We can attribute this not simply to our assumption that Feraoun was aware of these deliberate erasures of minoritarian identity, but also to the fact that the ostensibly autobiographical book devotes a considerable portion — half in each case, to be precise — to two experiences threatened by this ascendant mode of thinking about Algerians monolithically: namely, the daily Kabyle experience, and the experience of a young Kabyle as both a result and agent of French education in Algeria.

This equitable split in content between a collective and an individual experience along the similarities that are drawn between the life of the protagonist and the lives of others within his community or along the same hybrid trajectory upend the conventional understanding of autobiography, whereby the protagonist remains central throughout and may even show great care and intent to distinguish himself from the multitudes of experiences surrounding him. Our perspective on *Le Fils du pauvre* as historiographical in purpose welcomes this deviation from convention; and instead of straining to argue how Feraoun's book conforms to the conventional model of autobiography *despite* these deviations, I support the perspective put forth by Debra Kelly and other post-colonial critics, who, in the context of the colonial experience and colonial subjects, recognize inadequacies in the Rousseauian model that has defined the genre of autobiography and has been prevalent in the Western, male-dominated canon.[127] *Le Fils du pauvre* overcomes this shortcoming by performing both within and without the autobiographical canon: it appeals to the French public with a linear chronology and enough congruences as to be regarded as an autobiography and, at the same time, it "write[s itself] out of the dominant system of representation."[128] It does this by oscillating, at different times and for different purposes, between the protagonist and his family, the protagonist and his community, the protagonist and unnamed peers who undergo the same formative experiences — in other words, the book puts forth a collective history by establishing parallels between the individual experience and the collective experience, to which the author lends credence by relying on the immediacy between personal experience and an account thereof that is afforded to the autobiographical genre.

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Secondly, the first-hand account of *Le Fils du pauvre* as an autobiography is crucial

[127] "The individuals who wrote [these texts…] engage not only with their own personal histories, but also with the collective histories of North Africa and of Europe," writes Kelly, in *Autobiography and Independence*, 1, adding that "[f]rom the 1950s onwards several writers in North Africa […] sought to 'represent' (in both meanings of the word, to portray and to speak for) the experience of the colonised as a collective through the experiences of the individual," 2-3. Although later in the same chapter she warns against the existing critical tendency to allow the "we" to mask the "I" in North African autobiographical texts, she nonetheless recognizes that the collective did take precedence over the individual in the 1950s, 23. *Le Fils du Pauvre*, recognized by Kelly herself as the first in a line of autobiographical texts, was first published in 1951.

[128] Kelly, *Autobiography and Independence*, 45.

because it responds to a dearth of a different kind: a glaring absence in literature of the Algerian experience of and from the perspective of an indigenous group. The literary scene around the time when *Le Fils du pauvre* was written (1939-1948) was dominated by what has come to be known as *l'École d'Alger*, a literary current associated with names such as Gabriel Audisio, Albert Camus, and Emmanuel Roblès. According to most critics, the École d'Alger was a direct reaction against the so-called Algerianists who predated them, whose accounts of Algeria were written from the outside perspective of a visitor and were fraught with problematic orientalist themes. By contrast, the École d'Alger purported to give a first-hand account of the Algerian experience from those living it. Much like the contemporaneous historiography, however, this experience was limited to the *pied-noir* population of Algeria.[129]

Knowledge of this current was undoubtedly accessible to the French-educated author of *Le Fils du pauvre*. In a letter to Albert Camus dated 27 May 1951, Feraoun expresses his admiration for the recipient but also has the *culot*, as he puts it in another letter,[130] to reproach the illustrious author for the elision of indigenous characters in *La Peste*:

> j'ai lu *La Peste* et j'au eu l'impression d'avoir compris votre livre comme je n'en avais jamais compris d'autres. J'avais regretté que parmi tous ces personnages il n'y eût aucun indigène et qu'Oran ne fût à vos yeux qu'une banale préfecture française. Oh ! ce n'est pas un reproche. J'ai pensé simplement que, s'il n'y avait pas ce fossé entre nous, vous nous auriez mieux connus, vous vous seriez senti capable de parler de nous avec la même générosité dont bénéficient tous les autres. Je regrette toujours, de tout mon cœur, que vous ne nous connaissiez pas suffisamment et que nous n'ayons personne pour nous comprendre, nous faire comprendre et nous aider à nous connaître nous-mêmes.[131]

Feraoun's regret that there exists a seemingly insurmountable *fossé* between the Kabyle and *pied-noir* experiences is a tacit recognition of the reconcilability and similarities between them. He articulates this similarity explicitly in the paragraph that follows, where he seems to respond to the need for somebody to make the Kabyle people and experience known and understood. He expresse his own intention "d'écrire, de parler de nos compatriotes tels que je les vois," adding,

> Si je parvenais un jour à m'exprimer sereinement, je le devrais à votre livre — à vos livres qui m'ont appris à me connaître puis à découvrir les autres, et à constater qu'ils me ressemblent. Ne puis-je donc pas me payer ce ridicule : tenter à mon tour d'expliquer les Kabyles et montrer

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[129] For a more in-depth account of figures and features associated with the École d'Alger and the Algerianist movement that predated it, see chapters 5–7 in Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria*.

[130] Feraoun, *Lettres*, 64.

[131] Feraoun, 63.

> qu'ils ressemblent à tout le monde ? À tous les Algériens, par exemple ? Ce fossé qui s'élargit stupidement, ne faudrait-il pas essayer de le combler ?[132]

Although Feraoun is writing this letter after the publication of *Le Fils du pauvre* and even after being awarded the literary prize of the city of Algiers, it nonetheless helps to confirm an existing desire in him to do for the Kabyle population what Camus and others have done for the *pied-noir* experience. I would also add what Feraoun's characteristic modesty prevents him from saying directly in this letter: that he recognizes, for himself, a role tantamount to that of Camus and others vis-à-vis their respective communities; and that he already sees in *Le Fils du pauvre* an earnest and successful attempt to overcome the distance between the two experiences that constitute, in part, the complex totality that is the Algerian experience. When he recognizes himself that the Kabyle people "ressemblent à tout le monde," Feraoun proposes a humanistic assimilation between the Kabyle experience and that of other populations. More importantly, when he casually asks, "À tous les Algériens, par exemple?" he proposes an assimilation of the Algerian experience regardless of background. With this rhetorical question, he is appealing to and upholding Camus's own romantic ideal of an Algeria defined more by space — i.e., its geography — than by time — i.e., the lineage of its constitutive populations. Having just read Camus's *La Peste*, Feraoun is also, in a way, paraphrasing the book's final message to say that there are more things that unite than things that divide the different populations of Algeria.[133]

Feraoun's letter to Camus concludes with a direct recognition of his role as a Kabyle writer and of the role of *Le Fils du pauvre* in overcoming the distance he has deplored earlier in his letter: "J'ai réussi à attirer sur nous," writes the young Kabyle, "l'attention d'Audisiau [*sic*], Camus, Roblès. Le résultat est magnifique. Vous êtes Algériens tous trois et vous n'avez pas à nous ignorer…."[134] The naming of the three *pied-noir* authors as metonyms for the collective experiences of their respective groups attributes a place for these groups in the composite Algerian experience, in which Feraoun not only recognizes the glaring need for the Kabyle experience — the experience of the *nous* repeated twice in the last citation — but also implicitly adds himself to the author-metonyms he enumerates. The last sentence of this paragraph — "vous n'avez pas à nous ignorer…" — is as much a recognition of the role of Feraoun's own work (consisting, by this point, of only *Le Fils du pauvre*) as testimony of Kabyle life as it is an invitation for these figures of the École d'Alger to regard it in the same way: that is, as a work performing a chronicling of the Kabyle experience

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[132] Feraoun, 63.

[133] In the final paragraphs of *La Peste*, Camus's narrator, Rieux, reveals that "au milieu des fléaux" one learns "qu'il y a dans les hommes plus de choses à admirer que de choses à mépriser," Camus, *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles*, 1471. Feraoun seems to be responding with "Il y a dans les expériences des Algériens plus de choses qui les rapprochent que de choses qui les éloignent les uns des autres."

[134] Feraoun, *Lettres*, 63.

alongside the *pied-noir* experience that pervades their work. The use of the verb *ignorer*, moreover, does not simply declare that the Kabyle experience can now be known — "you can now get to know us" — but also eliminates the possibility of an excuse for ignoring the Kabyle experience — "you no longer have an excuse to neglect us." In this one sentence, Feraoun seems to claim a space for his own writing alongside those of his fellow Algerian writers, thereby bridging the gap he decries in his letter to Camus and filling the void calling for the addition of the Kabyle experience to the Algerian literary canon.

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This brings us to the third essential advantage to considering *Le Fils du pauvre* as an autobiography: namely, the inherent disinterestedness of a written work that precludes the possibility of self-serving revisionism by having the autobiography precede the public persona of the autobiographer. Autobiography has been regarded as a dynamic genre with a foot on two different time that allows the author — who is, at once, the protagonist — the opportunity to look at his or her *past* life through the prism of the autobiographical process, which is characterized by a selection of memories, connections, and perspective that are all a function of the *present*, i.e., of the time of writing.[135] Autobiography, therefore, is imbued with a potential for revisionism and rebranding of the self that no other genre claiming veracity can match. Critics and theorists have come to comment on this potential after looking at the Western tradition of autobiography, which, as we have seen, considers Rousseau's *Confessions* as both the prototype and prime example of modern autobiography. In this same tradition, autobiography is largely attributed to writers — political and military figures relying instead on the *memoir* — which presupposes that both a written corpus and the public persona that goes with it predate the autobiographical process. In Philippe Lejeune's words,

> L'autobiographie est, dans l'histoire littéraire, un phénomène secondaire, dépendant de l'écriture romanesque déjà acceptée. Mais elle

[135] There is an overall agreement among genre theorists that the autobiographical project, by virtue of this temporal duality, is as much an exercise on subjectivity and consciousness of the self as it is a historical account of a particular life. The "consciousness of the nature of one's own existence" underlies the figure of the metaphor that James Olney uses in his understanding of autobiography in *Metaphors of Self*, 44. In *French Autobiography*, 15–26, Michael Sheringham relates this retrospective and introspective action to the narrative understanding we referred to earlier in the chapter. Georges Pascal prefers to view the same action as one creating a "philosophical history" or providing the autobiographer with the possibility for an *interpretation* of his or her life, Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 9, 19. In recognizing these two moments in time, Philippe Lejeune seems to insist that the temporal space in between is one in which the person becomes a *personality* — a notion that also helps construct his definition of an autobiography: "*Récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité*," *Le Pacte autobiographique*, 14, original italics.

> est aussi, dans l'histoire de chaque individu, une expérience seconde, c'est-à-dire un phénomène de *reconversion* au sein même de l'écriture. Pour écrire son autobiographie, il faut non seulement avoir déjà vécu (rares sont les autobiographies écrites par des jeunes gens) mais surtout il faut déjà avoir fait quelque chose dans sa vie pour réaliser sa personnalité sur le plan intellectuel, moral ou artistique. […L]'autobiographie vient toujours après d'autres formes d'écriture.[136]

Let us recall that Mouloud Feraoun begins writing the manuscript that becomes *Le Fils du pauvre* in 1939, when he is only twenty-six years of age and whose public dimension — what Lejeune calls an autobiographer's *personnalité* — extended no further than what is allotted to a schoolteacher in rural Kabylie. When we consider *Le Fils du pauvre* as an autobiography from an individual in this context, we must consequently recognize that it performs another deviation from the commonly theorized Rousseauian model in order to make ground for a different mode of representation. As we have argued from different perspectives based on different aspects of the book, this mode is historiographical in nature and purpose. As Feraoun's first book, *Le Fils du pauvre* responds to the urgency signaled by the absence of the Kabyle experience in both historical and literary writings of the time. As an autobiography written by a twenty-six-year-old schoolteacher with no renown to his name, it preemptively invalidates any imputations of personal revisionism and falsity to which an autobiography by a famous writer might have been susceptible.

The veracity that might be threatened by the self-portrayal of a famous autobiographer — who might believe that particular aspects of his or her public work and life require consideration, justification, or defending in his or her autobiography — is, therefore, not similarly threatened in the case of an unknown, nascent writer who, instead of taking care to (re)construct a deliberate portrait of himself, opts for a chronicle of both an individual and a collective histories with a form of objectivism we ascribe, in good faith, to a historiographer.

But this work for Feraoun has only just begun. As we will see in a later chapter, there is a conscious and persistent attempt by the Kabyle author to become a chronicler of the dynamic and complex Kabyle experience in ways that extend beyond the autobiographical and delve into different genres and modes of representation. When he says "vous n'avez pas à nous ignorer…" to Camus, therefore, Feraoun also seems to be making a promise: "you *will* get to know us." The rest, as Feraoun's original ellipsis that weighs down the entire letter seems to indicate, is yet to come….

[136] Lejeune, *L'Autobiographie en France*, 38.

CHAPTER TWO

A new model, a new future: The paradigm of Algeria as a *patrie* and the promise it brings in Albert Camus's *Le Premier Homme*

« Pour toute l'enfance d'Albert Camus, voir Le Premier Homme. *»*
Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus : une vie*

For the reader of Albert Camus's *Le Premier Homme*, the similarities of the text with the author's biography by Olivier Todd do not go unnoticed. So numerous are the correspondences and cross-references that the biographer concludes the second chapter on the author's life with a footnote referring the reader looking for more details to *Le Premier Homme*.[137] That *Le Premier Homme* is, first and foremost, autobiographical in its content, is not disputed here or elsewhere in critical literature. Indeed, its autobiographical composition is taken as an immediate given, despite the author's repeated allusions to it as a *roman*.[138] Critics who regard it as an autobiography delight in pointing out the author's slip-ups in alternating between names of family members and those he gives his characters; others deplore that so much of the book's content, as it has come to us, remains merely autobiographical.

In this chapter, my approach to the book is no different from the general scholarly consensus in regarding the book as autobiographical. But, as far as the analysis presented here is concerned, the precise generic designation of the book is not an issue whose resolution would elicit "worthier" perspectives or foreclose the possibility of "unworthy" ones. I feel justified in diminishing the question of genre from the outset by the fact that the author's biographical details, as they appear in *Le Premier Homme*, represent only one side of the coin. As I propose in the pages that follow, aside from the biographical plot concerning its protagonist, the book attempts to impose a particular understanding of Algeria — one that may have arisen from events contemporaneous to the time of its writing, and may have purported to justify its author's complex stance on the question of Algerian independence. This understanding is particularly salient in the book's first part, titled "Recherche du père," which constitutes more than one half of the book. It becomes apparent not only in the nature of its contents, but also in the hesitation that is conveyed with regard to

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[137] See note 30 in Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus : une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 1059; given above as epigraph to this section.

[138] Even followers of Philippe Lejeune, the most unyielding theorist of the genre of autobiography, contort their way into allotting a space for Camus's *Le Premier Homme* within the domain of autobiography. See Lecarme and Lecarme-Tabone, *L'Autobiographie*, 25, 233–34.

its structure and focus.

My analysis will begin with a close reading of the opening pages of the first part of *Le Premier Homme*, "Recherche du père," which will be followed by a close reading of the final pages of the same section. This juxtaposition is intended to convey the discrepancy between the initial trajectory that the author attempts to give the narrative and the resulting trajectory. My reading will alternate between form and content in order to reveal the significance of the interplay between the two, as well as relate this interplay to the parallelism between the biography of the protagonist and the "biography" of Algeria I argue for in my close readings.[139] The cohesion of the two in the narrative, I will ultimately argue, provides the understanding of Algeria that underlies this entire first section: namely, Algeria not as a "nation," but as a different entity that I choose to call *patrie*.[140]

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The existing structure of *Le Premier Homme* consists of two developed sections and a number of notes and annexes meant to structure the remainder of the book. The two developed sections — titled "Recherche du père" and "Le Fils ou Le Premier Homme" — constitute the bulk of the unfinished novel and, at the same time, hint at a natural chronology from father to son. The author's own notes indicate that this natural chronology corresponds to the intended narrative order of the resulting novel.[141]

As we saw above, there is no question that *Le Premier Homme* is autobiographical, if not an autobiography *per se*. As such, a chronological order of events imposes itself on the narrative. The book begins with the birth of the protagonist and Camus's *alter ego*, Jacques Cormery, whose childhood is then recounted in the form of detailed moments in later chapters. After the scene of his birth, however, the focus remains on

[139] In the following pages, I refer to the section recounting the protagonist's childhood as a long intervening narrative between the portions of the manuscript that I consider. It should be noted right away, however, that this section could just as well have been placed in a different order in the final iteration of *Le Premier Homme* that we will never know. My approach, therefore, potentially compensates for any difference in the structure that Camus himself would have given the novel, as opposed to what his editor opted to do with the published posthumous manuscript of *Le Premier Homme*.

[140] This choice is not entirely my own. It is informed by Albert Camus's numerous qualifications of Algeria as a "patrie," which, importantly, carries with it a significant affective element that is absent in the notion of a nation.

[141] In the "Annexes" section of the book's original publication, we can see Camus's sketch for the entire structure of *Le Premier Homme*. It will consist of a first part titled "Les Nomades," followed by a second part titled "Le Premier Homme," and then by a third and (possibly) final part titled "La Mère." See Albert Camus, *Le Premier Homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 306–7. In the written text, the title of the first part seems to have been changed to "Recherche du père," though it still contains the original sections recounting scenes from different times in the protagonist's life.

the search for the father that the title of the first section announces.[142] As a result, the protagonist's own life, his childhood, is deferred to later chapters within the same section, where the search for the father appears, if not concluded, then at least relegated to the background and replaced by portraits of other members of the protagonist's family and early life.

This shift is not accidental. First of all, it is practical in finding fodder for the narrative when the details concerning the father's life are so meager. Whereas the beginning of the first section intimates a slow and progressive unfolding of the father's life, by the fifth chapter it comes to a timely end with the revelation of details surrounding his death.[143] The reader is informed explicitly of this dearth of facts when the protagonist takes stock of the information he has been able to gather about his father up to that point: "[…] Jacques essayait de mettre en ordre les renseignements qu'il avait recueillis. À vrai dire, il n'y en avait qu'une poignée, et aucun ne concernait directement son père."[144] Nevertheless, this final assessment comes in the very last chapter of the section titled "Recherche du père," after the narrator has used over one hundred intervening pages to recount scenes from the protagonist's childhood and portraits of people who shaped it.

This final tally also announces a reflection on Algeria and its inhabitants, which leaves no doubt about the intrinsic relationship the narrator recognizes between the land and its people and, consequently, between his father's life and the history of Algeria. This association parallels a similar one that the author begins to elaborate in the opening pages of *Le Premier Homme*, where the history of his family, and ultimately the history of other Algerians, is inextricably connected to the land and the erasure it imposes. Despite this connection between the land and the people, however, the *recherche du père* concludes with a discussion of the book's central notion of *le premier homme*. More significantly, it ends with a categorical statement that disassociates the protagonist from his own father: "Et pourtant il savait maintenant dans le fond de son cœur que Saint-Brieuc et ce qu'il représentait ne lui avait jamais rien été […]."[145]

It is in the congruity between the first and last chapters of the section "Recherche du père" that I would like to stop for a moment, and explore more closely what portrait of the father and what portrait of Algeria are given in them, and, subsequently, how they relate to each other.

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[142] Namely, in the chapters titled "Saint-Brieuc," "Saint-Brieuc et Malan," and "Le père. Sa mort. La guerre. L'attentat."

[143] The chapter's title itself, a pastiche alluding to the father, his death, the war, and a bombing ("Le père. Sa mort. La guerre. L'attentat"), betrays an abandonment of the kind of slowly reconstructed portrait that the previous pages seem to promise.

[144] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 171.

[145] Camus, 182.

ACT I: Enter the Father, the Son, the Land

The first chapter — and, at once, the section "Recherche du père" and the book itself — begins *in medias res* and immediately delimits the setting to "*la* carriole qui roulait sur une route caillouteuse."[146] This is not just *one* of many wagons on the pebbly road; it is immediately designated as the only one making the trek. Despite the absence of a caravan of wagons dotting the trail, the tableau still evokes the westward expansion and settling of the American West. By borrowing from a staple of American history, the trek seems to suggest a similar settling of Algeria by a different set of pioneers. Before introducing the people in the wagon — the awaited protagonist or protagonists — the narrator dedicates two long paragraphs to the setting surrounding them. The wagon is flanked by the pebbly road beneath its wheels and by the thick clouds accompanying it along its path. The clouds above "ce pays sans nom" go by "à peine plus vite que ne l'avaient fait pendant des millénaires les empires et les peuples."[147] Nature and people seem move together in this setting: they enter this land, coalesce into raindrops or empires, and slowly move beyond its geographical borders or outside of history. The relationship between the land and its people seems to be, at once and seemingly paradoxically, intrinsic and transient.

An image of the "quatre voyageurs" begins to emerge progressively: an Arab holding the reins, a man ("un Français d'une trentaine d'années"), a woman — his wife — who keeps reassuring the Frenchman that everything is alright, and a sleeping four-year-old boy.[148] The woman, we learn after a couple more pages, is pregnant: "Elle va avoir un petit enfant," says the Frenchman in an attempt to pithily explain the woman's discomfort and her need for a doctor upon arrival.[149] Although the suspenseful depiction of their arduous trek promises an open-ended entry into the unknown, the actual unfolding of their arrival is far from such an adventurous beginning. Instead, everything seems to be pre-arranged: there is an Arab waiting for them at the Algiers train station;[150] the house they find, although "inconnue," "les attendait," along with a few pieces of furniture in it;[151] the *domaine de Saint-Apôtre*, their destination, is where the Frenchman — finally identified as Henri Cormery — is expected to become manager;[152] and, finally, the other individuals — the European woman at the "Cantine agricole Mme Jacques," and the doctor who had himself been informed by the mayor — seem to be aware of their arrival.[153] The only unforeseen contingency appears to be the birth of the child, which the Frenchman "attendait […] pour plus tard."[154]

Despite this unforeseen arrival, the birth of the child is also awaited by the family and

[146] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 11; my emphasis.
[147] Camus, 11.
[148] Camus, 11–13.
[149] Camus, 15.
[150] Camus, 14.
[151] Camus, 15.
[152] Camus, 18.
[153] Camus, 18–20.
[154] Camus, 20.

is even depicted as a sort of prophetic fulfillment. From the moment the Frenchman announces that his wife "va avoir un petit enfant," we can see that the focus is not on the woman being subjected simultaneously to a hard journey and labor pains, but on the child that is going to come. The Frenchman's use of a future tense is echoed in the Arab's response who turns to the woman to say, "Tu auras un garçon," and, with an optative use of the subjunctive, adds, "Qu'il soit beau,."[155] It is similarly reflected in the doctor's reassurance, a moment later, that "tout se passera bien."[156] So great is the focus on the birth of the child that nothing seems to hinder or inconvenience it. By the time Henri Cormery arrives back home with the doctor, they are greeted by the owner of the *cantine*, who joyfully exclaims: "Plus besoin de vous, docteur. Ça s'est fait tout seul."[157] In a more intimate moment later on, the mother of the newborn turns to her husband to announce "Il est venu."[158] For a Western reader, the sentence "Il est venu" — in French, in its English equivalent "He is come," or in any other language — immediately evokes the birth of Jesus Christ, whose initials the author borrows for the newborn and the future protagonist, Jacques Cormery.

The correspondences between the birth of the protagonist and that of Jesus Christ do not simply end here. We have already seen that, just like Joseph and the pregnant Mary, the Cormery family is far from home and ready to welcome a child. We also saw the birth of the child — a male child to boot — as a long-awaited event that could not have been thwarted or inconvenienced by travel or the lack of a doctor. Similarly, the unedited manuscript of *Le Premier Homme* betrays a conscious effort on the part of the author to retain and strengthen this echo of the holy family triad by textually eliminating the newborn's four-year-old brother: though he may have been in the carriage when we first encountered its four *voyageurs*, in a matter of pages he is no longer in the picture: "j'ai laissé un garçon de quatre ans à Alger chez ma belle-mère," announces Henri Cormery when asked if the child was his first.[159]

As we see from the events recounted above, the first chapter treats, on the whole, the birth of the book's protagonist, Jacques Cormery. This is not unusual for an autobiographical text. Ironically, however, the apparent protagonist in this first chapter is not Jacques, but his father, Henri, who is depicted as valiant and provident toward his family. All "on-stage" actions and dialogue moving the plot forward involve the father: nothing appears to be done of which he is not the actor or solicitor, and nothing appears to be said that is not by him or to him.

Yet, despite his tireless agitation and his valiant efforts to facilitate his son's birth, the father fails to be there himself or provide a doctor at the moment of birth. Instead, the child first sees the light of day in the presence of the French woman, Mme Jacques,

[155] Camus, 15.
[156] Camus, 20.
[157] Camus, 22.
[158] Camus, 22.
[159] Camus, 20.

the Arab wife of the coachman, and, of course, his own mother.[160] Although abundantly present in the opening chapter, we can also see that the father is surprisingly inoperative as far as the subsequent textual plot and the protagonist's life are concerned. And although he later lends his figure and the meager details of his life to the book's entire first section, he merely haunts it with his glaring absence. This, as we will see, will lead the protagonist to the understanding and elaboration of the notion of *le premier homme* that we find at the end of the section titled "Recherche du père."

The father, it seems, is demoted from his initial role as apparent protagonist to a mere allusion from the moment he lies down and closes his eyes at the end of the first chapter.[161] The French woman who tells the doctor that he is no longer needed could just as well have been speaking to Henri Cormery who is standing right beside the doctor. Narratologically, however, it is not easy to claim that the father is no longer needed; he has, after all, been an agent in the first chapter in which we see the birth of the protagonist. Nevertheless, when the new chapter begins on the opposite page, we are "[q]uarante ans plus tard," and the "homme" burdened with moving the plot forward is no longer Henri Cormery, but the forty-something Jacques, the titular *premier homme*.[162]

Aside from the foreshadowing of an inoperative and absent father and of a life of work,[163] the first chapter relates a point of origin for the protagonist's life, seemingly providing a conventional beginning for the autobiography. Yet the manner in which the narrator unfolds this moment — replete with both *mythical* and *historical* allusions to the birth of the protagonist — is also significant.[164] This is a textual

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[160] This exclusively feminine presence and the absence of the father at the beginning of Jacques's life foreshadow his later life, about which we will learn in the section dedicated — not without irony, but also not without design — to the *recherche du père*.

[161] "[…] se renversant en arrière, [le père] ferma les yeux," Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 24.

[162] Camus, 25. Both chapters begin with an apparent protagonist — *l'homme* or *un homme* — whose name is revealed only later in the chapter. The protagonist of the second chapter, titled "Saint-Brieuc," is the forty-year-old Jacques Cormery. More on the death of the father and what it signifies for the narrative later on in this chapter.

[163] "Le lendemain, il faudrait se mettre au travail. Près de lui, la main déjà usée, presque ligneuse de sa femme lui parlait aussi de ce travail," Camus, 24.

[164] The chapter situates us explicitly in the outskirts of Algiers in the fall of 1913. On top of it, it presents Algeria as it was at the time: a fully colonized country (colonization having begun in 1830 and accelerated after the 1870s) with a French administration in power, French or European commercial interests already in place, and a European population already cohabitating with the indigenous population referred to indiscriminately as "Arabes." This is the *historical* dimension interwoven within the chapter's narrative. The dimension to which I am referring as *mythical* is less explicit than the historical: it is mostly stylistic and it concerns the descriptions of the land and its history, of the father as a valiant (albeit inoperative) figure, and of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the book's *bona fide* protagonist, Jacques Cormery. As we will see below, the *mythical* extends beyond the style of

gesture that hints at a desire to anchor the Cormery family not only in the early history of modern (i.e. colonial) Algeria, but also in the tradition of the narrator's mythical understanding of it as a nameless land traversed by peoples and empires across millennia. Through the reconstructed portrait of the origins of the Cormery clan and of the protagonist himself in both historical and mythical terms, we also obtain a portrait of Algeria that is, similarly, both mythical and historical. The most salient feature of the portrait I am calling "historical" is the description of the society in which the Cormery family finds a seemingly peaceful cohabitation of French (i.e., *pied-noir*) and Arab (i.e., more broadly indigenous Algerians). The other side of the portrait, this "mythical" Algeria, is more complicated and requires greater attention for understanding.

We find a description of colonial Algeria as mythical in this same chapter, where, as we have seen, the birth of the protagonist is also depicted in mythical fashion through the evocation of predestination and through the parallels with the holy family. This portrait of colonial Algeria is twofold: it is at once of the land and of the people. The description of the land is such that it fails to name it as a country, and even refuses to name it, referring to it simply as "ce pays sans nom"; instead, it relies on Algeria as a geographical descriptor more than a geo-political entity.[165] Furthermore, this nameless country is mythical in that the erasure of its name also extends to an elision of its history and its inhabitants: "pendant des millénaires les empires et les peuples" have traversed this country no more remarkably than the heavy clouds that pass over it.[166] Algeria is therefore more nature than history; more appropriately described in terms of time immemorial than in terms of historical time and memory. No wonder, then, its history is more cyclical — like the seasonal changes and the many civilizations that have traversed it — than linear in the way we understand the history of a land and its people from a modern perspective.

On the other hand, there is the description of Algeria's inhabitants at the time of the Cormerys' arrival. The characters we encounter in the opening chapter and the interactions that take place among them are perhaps the clearest indication of an attempt to construct a foundational moment defined by a cohabitation of groups that define this moment in Algeria's "cyclical" history. The simultaneous presence of Frenchmen and Arabs is, at first sight, unremarkable for a reader of Camus.[167] In a departure from his other works, however, the characters described as "Arab" here are not relegated to the background and do not simply blend with the landscape. In the first chapter of *Le Premier Homme*, there is instead a benign collaboration between

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the narrative and the nature of the characters into a more general perception of Algeria and its people as an "imagined community."

[165] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 11. In the opening paragraph of the first chapter, the name "Algeria" is mentioned in the way the Atlantic Ocean or Tyrrhenian Sea are mentioned: simply to locate a geographical feature — "les hauts plateaux d'Algérie" — in the way one would locate the North American Plains.

[166] Camus, 11.

[167] As is the use of the term "Arabes" as all-inclusive of Algeria's indigenous Arab and Kabyle populations.

these two groups, one that begins with the pre-arranged meeting at the train station, continues with the trek to Saint-Apôtre where Henri Cormery is expected to arrive, and ends with the birth of Jacques Cormery being assisted by a French woman *and* an Arab woman. This collaboration hints at an acceptance of their mutual role as just the next people in line to co-inhabit the land of Algeria. But it also raises questions about the division of this shared role — questions that are left unanswered in this part of the narrative, and which can only be answered by looking at the actual history of colonization in Algeria.

The text clearly depicts a colonial setting in which the French population is in charge of administration and in control of many economic interests such as farms and vineyards. In this regard, the depiction is historically accurate. But the text also leaves unanswered questions about what facilitates their intelligibility — no mention of language is made in exchanges between the two populations, leaving the reader to see their mutual understanding as one of the natural elements of this collaboration, which is itself one of the many that have taken place and will take place on this land. At the same time, it suggests that there is no need for a common language as long as there is a common land, namely Algeria. More importantly, this depiction elides any misunderstanding or sign of tension between the two populations, culminating instead in an emblematic scene in which Henri Cormery and the Arab who has accompanied him throughout stand shoulder-to-shoulder in a fraternal submission to the land, to the elements, and to the cyclical history that defines it:

> Sous la vigne, l'Arabe, toujours couvert de son sac, attendait. Il regarda Cormery, qui ne lui dit rien. « Tiens », dit l'Arabe, et il tendit un bout de son sac. Cormery s'abrita. Il sentait l'épaule du vieil Arabe et l'odeur de fumée qui se dégageait de ses vêtements, et la pluie qui tombait sur le sac au-dessus de leurs deux têtes. […] L'eau venue de milliers de kilomètres […] allait inonder […] l'immense terre quasi déserte dont l'odeur puissante revenait jusqu'aux deux hommes serrés sous le même sac, pendant qu'un faible cri reprenait par intervalles derrière eux.[168]

For anyone acquainted with Algerian history, this depiction contradicts the nature of historical relations between the French and indigenous Algerian populations. It is partly in this context that I regard the textual depiction of French and indigenous inhabitants of Algeria as *mythical*. I therefore suggest that the book — at least in this chapter — is not trying to construct a history, but rather a *mythical foundational story*, one that juxtaposes the birth of this coexistence — if not country — with the birth of the protagonist. Yet, despite this mythical depiction, the narrator's approach is historical: the attempted chronology not only correspond to the trajectory we normally find in autobiographies, it also serves to provide a point of origin from which the protagonist can begin to accumulate archival and testimonial knowledge that will help the protagonist construct a linear trajectory that will relate this moment of origin, his father's life, and his own life.

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[168] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 23.

Camus's narrator, therefore, seems to begin the biography of the protagonist and of this population in "down time" fashion while, simultaneously, providing a portrait of an "imagined community." I am borrowing these phrases from an important work by Benedict Anderson's on nationalism, its forms, and its permutations.[169] Anderson's analysis picks up where Ernest Renan refused to go in 1882 when he answered the question, "qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," and failed to define the nation in terms more concrete than "une âme, un principe spirituel."[170] Anderson identifies a nation as "an imagined political community" — where the qualifier "imagined" acknowledges the fact that "in the minds of each [member of a nation] lives the image of their communion" without their needing to know or meet or hear from other members, and "community" refers to the persistent conception of a nation as "a deep, horizontal comradeship" that supersedes any actual fracturing in it.[171]

Further on in his study, Anderson credits the formation of new countries in the Americas with a new form of consciousness, a consciousness which, in turn, arose from the marked differences that had developed between the new countries and the parallel, colonial country to which they had been subordinated.[172] He relates this rupture to the act of forgetting, which has been deemed as crucial as that of remembrance in the conception and construction of a nation.[173] "All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias," states Anderson, and continues:

> Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances spring narratives. […] These narratives […] are set in homogenous, empty time. Hence their frame is historical and their setting sociological. This is why so many autobiographies begin with the circumstances of parents and grandparents, for which the autobiographer can only have circumstantial, textual evidence; and why the biographer is at pains to record the calendrical, A.D. dates of two biographical events which his or her subject can never remember: birth-day and death-day. […] As

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[169] See Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London ; New York: Verso, 2006).

[170] Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?*, 26.

[171] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6–7. The term "political," for Anderson, is related to the imagined aspect of the nation. It refers to the *limited* nature of this imagined community, which changes in the way geopolitical borders are prone to changing, as well as to its attribute as *sovereign* in a way that breaks with the divinely ordained or dynastic orders of the past. See Anderson, 7. For the purposes of my analysis, I will bypass the political dimension of the nation and refer to it simply as an "imagined community."

[172] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 188.

[173] Here by Anderson, but also, notably, by Ernest Renan, who cites forgetting as "un facteur essentiel de la formation d'une nation," particularly when it comes to the necessary task of seeing beyond — i.e., forgetting — the violence that may have accompanied past unifications. See Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?*, 7–9.

> with modern persons, so it is with nations.[174]

Anderson's example of the biographer and autobiographer who begin with the parents of grandparents is crucial to our analysis of *Le Premier Homme*. The inclusion of the period and events preceding the birth of the subject of a biography or autobiography is meant to underscore their role in filling the gaps of a lineage that ultimately results in a "conception of personhood, *identity* […], which, because it can not be 'remembered,' must be narrated."[175] Saying "[a]s with modern persons, so it is with nations" is to say that the (auto)biographer performs a task akin to that of a historian by responding to "the need for narrative 'identity'."[176]

In the same breath, Anderson provides a crucial nuance between the story of individuals and the story of nations, which he calls "a central difference of emplotment."[177] The narratives of persons and nations are markedly different in one respect. Individuals and the narratives about them, Anderson notes, have clearly identifiable beginnings and ends with their birth and death; nations and their narratives, by contrast, "have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural."[178] It is in the context of this discrepancy that Anderson elaborates how the nation's story is narrated:

> Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography can not be written evangelically, "down time," through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it "up time" — towards Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam. This fashioning, however, is marked by deaths, which, in a curious inversion of conventional genealogy, start from an originary present. World War II begets World War I; out of Sedan comes Austerlitz; the ancestor of the Warsaw Uprising is the state of Israel.[179]

It is important to note that few nations can successfully reconcile their modern sense of nationhood with an originator or a founding myth. Instead, they have to rely on a more modern narrative that is driven by the consciousness of nationhood only once it has taken shape under the geopolitical factors of the day. It is only from this shared consciousness and common identity as a nation that they can extrapolate back in time and find events that can be reimagined as precursors to the modern nation and thereby become incorporated into the national narrative. Inevitably, others that do not fit the narrative of the national lineage will be omitted and forgotten in what Anderson called "characteristic amnesias."

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[174] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 204–5.
[175] Anderson, 204, original italics.
[176] Anderson, 205.
[177] Anderson, 205.
[178] Anderson, 205.
[179] Anderson, 205.

This chronological inversion of the "up time" form of narration implies two things: first, the awareness of a present consciousness or identity; and, second, a desire to explain it or find its origins in a seminal moment in the past. Because the first chapter of the autobiographical *Le Premier Homme* gives the birth of its protagonist, we are led to believe that the narrative is being supplied in a "down time" fashion, thus conforming to the chronology we expect of an autobiography. Yet the mythical allusions and parallels that accompany Jacques Cormery's birth, along with the historically inaccurate portrayal of interethnic relations seem to suggest that a certain level of invention is involved in the story of the protagonist and the history of Algeria and Algerian people that the narrative puts forth. This would bring the narrative in *Le Premier Homme* closer to the "up time" approach Anderson associates with national histories.

At first glance, the first chapter of Albert Camus's *Le Premier Homme* would have the reader believe that a similar project is undertaken in this book — namely, that Camus is attempting to construct a narrative for Algeria as a nation. We can see this in the mythical dimensions surrounding this past moment of Algeria as well as the protagonist's birth. In numerous references to *Le Premier Homme*, Camus does refer to the book as an epic novel about the Algerian people — by which we are to understand the *pieds-noirs* of his community. In light of this overt objective, of the historical context provided by the Algerian War, and of the author's own pronouncement on the *pied-noir* claim to Algeria, it is easy to view the novel as an attempt to legitimize the claim that the *pieds-noirs* are embedded in the history of Algeria by the time Camus begins to write his autobiographical novel. *Le Premier Homme* does this by creating, in the first chapter, a narrative that situates this community in a concrete historical past first, and secondly in a more mythical understanding of the history of Algeria as a land crossed and inhabited by diverse populations with a temporary claim to it. Both characterizations are crucial because they correspond to the claims that can be made by other groups in Algeria. On the one hand, the historical depiction states that, like other populations in this territory called Algeria, the presence of the *pieds-noirs* is by this point a historical fact; on the other hand, the mythical understanding of Algeria as a non-country whose cyclical history has comprised numerous populations serves to legitimize the *pied-noir* presence as just one of the many arcs in that cycle. At the same time, the book could potentially resolve questions of identity on the level of the individual — i.e., the protagonist — by dissimulating the author's autobiography as a biography of the protagonist. One could go further and regard this juxtaposition of the individual (or familial) and the general Algerian trajectories as a narrative strategy whereby the association of both is inextricable — i.e., one of co-existence, and a legitimate one at that. Thus, the narrative first suggested in the opening chapter seems to be one of Algeria as a nation, and, more importantly, as a nation that incorporates the *pied-noir* people and experience in the national narrative.

Valid though it may be, this characterization of the book is too simplistic to take for granted, especially given the structure of the book — specifically, the dissonance in tone and discrepancy in focus between the first chapter of the book most of its

subsequent contents. To understand how this shift explains the structure of the book and how it functions in the narrative, we have to consider another discrepancy: this time with respect to Benedict Anderson's distinction between autobiographies as being written "down time" and national stories as having to resort to an "up time" form of narration. If we look at the first chapter of *Le Premier Homme*, we have not only the birth of the protagonist and an overwhelming — albeit inoperative — presence of his father, but also a past and pivotal — if not original — moment in the history of Algeria. The autobiographical narrative remains truthful to its genre by beginning with the protagonist's birth and with his father, and thereby setting the stage for a down-time narration of the rest of the protagonist's life. The broader Algerian narrative surrounding this "foundational" moment also seems to begin at this moment, interwoven with the birth of the protagonist. Similarly, it sets the stage for what can be expected to be a parallel *down-time* narration of this Algerian biography in subsequent chapters.

As we saw above in Anderson's characterization, national narratives come about only after the imagined community of the nation has entered the collective consciousness, and, as such, are constructed in an *up-time* fashion. I'd like to propose that the failure of the first chapter of *Le Premier Homme* to promise — or deliver — such a chronology is an indication that the imagined community we have here is *not* one defined as a "nation." Entities we call "nations" and their narratives result from a collective consciousness that regards nationhood as the logical conclusion of a *linear* procession of historical events constructed *ex post facto*. Implicit in this linearity is a shared genealogy that upholds the thesis of the inevitable coagulation into a group with a shared understanding of the past and a common will to live and construct a collective present and future. Despite the depiction of Henri Cormery and the Arab as joined in a fraternal stance, the first chapter of *Le Premier Homme* also clearly denotes their differences and the two separate spaces they occupy in this land. We also noted above that the *pied-noir* claim to this land stems in part from the mythical understanding of Algeria as a land traversed by many people. This is only valid if the linearity of the national lineage is disrupted, as it is by the mythical characterization of Algeria. Consequently, the chapter forecloses the possibility of Algeria being conceived of as a nation — for the *pied-noir* in this instance, but just as much for Algeria's other communities. And yet, the narrative does not deny the possibility of a different kind of "imagined community."

I'd like to suggest here that an imagined community that is *not* a nation is indeed put forth in *Le Premier Homme*. To illustrate the nature of this imagined community, I'd like to first name it after a term used by Albert Camus himself in contrast with the nation: *patrie*. Citing an exchange between the writer and his friend Jean Daniel that took place in the early days of 1956, Olivier Todd provides a brief insight into Camus's understanding of nation and of the community of Algerians:

> — Aujourd'hui, dit Camus à Jean Daniel, on nous parle de « nation algérienne », et cela m'exaspère. Que le FLN, lui, combatte pour créer une nation, c'est son droit […] ; qu'il veuille accréditer l'idée

> d'une nation préexistante à la conquête, encore une fois pour lui c'est de bonne guerre.
>
> Pour Camus il existe une patrie algérienne :
>
> — Vous savez bien que tout cela n'a rien à voir avec le concept de *nation*. En tout cas, aujourd'hui, l'Algérie est un territoire habité par deux peuples, je dis bien deux peuples, l'un est musulman et l'autre ne l'est pas. […] Les deux peuples d'Algérie ont un droit égal à la justice, un droit égal à conserver leur *patrie*.[180]

Camus's conversation makes clear the inapplicability of the term "nation" and the concept it denotes to Algeria. In pronouncements and opinions that he published in the 1950s, he makes numerous attempts to define the role and status of the two communities of Algerians he mentions above. Despite their differences in tone and tenor, these opinions are constant in one regard: Camus's unwillingness to concede that European Algerians like he and members of his family had less of a right to exist in Algeria than the Muslim population they found there starting with the conquest of 1830.

As is often the case with Camus, the philosophical, political, and humanistic concerns he articulates in essays and articles are also elaborated in his literary texts. Whereas *L'étranger* illustrates his philosophy of the absurd, *L'Exil et le Royaume* the precarious negotiation between the choice to be *solitaire* or *solidaire*, or *L'Homme révolté* the favoring of rebellion over revolution, I'd like to suggest that *Le Premier Homme* is an elaboration of the status of Algeria as a *patrie* insofar as it is a non-nation. In so doing, I am moving away from the more facile understanding of the book as a legitimation of *pied-noir* presence and right of existence in Algeria, and even farther from an understanding of the book as its author's refusal to recognize Algeria's nationhood for the same political reasons that would also deny it its independence. Instead, in the pages that follow I will argue that the structure and contents of *Le Premier Homme*, as well as the notion of "the first man" articulated therein undo any potential understanding of Algeria as a *nation*. At the same time, I will distill this into an understanding of what constitutes Algeria as a *patrie*, and how that understanding relates to the notion of *le premier homme*, and to the structure and contents of the book.

Camus's refusal to recognize Algeria as a nation — in the exchange cited above or elsewhere in his writing, implies that the general understanding of a nation is not seen as a fitting model for understanding the case of Algeria. Camus also shows this narratively in the beginning of *Le Premier Homme* by giving not a single lineage whose origins are lost in the mists of time, but rather the initial moment of only one Algerian community's existence in Algeria. Understanding how he conceives of this Algeria in the present of the autobiographical project, of the place of his *pied-noir* community in it, and of the place of its other communities living in it is crucial to our understanding of the political position he maintained with regard to the question of Algerian

[180] Todd, *Albert Camus*, 855; my emphasis.

independence.

ACT II: Exit the Father

The first chapter of *Le Premier Homme* makes two promises: an explicit commitment to narrate the life of the protagonist, and an implicit one to pursue the portrait of Algeria from the foundational moment in which the narrator begins the story both for Algeria and for the protagonist. In the sections that follow it, however, the reader is made privy only to scenes from the protagonist's life, spanning from his childhood to his adulthood; the portrait of Algeria, it seems, is neglected in favor of the protagonist's biography. It would seem, therefore, that the portrait of Algeria suffers a narrative death in the same fashion as the death of the protagonist's father. The two, however, are markedly different.

First of all, we have to recognize that the father is effectively declared dead in the book as soon as the first chapter concludes with him closing his eyes to sleep. The second chapter, as we saw above, begins with a different *homme*, the adult Jacques Cormery at Saint-Brieuc, France. The use of Saint-Brieuc — the site of the World War I cemetery where his father was buried — as a metonym for his father is here quite significant. As a cemetery commemorating war victims, Saint-Brieuc functions as a site of memory. Sites (or realms) of memory have been theorized in detail by the historian Pierre Nora in the introduction to his multi-volume work *Les Lieux de mémoire*. They are, according to Nora, necessary in order to maintain the memory of something that is no longer extant or evident in present times. Nora's distinction and theorization of the *lieux de mémoire* relies on the preliminary acceptance of the *nation* as a unit of historical record and recollection. Equipped with a century of retrospection, Nora is able to suggests that the unit of the nation has survived because the sense of nationhood — resting on the acceptance of a common past and on the will to maintain it in the present and in the future — has been buttressed by the myriad sites and myths that commemorate the past in ways that allow for both glory and grief.[181]

The father's association with Saint-Brieuc as a *lieu de mémoire*, and this site's presence in France and its association with the nation of France serve to deepen the dissociation between the father and Algeria. It furthermore highlights the inoperative role of the father in Algeria that we saw in the first chapter of *Le Premier Homme*. Narratively, this chapter functions as the moment after which the protagonist's search for the father ceases to be an explicit or primary concern and is relegated to the background. It will only reappear at the very end of the section "Recherche du père" for a final tally of facts and a final reflection on what it means. It may seem that the portrait of Algeria undergoes the same demotion after the first chapter, but we should not forget that this portrait was not explicit to begin with. More importantly,

[181] For more on this concept, its significance, and its manifestations, see Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

we should not lose sight of the backdrop present in the chapters that follow. Although scenes from the protagonist's life take center-stage, the setting for them remains firmly anchored in Algeria — specifically, in a spatial, social, and economic context that, despite the daily adversities that define it, is more successful in providing the specific experiences, encounters, and opportunities that set the young protagonist on the path to a successful adulthood in which he attains what his father did not (or could not): the title of "first man."

Moreover, if we consider the first chapter as evidence of the author's *bona fide* attempt to reconstruct the father's role in the protagonist's life, the "narratological abandonment" of the father's figure beginning with the third chapter ascribes even greater significance to the second chapter, "Saint-Brieuc." From this perspective, the second chapter becomes a point of transition in the focus of the narrative — from the father to the protagonist and the world around him. The evocation of the cemetery as a *lieu de mémoire* that is unable to inform Jacques Cormery about his father is also an important indication in a change of approach on the part of the author. It signals an abandonment of the chronological, archival forms of memory or commemoration that will be used — as we are initially led to believe — to reconstitute the father's life. As a result, we see a change in the book's structure from a chronological and patrilineal history relying on these forms of historical memory to one that turns instead to the memory of the lived experience and to the eventual understanding that each man is *le premier homme*.

We might even go a step further and suggest that this failure of archives and sites of memory corresponds to Camus's understanding of the history of Algeria as one defined by erasure and self-edification with each new generation. This is also reflected in the book's resulting structure by means of the protagonist's progressive understanding that this is the form of memory associated with Algeria. This is the moment at which the narrator provides a reflection on the life of the father and of the protagonist, and relates them to the history and features of the land of Algeria. The result is the notion of *le premier homme*, which the author develops in the last chapter of the section titled "Recherche du père," and for which I provide a reading in relation to a new understanding of Algeria.

ACT III: Enter the *Patrie* and *le premier homme*

The last chapter of "Recherche du père" — the first part of *Le Premier Homme* we have been discussing — is titled "Mondovi: La colonisation et le père." It opens with the announcement that the Jacques we met in the preceding pages is no longer a child: "Maintenant, il était grand…," writes the narrator, adding an ellipsis as if to say "despite everything," or as if to announce that his being an adult is not as simple as the mundane statement about his relative age might indicate.[182] The pages that ensue attempt to complicate this statement. They begin with an account of Jacques's return

[182] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 165.

to Saint-Apôtre, his birthplace, where he meets Monsieur Veillard, the owner of the estate that his father managed briefly, and Tamzal, an elderly Arab man who has no definitive memory of Jacques's father. The chapter then recounts his visit to Solferino, where Jacques meets the now retired doctor "qui l'avait mis au monde."[183] These encounters offer no additional details about Jacques's father. Nevertheless, they do provide a scaffolding for a foundational Algerian narrative in which he attempts to situate his father and the origins of his family's trajectory. More importantly, they play a deciding role in Jacques's conclusions about the notion of *le premier homme*, about the role of memory in Algeria, and about its inhabitants' understanding of it. As my reading will show, this combination of factors, in concurrence with the narrator's discussion of it, precludes the possibility of Algeria as a *nation*, and, at the same time, proposes a different conception of it, one which I have been calling *patrie*, and which I will finally define in the context of *Le Premier Homme* and of Camus's stance and pronouncements on the question of Algerian independence.

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The chapter opens with a scene that unmistakably parallels that of the book's first chapter: "Sur la route de Bône à Mondovi, la voiture où se trouvait J. Cormery croisait des jeeps hérissées de fusils et qui circulaient lentement…"[184] Aside from the updated means of transport, two remarkable differences are the immediate identification of the passenger and the substitution of rifle-spiked jeeps for the clouds we see in the first chapter. The immediate indication is that Algeria is no longer a stage traversed by people and civilizations in the same harmless way as the clouds that mottle its blue skies: it is now a changed place in which new actors speak with their weapons. Historically speaking, we are in the thick of the violent clashes of the Algerian War. There is no initial indication that this is at all disconcerting for the protagonist, who, upon arrival, immediately asks whether he has found the person he came to meet: Monsieur Veillard. He has. The narrator's description of him echoes the same general features we discovered in the protagonist's portrait when he was standing near his father's grave at Saint-Brieuc:

> Il devait avoir une quarantaine d'années, si l'on en jugeait par ses rares cheveux grisonnants qui lui faisaient une tête romaine. Mais la peau tannée de son visage régulier aux yeux clairs, le corps un peu gourd mais sans graisse ni ventre dans son pantalon kaki, ses spartiates et sa chemise bleue à poches le faisaient paraître beaucoup plus jeune.[185]

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[183] Camus, 169. Although he is referred to as the doctor who delivered him, the reader will recall that the doctor called in the first chapter had no hand in Jacques's delivery; he arrived well after Jacques had been born with the help of the women who had been assisting the mother.

[184] Camus, 165.

[185] Camus, 165. The description of Jacques we see previously in the book: "Tête nue, les cheveux coupés ras, le visage long et les traits fins, de bonne taille, le regard bleu et droit, l'homme, malgré la quarantaine, paraissait encore mince dans son imperméable," Camus, 25.

Jacques's own explanation for the visit is elided in the conversation that unfolds in indirect discourse. Nevertheless, it does grant him entrance and the reason for his visit is restated by Veillard as "[e]n somme, un pèlerinage!" adding, "Eh bien, franchement, c'est le moment."[186] It is only after attending to the necessary gestures of hospitality that Veillard elucidates this statement by saying, "Si vous aviez tardé, vous auriez risqué de ne plus rien trouver ici. Et en tout cas plus un Français pour vous renseigner."[187] Veillard, we learn, is the son of the owner who purchased Saint-Apôtre after the First World War, thus foreclosing any possibility of having known Henri Cormery. Instead of leaving or changing subject upon learning this, Jacques remains and Veillard relates the story of his father's years on the farm.

The chronology of events he recounts leads us to believe that Veillard's story spans about forty years, most of which are summarized in terms of hard work put in by the elder Veillard, and exacted by him from his sons and Arab workers alike. The bulk of Veillard's story concerns a single year preceding this encounter with Jacques. Through it, we learn that the old man had spurned the prefect who had told him and other farmers like him that "il fallait reconsidérer les questions [coloniales], la manière de traiter les Arabes et qu'une page était tournée maintenant," by responding that "personne ne ferait la loi chez lui."[188] When the evacuation order arrives, the old man says nothing, empties the freshly-filled wine vats on the ground, diverts a source of brackish water back to its original path toward the vineyard, and for three days in a row uproots all the grapevines as Arabs and French-Algerians alike observe from a distance. Asked by a young police captain to explain his actions, the old man answers: "Jeune homme, puisque ce que nous avons fait ici est un crime, il faut l'effacer."[189] After he tells his Arab workers that they might as well join the insurgents — "Ils vont gagner" — the old man and his wife move to Marseille, where, we learn, "il tourne en rond dans sa chambre."[190]

The story of the old Veillard further clarifies what the younger Veillard had meant when he told Jacques that, had he come later, he might not have found anything. It also supports Veillard's earlier characterization of Algeria: "Puisque vous êtes du pays, vous savez ce que c'est. Ici, on ne garde rien. On abat et on reconstruit. On pense à l'avenir et on oublie le reste."[191] More than just a concrete example for this characterization and more than a simple vignette of the effects of the Algerian War afoot, the story of the old man and his son presents a potential trajectory for the life that Jacques and Henri Cormery might have had if they had remained at Saint-Apôtre. Central in this parallel story of the Veillards is the change that occurs between

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[186] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 165–66.

[187] Camus, 166.

[188] Camus, 167; original brackets indicating the editor's uncertainty about the word appearing in the manuscript.

[189] Camus, 168.

[190] Camus, 168.

[191] Camus, 166.

the paternal and filial generations concerned, specifically the absence of knowledge or material goods transmitted from father to son. For different reasons, Jacques and the younger Veillard inherit little, if not nothing, from their fathers: Jacques because his father perished in the war, and his counterpart because the elder Veillard chose to destroy everything that he had built in his lifetime. Implicit in Jacques's *recherche du père* has been the existence of something of, or relating to, his father that Jacques, as his son, could inherit or learn from.[192] The story of the Veillards seems to foreclose that possibility, as well. The parallels between the two father-son duos also suggest that the Veillards take the place that would have been occupied by the Cormerys if Henri Cormery had not died in the war. The phonetic similarity of the name "Veillard" with the verb *veiller* suggests that they watch over and ensure the existence of a particular trajectory that would have been that of the Cormerys if Henri's life had not been derailed or cut short by the war. The family story that the younger Veillard shares with Jacques serves as conclusive evidence that the father's absence in Jacques's life — and, with it, the absence of tradition, guidance, a familial memory, or material wealth — was not so much occasioned by the war that killed him as it was by the existence that the land of Algeria imposes on those who settle there. The Veillards thus serve as a control group that shows what occurs to a family like Jacques's in Algeria when no outside interventions derail the pre-determined path. The Cormerys, on the other hand, represent a family on a path derailed by the First World War.

The fact that these diverse familial trajectories arrive at the same place despite the markedly different paths they follow reflects the deterministic fate dictated by the cyclical trajectory of the inhabitants of Algeria that the narrator hints at in the first pages of *Le Premier Homme*. More than just the land of cyclical fates for those who inhabit it, by the time we arrive at the end of the *recherche du père*, Algeria is portrayed as the land of forgetfulness — *oubli*. We first encounter this *oubli* associated with Algeria in the words of the younger Veillard, which we quoted above: "Ici, on ne garde rien. On abat et on reconstruit. On pense à l'avenir et on oublie le reste,"[193] and hear the same idea repeated by him a few pages later as "Tout change ici […]. Ça va vite, très vite, et on oublie."[194] In Jacques's case, this forgetfulness has been ostensibly caused by the absence of the father, Henri. Judging by the story we hear about the elder Veillard from his son, forgetfulness in their case seems to have been imposed by the father himself, who, faced with the possibility of changing his way of life and his attitude toward indigenous Algerians, opted instead for the destruction and erasure

[192] The reader gets an idea of what this something could be later in the chapter, when Jacques reflects on what has not been obtained as a result of his father's absence: "lui-même avait dû s'élever seul, sans père, n'ayant jamais connu ces moments où le père appelle le fils dont il a attendu qu'il ait l'âge d'écouter, pour lui dire le secret de la famille, ou une ancienne peine, ou l'expérience de sa vie, ces moments où même le ridicule et odieux Polonius devient grand tout à coup en parlant à Laërte, et lui avait eu seize ans puis vingt ans et personne ne lui avait parlé et il lui avait fallu apprendre seul, grandir seul, en force, en puissance, trouver seul sa morale et sa vérité […]," Camus, 181.

[193] Camus, 166.

[194] Camus, 169.

that his son now offers as characteristic of the Algerian lived experience.

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The pages leading up to, and including, this section represent Jacques's attempt to overcome the *oubli* surrounding his father. In a last attempt to recreate a portrait of his father's life, Jacques oscillates between a personal reflection and a recollection of stories about the settling of Algeria by Europeans — the French, in particular — that he heard in conversations with the doctor and Veillard. The composite story to which these characters and Jacques himself contribute different scenes and details begins with the promise of prosperity and new beginnings in Algeria at moments in history when geopolitical and economic circumstances had obliterated such hopes and promises in France: "Et tous rêvaient de la Terre promise," says the narrator referring to the settlers who left France in 1848, after that same year's failed revolution, and who first built houses in 1854.[195] They had embarked on a steam frigate called *Le Labrador*, whose name seems to promise not its proximal anagram El Dorado, but hard work. Once arrived, the settlers had to contend with the animosity of the locals, with famine and disease, and with an unforgiving weather and terrain. Once again, as in the opening pages of *Le Premier Homme*, the settling of Algeria by Europeans is made to resemble the settling of America.[196] Once again, the descriptions border on the mythical. Jacques's own birth, as recounted by the doctor this time — who, as we have noted, was absent for it — also echoes notes of the holy family and the birth of Jesus when Jacques describes the witnesses who signed the record of his birth as "les premiers venus"; though we immediately learn that, unlike the first visitors who visited the holy family in adoration of the newborn Jesus Christ, these two were, in fact, from among the first settlers of Algeria, from among the first who labored there, and *not* the first come to adore the newborn Jacques Cormery.[197] Thus, the description of Jacques's birth and the collective narrative of the settling of Algeria *border on* the mythical, but are, by this point in the narrative, no longer mythical; they are instead part of a collective narrative that comes with caveats and, to Jacques's chagrin, no specificity relating to his father or family.

Left only with the *poignée* of facts that did not directly concern his father, Jacques attempts to situate his father's life and existence in Algeria in this collective, foundational, and quasi-mythical narrative that he and his interlocutors are in the process of reconstructing: "il essayait *en vain* de revoir, d'imaginer son père qui disparaissait derrière ce pays immense et hostile, fondait dans l'histoire anonyme de ce village et de cette plaine."[198] Further on, the narrator asks, "Où était son père en

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[195] Camus, 172.

[196] We do see an important difference between the narratives about the settling of United States and Algeria, as well. Unlike Algeria, which promises hard work and only that, the United States have always retained the appeal of an El Dorado, and its settlers or immigrants only discover the hard work that lies ahead once they arrive on its shores.

[197] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 171.

[198] Camus, 171; my emphasis.

tout ceci?" and immediately answers, "Nulle part, et cependant [ces détails sur la colonisation de l'Algérie] lui apprenaient plus de choses sur le jeune mort de Saint-Brieuc que les souvenirs [séniles] et désordonnés qu'il était allé chercher."[199] Known facts about his family join this collective narrative in Bône, where, "près de quarante ans plus tôt," the father's journey toward Saint-Apôtre, along with the pregnant mother, had begun, "à bord de la carriole, sous le même ciel d'automne."[200] The collective foundational story also rejoins the historical violence faced by these settlers and, at the same time, perpetrated by them. Even when doing laundry on the riverbanks of the Seybouse, "il fallait une escorte," "toujours le fusil et les soldats autour," "et le village lui-même était souvent attaqué de nuit" in this "pays ennemi, qui refusait l'occupation et se vengeait sur tout ce qu'il trouvait."[201]

The example, on the following page, of a pregnant French woman being left alone as others went to seek medical help, only to come back to find her eviscerated with her breasts cut off is not accidental. It evokes — and at the same time contrasts — the same situation preceding Jacques's birth, when the father leaves his pregnant wife in order to find a doctor. The opposing outcomes in either case once show in stark tones that something has changed from that "original" birth. I would instead propose that we read this change as yet another indication that the fraternal nature of relations among settlers and indigenous Algerians we see in Jacques's birth is nothing more than mythical. Violence, not fraternal love and cooperation, is what defines the relations between these groups, and it continues to do so in the present of the narrative and the historical present of the Algerian War.[202] The reader knows why Jacques thinks about his mother when the vengeance of the "pays ennemi" is mentioned: it recalls the explosion he heard outside of his mother's apartment in Algiers.[203] And if the reader does not recall this indiscriminate act of violence, the narrator makes sure to direct the narrative to the present, where, in a stroll with Veillard and the doctor, Jacques notices the presence of loudspeakers installed by "les services psychologiques de l'armée."[204] The past and the present come together in this moment in *Le Premier Homme* through the reality and endurance of violence between European settlers and indigenous Algerians.

It is at this moment, after describing the scene where the French army's propaganda is being broadcast, that Jacques begins a sustained and crucial reflection on Algeria. This reflection seems to arise from the scene witnessed in the center of town, which is described as follows:

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[199] Camus, 173; original brackets indicating the editor's uncertainty about the word appearing in the manuscript.

[200] Camus, 174.

[201] Camus, 176.

[202] Anyone critical of Camus's stance on the question of Algerian independence could cite this as yet another missed attempt by Camus to address the inherent violence of the colonial order. This kind of analysis was in vogue for many decades and has its own merits. Because it risks diverting my own, however, I would simply like to acknowledge it and move past it.

[203] Described earlier in Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 73–74.

[204] Camus, 177.

> […] la foule était en majorité arabe, mais elle ne tournait pas autour de la place, ils étaient immobiles et ils écoutaient la musique arabe qui alternait avec les discours, et les Français perdus dans la foule se ressemblaient tous, avaient le même air sombre et *tourné vers l'avenir*, comme ceux qui autrefois étaient venus ici par le *Labrador*, ou ceux qui avaient atterri ailleurs dans les mêmes conditions, avec les mêmes souffrances, fuyant la misère ou la persécution, à la rencontre de la douleur et de la pierre.[205]

The majority of those he sees around town are described as Arab, a qualifier that in Camus's literary writings refers to both Arab and Berber inhabitants of Algeria, despite ample evidence elsewhere in his work that the writer was fully aware of ethnic and linguistic differences among native Algerians. In a move atypical of his other works, however, it is not the "Arabs" who blend into the background and become invisible and indistinguishable as individuals, but rather the French inhabitants, who happen to be not simply dispersed but lost — *perdus* — in the midst of the indigenous majority. Together, they move about under the sounds of Arab music interrupted by sounds of French army broadcasts on the loudspeakers. It is as all of Algeria is represented in this small-town square; as if indigenous and French Algerians both have a voice, yet neither group speaks to the other. Though immediate violence and hatred between them is absent, it is nonetheless reminiscent of the scene the narrator describes after the bombing near Jacques's mother's apartment in Algiers. This passage, furthermore, gives a description of the French as "tourné[s] vers l'avenir," an appearance they share with those who settled there before them. This same phrase is used to describe Jacques's father and his ancestors, and qualified further as pertaining to "ceux qui n'aiment pas leur passé et qui le renient."[206]

These generations of deniers and disdainers of the past seems to be at the root of the *oubli* we saw earlier in this chapter. This is further supported by the paragraph that follows it, in which the narrator recounts the presence of French (and European) settlers in Algeria in terms of an existence that, despite mammoth efforts to create and construct, remains defined by disappearance and forgetfulness:

> Des foules entières étaient venues ici depuis plus d'un siècle, avaient labouré, creusé des sillons […] *jusqu'à ce qu'une terre légère les recouvre et la région retournait alors aux végétations sauvages*, et ils avaient *procréé puis disparu*. Et ainsi de leurs fils. Et les fils et les petits-fils de ceux-ci […]. Toutes ces générations, tous ces hommes venus de tant de pays différents […] *avaient disparu sans laisser de traces*, *refermés sur eux-mêmes*. *Un immense oubli* s'était étendu sur eux, et en vérité c'était cela que dispensait cette terre […]. Oui, comme ils étaient morts ! Comme ils mourraient encore ! *Silencieux et détournés de tout*, comme

[205] Camus, 177–78; my emphasis.
[206] Camus, 178.

était mort son père dans une incompréhensible tragédie loin de sa patrie de chair, après une vie tout entière involontaire, […] une vie qui s'était construite autour de lui, malgré lui, jusqu'à ce que la guerre le tue et l'enterre, *à jamais désormais inconnu des siens et de son fils*, rendu lui aussi à *l'immense oubli* qui était la patrie définitive des hommes de sa race, le lieu d'aboutissement d'une vie commencée *sans racines*, […] tous ici enfants *trouvés et perdus* qui bâtissaient de *fugitives cités* pour mourir ensuite à jamais *en eux-mêmes et dans les autres*.[207]

Already lengthy in the abridged quote above, the passage is even longer in the text. Yet it is delivered in one breath, betraying a sense of epiphany in the protagonist, narrator, and author alike. The qualifications it makes and traces across generations present a final case for a life ruled by an *oubli*. In relating this fate to Jacques's particular case, we get the final verdict:

> Non, il ne connaîtrait jamais son père, qui continuerait de dormir là-bas, le visage perdu à jamais dans la cendre. Il y avait un mystère chez cet homme, un mystère qu'il avait voulu percer. Mais finalement il n'y avait que le mystère de la pauvreté qui fait les êtres sans nom et sans passé, qui les fait rentrer dans l'immense cohue des morts sans nom qui ont fait le monde en se défaisant pour toujours. Car c'était bien cela que son père avait en commun avec les hommes du *Labrador*.[208]

Jacques's conclusion about the irretrievability of details surrounding his father's existence in Algeria is thus not unique; he shares it with those like him and his ancestors who had settled in Algeria from the very beginning. The intervening sections between the first chapter and this moment in the narrative indicate, furthermore, that in their specific case, this loss is inevitably related to the poverty they found upon arrival, and especially to the poverty that defined their existence to the point of being erased from history and from a collective memory. Jacques's family, says the narrator, and those like it made the world — *ont fait le monde* (or, in this case, Algeria). Their extreme poverty, however, which condemned them to an existence seldom concerned with issues beyond the quotidian struggle for subsistence, meant that whatever they built they did so at the cost of their own historical existence or recognition — *en se défaisant pour toujours*. For Jacques's family, as for the father he never knew, his father's ancestors, and those like them, the verdict is the same: *oubli*.

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We have considered *oubli* up to this point as a characterization for the collective lives of people who have lived in Algeria throughout the centuries. The mythical

[207] Camus, 177–78; my emphasis.
[208] Camus, 180.

trajectories of people we were told about in the first chapter acquire concrete and historical manifestations in the recent history of European arrivals in Algeria, in the history of *pieds-noirs* like Jacques Cormery's family. This last chapter of the "Recherche du père" tells the reader that forgetfulness prevails not because of time, as we commonly think of it, but because of a place: Algeria. Up to this point and with this understanding, *oubli* has been a passive, involuntary phenomenon that seems to be merely acknowledged. Perhaps because of an implicit understanding of its inevitability in the context of Algeria and its people, this *oubli* is not even contradicted or undermined in any way by the secondary characters we have encountered. In the case of the elder Veillard, it is even aided by his willful destruction of property and material goods. The only character who mounts a form of resistance to this forgetfulness is the protagonist, Jacques Cormery, specifically in the search for details about his father's life that the narrative has him pursue beginning with the second chapter, following his birth. Even Jacques, however, finds himself powerless against this form of *oubli* by the end, when he acknowledges that he does not know his father any more than he knows about the general arrival of countless and nameless Europeans in Algeria.

At this point, I would like to suggest another meaning for the *oubli* discussed by the narrator in this section of *Le Premier Homme*, one which will help us understand the conception of Algeria as a *patrie* and the author's vision for its future. Aside from the meaning of involuntary forgetfulness, the word *oubli* also signifies a voluntary action. This distinction between involuntary and voluntary is the first one made by the *Trésor de la langue française*. As "un acte volontaire," *oubli* acquires the meaning of "[f]ait de ne pas vouloir prendre en compte quelqu'un ou quelque chose," as well as "[f]ait d'écarter de sa pensée un objet de préoccupation ou de ressentiment."[209] This second, voluntary meaning of the word *oubli* helps to explain the protagonist's new understanding of the inhabitants of Algeria and their relations among one another. This understanding is given in one long sentence covering the length of one full page in the text. This passage begins by claiming that Jacques Cormery belongs to the *tribu* of those anonymous people living in the "pays sans nom," and recognizes him as an incarnation of the desire to escape this anonymity while, paradoxically, striving to belong to it: "Et lui qui avait voulu échapper au pays sans nom, à la foule et à une famille sans nom, mais en qui quelqu'un obstinément n'avait cessé de réclamer l'obscurité et l'anonymat, il faisait partie aussi de la tribu…"[210] Jacques's reflections at this point are no longer diachronic and do not look back on the past; they suddenly become synchronic. By abandoning the search for the father, his attention is awakened *in* the present and *to* the present. One by one, he sees and hears the "vieux docteur qui soufflait à sa droite […], le visage dur et impénétrable des Arabes autour des kiosques, le rire et la figure volontaire de Veillard, revoyant aussi […] le visage

[209] Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, "Oubli," *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, accessed December 2, 2016, http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=2573624475;

[210] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 180.

d'agonisante de sa mère lors de l'explosion […]."[211] This awareness of the present and of those in it is important on two levels. On a first level, it helps the reader understand both the notion of *le premier homme* that gives the book its title and the significance of the last part of the protagonist's reflection. On a second level, the two parts above helps us better understand what I suggest is Camus's view of Algeria as *patrie* rather than as a nation.

It is precisely in this section that the phrase "le premier homme" is first used in the book, and critics have rightly associated it with Jacques Cormery, who had to grow up fatherless and learn by himself or through others what one normally learns through one's father. Camus's biographer, Herbert R. Lottman, cites an interview from 1954 in which Camus states that he imagines "a first man who starts at zero, who can neither read nor write, who has neither morality nor religion. It will be, if you like, an education, but without an educator."[212] "The First Man, then," Lottman concludes, "was the first-generation French Algerian. It was Albert Camus' father, who was killed in World War I before Albert was a year old. But it was also Albert Camus Himself, growing up in a cultural and historical vacuum accentuated by his family's illiteracy, symbolized by a home without books."[213] Seth Graebner's understanding of *the first man* carries with it a greater historical weight. In an analysis of *Le Premier Homme*, Graebner identifies the "first men" as "the crowd of conquering predecessors," and identifies them as central to "a sort of collective rebirth" needed by Jacques Cormery and "his fellow Franco-Algerians," who face the risk of disappearance.[214] In another significant work on Albert Camus, Emily S. Apter sees a different dimension to *le premier homme*. "Beneath the First Man fantasy of the frontiersman," Apter argues, "there lies a 'first' First Man: an under-characterized 'person who was there first,' a displaced or missing subject. This 'first' First Man exerts pressure throughout the novel, as if demanding to be released into characterhood."[215]

Apter's understanding of the first man aligns with my own in recognizing that Jacques Cormery is not the only one who qualifies as a first man. In the understanding of Algeria as a land of forgetfulness that we discussed above, lineage is conspicuously absent. As a result, it is not only Jacques who is a *premier homme*, but all like him and his family who, regardless of ethnic background, find themselves absorbed in —

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[211] Camus, 180.

[212] Cited in Herbert R. Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography* (Corte Madera, Calif.: Gingko Press, 1997), 7.

[213] Lottman, 7.

[214] Seth Graebner, *History's Place: Nostalgia and the City in French Algerian Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 233. Graebner notably adds: "Camus disarms the pro-colonial thrust of this idea by remembering that these successive conquerors were all thrown out, and that if the French believed themselves to be the first men as well, they must necessarily admit 'brotherhood of race and destiny' with losers, people who had not been able to maintain themselves as conquerors. Camus comes as close here as he ever would to admitting the doom of an Algeria based on conquest," Graebner, 233–34.

[215] Emily S. Apter, *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 72.

if not consumed by — their daily struggle for subsistence. In Jacques's case, lineage was interrupted by an actual death of the father. As the example of the Veillards shows, paternal death is not the cause of the loss and forgetfulness that seems to define life in Algeria for European settlers. The same could be said of the indigenous populations who have struggled to find subsistence in the land of Algeria. Collectively, generations of these Algerians seem to be condemned to a loss. And the kind of loss that they have to face in "la terre de l'oubli" seems to be such that it requires an existence that is not founded on any particular lineage or continuity, but rather on independent self-fashioning.

For a reader familiar with the biblical narrative about the creation of the world, the phrase *le premier homme* is also evocative of Adam and of the Garden of Eden. The image of Algeria as a promised land akin to the biblical Garden of Eden is upheld by the opening chapter in *Le Premier Homme*, and also — though more precariously — by the settlers embarking on *Le Labrador* whom we met in the story that Jacques, the younger Veillard, and the doctor piece together. With its details about the toiling and killings upon the initial settlement of these passengers of *Le Labrador*, the same story also dispelled for the reader any real possibility of that promised or envisioned Eden. The intervening pages in *Le Premier Homme*, in which we learn about the childhood of Jacques Cormery, depict a similar toiling, if not the violence and death faced by the first settlers. Camus's book, therefore, dismisses a characterization of Algeria as Edenic: though Algeria may be imagined as a land of prosperity, the reality of life in it is quite the opposite.

Camus's depiction of Algeria does retain, however, the homicidal portion of the biblical narrative, as well as the notion of *le premier homme*. When recalling the violence of the first years of colonization, the doctor points to a circular form of violence between European settlers and indigenous populations, ending with "et alors on remonte au premier criminel, vous savez, il s'appelait Caïn, et depuis c'est la guerre, les hommes sont affreux, surtout sur le soleil féroce."[216] The fratricidal nature of this crime is not lost on the reader. It recalls a statement made by Veillard a few pages earlier, when he tries to explain to Jacques his reasons for not leaving Algeria. He asks Jacques, "À part nous, vous savez ceux qui sont seuls à pouvoir le comprendre?" to which Jacques immediately replies, "Les Arabes."[217] "Tout juste," says Veillard, and continues, "On est fait pour s'entendre. Aussi bêtes et brutes que nous, mais le même sang d'homme. On va encore un peu se tuer, se couper les couilles et se torturer un brin. Et puis on

[216] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 177.Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 177. This characterization and allusion by the doctor come right after Veillard blames it on a state of war: "C'était la guerre," to which the doctor replies by saying "Soyons justes, […] on les avait enfermés dans des grottes avec toute la smalah, mais oui, mais oui, et ils avaient coupé les couilles des premiers Berbères, qui eux-mêmes…," and then proceeds to allude to the first crime of Cain slaying Abel quoted on the page.

[217] Camus, 168. Jacques's use of "Les Arabes in this instance should not be understood in the ethnic sense, but rather in the all-encompassing, albeit problematic, sense of indigenous Algerians, including Berbers.

recommencera à vivre entre hommes. C'est le pays qui veut ça."[218] The mutual perpetration of acts of violence between the native population of Algeria and the *pied-noir* population represented here by Veillard and Camus and the specific act of castration shows that Veillard is just as aware as the doctor who, as we saw, corrects him on the issue. More importantly, Veillard's statement hints at a shared humanity between the populations of Algeria, as well as at the possibility of peaceful future cohabitation — "on recommencera à vivre entre hommes."[219] By the time the doctor takes up the same violence ten pages later, the shared humanity has become fraternity, as indicated by the reference to Cain and Abel. Yet this fraternity retains the violent characterization it had from the beginning. If all they had to do to live in shared peace was to begin again — *recommencer*, as Veillard suggests — the present violence around them confirms that the two populations have failed to do so.

Jacques's last discussion surrounding *le premier homme* — in which he begins to talk of *oubli* in what I argue is the word's voluntary meaning — begins to get to the reasons why such a new beginning has not yet occurred. Jacques seems to say that those whom we, *pieds-noirs*, have long neglected — *oublié* in the voluntary sense, or been oblivious to — are those against whom we have committed violence and who, in turn, have committed violence against us: the Arabs and Berbers of Algeria. Having come to terms with the involuntary *oubli* that seems to plague all those who call Algeria their home — that is, having realized that, in his case, the memory of his father is irretrievably lost to him, much like the lost memories of other poor Algerians across ethnic lines — Jacques now considers this second kind of *oubli*:

> …et il lui avait fallu apprendre seul, grandir seul, en force, en puissance, trouver seul sa morale et sa vérité, à naître enfin comme homme pour ensuite naître encore d'une naissance plus dure, celle qui consiste à *naître aux autres*, aux femmes, comme tous les hommes nés dans ce pays qui, un par un, essayaient d'apprendre à vivre sans racines et sans foi et qui tous ensemble aujourd'hui où ils risquaient l'anonymat définitif et la perte des seules traces sacrées de leur passage sur cette terre, les dalles illisibles que la nuit avait maintenant recouvertes dans le cimetière, devaient apprendre à *naître aux autres*, à l'immense cohue des conquérants maintenant évincés qui les avaient précédés sur cette terre et dont ils devaient reconnaître maintenant la fraternité de race et de destin.[220]

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[218] Camus, 168–69.

[219] The use of the conjunction "mais" in Veillard's statement — "Aussi bêtes et brutes que nous, mais le même sang d'homme" — hints at an attempt to establish a contradiction between the two clauses, which would undo any thinking of the two populations as dissimilar. Yet, the statement becomes tautological when we see that each clause draws a similarity between the two populations concerned. The contradiction that comes through is instead the one echoed in Jacques's and the doctor's stories about the violence between European and indigenous Algerians as fratricide.

[220] Camus, 181; my emphasis.

Jacques's reflection here suggests that, whereas the involuntary form of *oubli* imposes the role of *le premier homme* and, with it, the responsibility to grow up without a lineage, the voluntary *oubli* that has characterized relations among ethnic groups in colonial Algeria requires an act of a different kind. Jacques's idea for counteracting this voluntary *oubli* consists of what he calls "naître aux autres." The *Trésor* gives, as its synonym, "s'éveiller à" and further defines it as "Connaître, éprouver pour la première fois."[221] In the first instance, the phrasal verb "naître à" seems to have as its indirect object women: "une naissance plus dure, celle qui consiste à naître aux autres, aux femmes, comme tous les hommes nés dans ce pays." This seems to recall the importance of women of Algeria as mothers in instances where the father is either absent or the patriarchal line is otherwise compromised, as we have seen to be the case with Algeria. I would argue, however, that we ought to look at the idea of *naître aux femmes* as a valorization of a different collective narrative that either supersedes or supplants the patrilineal conception that has heretofore resulted in the circle of violence recalled by the narrator via Veillard and the doctor. It would seem that this should be a *matrilineal* narrative, and yet the possibility of this lineage is foreclosed with the second use of the verb *naître à*.

The second instance of the verb retains the use of the noun "autres," and the clause that follows qualifies these others as "l'immense cohue des conquérants maintenant évincés qui les avaient précédés sur cette terre et dont ils devaient reconnaître maintenant la fraternité de race et de destin." The image of the conquerors now supplanted, evicted, or otherwise deposed recalls the protagonist's own family as settlers (or conquerors) in a land that promises a brighter future, but instead delivers them to a life of work that renders them inoperative beyond their immediate existential needs and practically erases them from history. More importantly, it also alludes to the numerous people who have claimed this land as theirs throughout time, as the first lines of the book reminded us. Like Jacques's own family, they, too, remain unable to conquer the land, resorting instead to a life of work that, at best, guarantees only survival. These past *conquérants évincés* are none other than the existing populations in Algeria, especially Arab and Berber populations that have lived in conflict with the *pied-noir* population of which Jacques Cormery is a member.

This idea of waking up to the presence and to the shared fate of these other populations is presented as an antidote to the second meaning of *oubli* that we have so far discussed. More than that, it is introduced as a *necessity* in the present of the narrative — "aujourd'hui [ils] *devaient* apprendre à naître aux autres." Failure to do so, according to Jacques's reflection, would amount to a sentence of "anonymat définitif et la perte des seules traces sacrées de leur passage sur cette terre." To illustrate the already disappearing traces, Jacques recalls, in one of the clauses of this page-long sentence, the cemetery he walked by with the doctor, where time and the elements had already rendered the lettering on the tombstones illegible. The next

[221] Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, "Naître," in *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, accessed February 22, 2018, http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?12;s=3576306660;r=1;nat=;sol=1;

paragraph finds Jacques on an airplane headed for Algiers. It is not by coincidence that the reader is made privy to Jacques's thoughts at this moment:

> Jacques pensait au petit cimetière de Saint-Brieuc où les tombes des soldats étaient mieux conservées que celles de Mondovi. La Méditerranée séparait en moi deux univers, l'un où dans des espaces mesurés les souvenirs et les noms étaient conservés, l'autre où le vent de sable effaçait les traces des hommes sur de grands espaces.[222]

The passage contrasts the image of the cemetery on Algerian soil with the one on French soil where Jacques's father is interred. More than to stress the apparent illegibility of the inscriptions on the Algerian tombstones, the juxtaposition provides a symbolic significance. The two cemeteries represent the forms of memory that are operative in each setting. Whereas France is identified with a permanent and active remembrance of the past, Algeria is instead a land where efforts to commemorate the past are all but futile.[223]

This characterization supports the image of Algeria we find in the preceding pages as a land and a people ruled by a collective amnesia. The use of Saint-Brieuc as its French counterpart, however, is significant because it is not simply a civilian or municipal cemetery, but rather one erected with the sole purpose of commemorating those who fought and gave their life during World War I. As such, it immediately evokes the image of France as a nation defined by the many *lieux de mémoire* that are part of its national, collective narrative, and of which Saint-Brieuc is only one example. As such its contrast with the cemetery in Algeria is more than just one of memory and forgetfulness; it is also one that forecloses the possibility of a particular type of memory — national memory — in the case of Algeria. Considered with the references to Cain and Abel and to their fratricide, Algeria is therefore not a viable setting for the concept and the forms of memory surrounding a nation. Rather, it is portrayed as a place where a different genealogy has to take place.

Though it is not explicitly identified as such, the original fratricide refers to the violent colonial history of Algeria. The actors of that violence and the parties of that antagonism are identified as indigenous Algerians and early European settlers who came to Algeria in search of a better life. Whereas earlier in the narrative these actors are implicated in a cycle of violence, in Jacques's reflection they suddenly become "brothers in race and destiny."[224] This fraternal assimilation has been lurking in the

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[222] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 181.

[223] Recall Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire*, which exist in France (Saint-Brieuc is, not coincidentally, one such cemetery) but not in Algeria. Because of the vital role that such sites play in the national memory, the national identity, and on the understanding of a nation, the narrator wants to remind us that Algeria lacks such places and, with them, the possibility of a national memory, a national identity, and an understanding of Algeria as a nation.

[224] I understand the word "race" in the broader sense it has in its original French use.

background of *Le Premier Homme* for a while. It initially appeared in the first chapter when Henri Cormery shared a raincoat with the Arab coachman. It was abandoned, however, along with the apparent initial attempt to give a singular and common point of origin to the narrative, the protagonist, his family, or the Algeria they live in. With this conspicuous abandonment, the fraternal is effectively deemed fictional, if not impossible, much like the origin story that the narrator/writer attempted to give Algeria. When the story of the early settlers is pieced together, the image is no longer one of fraternity but or fratricide.[225]

This assimilation between indigenous Algerians and early European settlers is even less surprising when we consider that collective stories of different Algerian populations are dismissed in favor of a history more concerned with the place: Algeria. Once it has been defined as a place of forgetting, its inhabitants are excluded from a collective memory defined as anything other than forgetting. It is the reason why I join other critics in seeing the titular First Man not only in Jacques Cormery, who has to grow up without a father and without lineage, but also in his father whose life was erased from both the national and particular memory of those who knew him, as well as in countless Algerians of the past and present whose lives have been absorbed by time and erased by the elements, leaving them without a sense of origin both individually and collectively.

That is why we find the metaphor of Cain and Abel more apt than the one of the Garden of Eden or of the Holy Family that the narrative seems to have experimented with. The history of Algeria is not one that hinges on an original story as it is one more concerned with the coexistence that the land imposes on its inhabitants beginning with the first filial generation. Combined with the notion of the First Man, we can say that each generation of Algerians is a filial (but also orphaned) one. It is the perennial cycle that defines the history of the land and imposes the kind of forgetting we have seen bemoaned thus far. In this state, every generation gets a renewed chance at constructing a fraternal coexistence. The stories of fratricide, however, tell us that this has been unattainable. The historical context of the Algerian War also tells us that Algerians are at the pinnacle of this ascendance of violence, which seems to be the only traceable lineage in the history of its inhabitants. The narrator's last discussion in the "Recherche du père," where the actual search for the father reaches its fruitless conclusion, suggests that this is the moment when we can say that the *oubli* as forgetting of the past can be operative when applied to the violence that has defined the coexistence of European settlers and indigenous Algerians; forgetting it and starting anew would leave space for a new and salutary pact between them. On the other hand, abandoning the other form of *oubli* — that is, as unwillingness to

[225] One could see an allegory of colonialism in *Le Premier Homme*, and, most importantly, a critique of it in the mere transition from the idyllic coexistence of French and indigenous Algerians presented in the first chapter to the fratricidal tensioned that ensued and are now seeking a resolution in the form of open war. As such, *Le Premier Homme* would be a literary critique of the injustices of colonialism — if not colonialism itself — in Algeria, and would thus echo Camus's critique of those injustices in his function as a journalist.

recognize the other — can open their eyes to the existence of other Algerians, and, more importantly, to the possibility of abandoning the fratricidal cycle that has condemned them to a fractured existence and to the forgetting that goes along with it.

In these last pages of the first part of *Le Premier Homme*, Camus is essentially proposing a more enduring end to the violence in Algeria than the *trêve civile* he has been advocating throughout the years of the Algerian War. Idealistic though it may be, the solution is one that challenges the haunting of the past and, with it, the understanding of Algeria and Algerians. This understanding is not based on the model of a nation. As we have seen, both narrative attempts at constructing the kind of memory associated with nationhood and discussions of the types of memory in Algeria contradict the understanding of it as a nation. Whereas the original story of a nation relies on a defined space, time, and characters involved in its origin, the history of Algeria denies any such (re)constructions. Even sites of commemoration like cemeteries are distinct between the two places: French cemeteries like those at Saint-Brieuc are well maintained and display the names of the dead etched in stone; similarly etched names in Algerian cemeteries, on the other hand, are no match for the erasure caused by the elements — as if they, too, conspire to physically manifest the effects of memory in Algeria. In light of this impossibility of a singular memory, of an original founder, and of a foundational story, I'd like to suggest that the idea of Algeria as a nation in *Le Premier Homme* is abandoned for a different notion I have alluded to as *patrie*.

I choose this term not simply because of Camus's own preference for it when referring to Algeria, but also because of the presence of a First Man as a fatherless figure and because of the prevalence of the Cain/Abel story. Together, these two factors eliminate the need for a foundational story and a foundational figure. As a *patrie*, Algeria functions as a common setting, if not a common past, for the groups responsible for founding a fraternal coexistence. As such, the foundational moment is not one preceding those responsible for giving rise to a fraternal coexistence; rather, it is the conscious commitment to a fraternal coexistence itself that is the foundational moment. In other words, the coexistence of indigenous and European Algerians is only possible when another iteration of the Cain and Abel story does not result in fratricide. In the colonial context, such a proposal, if it is indeed one, would seem far-fetched even in times of peace. The fact that it comes in the midst of the Algerian War and the atrocities that defined it makes it appear naïve at best. And yet, this is what *Le Premier Homme* proposes.

Though far from a realistic solution in the late stages of the Algerian War, this perspective is actually less naïve than Camus's previous view of Algeria as a corner of the Mediterranean owing for its cultural-historical features to other corners of the Mediterranean basin like Ancient Rome and Ancient Greece. Unlike this pan-Mediterranean view he had espoused before, this view contends with the mixture of populations and destinies made possible by French colonial history — the most recent chapter in Algeria's history. Similarly, it accounts for those excluded from the greater benefits of the colonial project like Camus's own family. But the most incisive gesture

in *Le Premier Homme* is perhaps the assimilation of these poor *pied-noir* settlers and of the indigenous Algerians as men and women who exist with neither the legacy nor the promise of memory. They exist instead as non-historical entities, as non-actors in the context of Algeria's colonial history. Although this assimilation does not account for the violence of colonialism up to that point, it nonetheless attempts to make sense of Algeria in the 1950s from a perspective that ultimately offers a conceptualization of it that can have real political consequences.

One would be right to hesitate before the potential for the kind of fraternal reconciliation that *Le Premier Homme* seems to call for. In light of the colonial and postcolonial history of Algeria, and of the fate of its inhabitants — European and indigenous alike — in its transformation from a colonial possession to an independent nation-state, one has to wonder whether the clean slate that the mass exodus of European Algerians aimed to achieve and the clean slate upon which the FLN government got to write, rewrite, and even create a national Algerian identity to suit its political goals and conform to the model of the modern nation-state were the most viable, if not optimal, alternatives.

EPILOGUE: The political and the literary

Camus's *avant-propos* to *Chroniques algériennes* (1958) concludes with a note about the possible role of a writer — undoubtedly himself — on the question of Algeria and of other political issues more broadly: "Mon opinion," says Camus,

> est qu'on attend trop d'un écrivain en ces matières. Même, et peut-être surtout, lorsque sa naissance et son cœur le vouent au destin d'une terre comme l'Algérie, il est vain de le croire détenteur d'une vérité révélée et son histoire personnelle, si elle pouvait être véridiquement écrite, ne serait que l'histoire de défaillances successives, surmontées et retrouvées.[226]

The diminution of his influence and the recognition of failures notwithstanding, Camus decides to publish at the height of the Algerian War a collection of essays and articles he has written about Algeria between 1939 and the time of its publication. The reasons for publishing past opinions and analyses of the situation in Algeria is articulated many times by Camus: he simply does not want to make any new pronouncement that might incite violence from either side of the conflict.[227] By the

[226] Camus, "Chroniques," 900. The quote continues: "Sur ce point, je suis tout prêt à reconnaître mes insuffisances et les erreurs de jugements qu'on pourra relever dans ce volume. Mais j'ai cru possible au moins, et bien qu'il m'en coûte, de réunir les pièces de ce long dossier et de les livrer à la réflexion de ceux qui n'ont pas encore leur opinion faite."

[227] Despite this public silence, there are dozens of documented instances in which Camus intervened in private to ensure pardons, clemency, and the commuting of sentences for those arrested by the French government, including Algerian nationalists.

time Camus makes this decision, the uprising in Algeria has become nothing short of a revolution that can no longer be mitigated, if not an all-out war. This is yet another reason why Camus refuses to take clear sides in the fashion expected of public intellectuals of the time. In 1951, Camus made clear his opinions on revolutions more generally with the publication of *L'Homme révolté*, in which he recognized that, throughout history, revolutions had bred upheavals that forgave and even promoted acts of violence in the name of a desired historical end. With the ideological and geopolitical state of the world after the Second World War, Camus recognizes that revolutions have become even more dangerous and even more violent. In the face of Marxist, bourgeois, or even anti-colonialist revolutions, Camus strongly favors individual rebellion over revolutions on a national scale.[228]

This view put Camus at odds with the dominant thinking of the time, particularly with Jean-Paul Sartre and his views on Marxism, revolution, and, most poignantly, anti-colonialist violence. Their view of violence as means of instituting historical change constituted perhaps the most irreconcilable point between their respective philosophies.[229] Though this discrepancy had been building up in the years following World War II, it reached its pinnacle during the years of the Algerian War, during which Sartre's public editorials and essays echoed Frantz Fanon in regarding the violence of colonial subjects against colonial authority as effective means of ending the colonial order. For Fanon and Sartre — as well as a great number of intellectuals of the time — this was a necessary expiatory violence, the only one that was able to bring about the end of the colonial order by mounting against the colonizer a revolutionary violence that returned the centuries-old violence perpetrated against the colonized.[230]

By contrast, Camus did not regard violence as an acceptable means of revolt, particularly in cases where it targeted civilians and other individuals caught in the middle of a conflict of which they were not the perpetrators. Such was the case of the poor *pieds-noirs* in Algeria, whose well-being and the right to exist in Algeria and to

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[228] For more on Camus's view of revolution and revolt, see Albert Camus, "L'Homme révolté," in *Essais*, ed. Roger Quilliot and Louis Faucon (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 407–709.

[229] This difference is first laid bare in the very public debate in *Les Temps Modernes* that followed the publication of *L'Homme révolté*. After months of silence, *Les Temps Modernes* decides to publish a review of Camus's philosophical essay in which they accuse the author of taking an ahistorical stance. Camus's response to this review prompts an answer by Sartre himself, which cements the falling-out between the two intellectuals. For the initial review of *L'Homme révolté*, see Francis Jeanson, "Albert Camus, ou L'Âme révoltée," *Les Temps Modernes* 79 (1952): 2070–90. For Camus's response to the excoriating review penned by Jeanson, see Albert Camus, "Lettre au directeur des Temps Modernes," *Les Temps Modernes* 82 (1952): 317–33. For the final response by the editors of *Les Temps Modernes*, see Jean-Paul Sartre, "Réponse à Albert Camus," *Les Temps Modernes* 82 (1952): 334–53; and Francis Jeanson, "Pour tout vous dire...," *Les Temps Modernes* 82 (1952): 354–83.

[230] For more on Fanon's and Sartre's view of violence in the context of colonialism, see Sartre's preface and Fanon's "De la violence" in Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1966); and Jean-Paul Sartre, "Le Colonialisme est un système," *Les Temps Modernes* 122 (1956): 1371–1386.

co-exist with its Berber and Arab populations Camus defended until his untimely death.[231] But this does not mean that Camus denies or is unable to see the violence of colonialism as a whole and also in the case of Algeria. As the articles and essays in *Chroniques algériennes* make it clear, he condemned such violence and called for reforms in Algeria as early as 1939 and especially in 1945, when he calls for a "reconquest of Algeria," by which he envisions France extending full citizenship rights to Muslim Algerians while providing much-needed humanitarian aid that would at once save the population from starvation and undo some of the neglect it had felt during the war years.[232] In an article also published in 1945 in *Combat* but not included in *Chroniques algériennes* in 1958, Camus states in no ambiguous terms that imperialism is dead: "je tiens à dire ma conviction que le temps des impérialismes occidentaux est passé," and adds that it is high time that Europe accuse itself — "l'Europe doit s'accuser elle-même" — for having produced "la plus longue et la plus affreuse barbarie que l'histoire ait connue."[233] The time is particularly propitious for Camus, because Europeans have just liberated themselves from the evil in their midst; but these Europeans will only save Europe definitively "s'ils libèrent tous les hommes qui dependent de l'Europe."[234]

In a nuanced view characteristic of him, Camus refuses to see the dominant role of colonial violence as applicable to Algeria. His published warnings and recommendations for social, economic, and political reforms having gone unheeded for over a decade, he turns to literature to describe an Algeria as he sees it. As we saw in our discussion of *Le Premier Homme*, Camus is not afraid to bring up violence as a component of this portrait of colonial Algeria. My original discussion related that cyclical violence to the mythical dimension of Algeria going back to the biblical fratricide of Cain and Abel. Here, I would like to discuss the view of that violence as one that does not conform to the model of colonial violence through which Fanon and Sartre, among others, justify violence as a means to bring about the end of that system. Historical violence in Algeria, as described in the discussion among Jacques Cormery, the younger Veillard, and the doctor, is one that, crucially, loses its point of

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[231] This is perhaps the reason why *Le Premier Homme* has been critically regarded as a justification for *pied-noir* presence in Algeria, as Camus's defense of the right of "his own tribe" to continue to exist in Algeria. For some critics, this has been extrapolated to mean a continued colonial order.

[232] Camus, "Chroniques," 943.

[233] Albert Camus, *Camus à Combat: éditoriaux et articles d'Albert Camus, 1944-1947*, ed. Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, Cahiers Albert Camus 8 (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 531. The article in question is titled "C'est la justice qui sauvera l'Algérie de la haine" and is conspicuously absent from *Chroniques algériennes* (the editors' note claims that this omission is likely due to Camus's thinking that what the article has to offer is, by 1958 "dépassé." The titular justice for Camus means full citizenship rights as a juridical recognition of the parity that exists among the constitutive populations of Algeria; and the hatred in question refers to the rising — and, in his opinion, *justified* — resentment of French authority which, because it was not mitigated through the measures Camus proposes, nine years later ultimately resulted in the all-out nationalist revolution and the Algerian War.

[234] Camus, 532.

origin like so much else in Algeria. The evocation of Cain and Abel itself is Camus's way of denying the privilege of "first martyrdom" to any of the extant populations of Algeria.[235] When this privilege disappears, so does the right of any group to justify any violence in the present. More importantly, we can see it as a recognition of responsibility for stopping this violence. In the words of David Carroll:

> The extension of the history of colonialism into the entire geographical history of the land and even into religious mythology and the biblical story of Cain and Abel thus does not have the effect of denying, mitigating, or legitimizing the horrible violence, crimes, and terrorism of the war itself. Or the responsibility of specific groups, political parties, and individuals for particular injustices, crimes, and terrorist acts. On the contrary, it highlights that responsibility all the more by refusing either side the right to first martyrdom, the "privilege" of the first victimhood, and thus any justification for the violence and terror it inflicts on innocent civilians. If there is no Algerian Adam, there is also no original sin. The only way the cycle of terrorism can be broken is if both sides recognize that there is in fact no unique origin of violence, no first murder, and no first murderer, and therefore no first or pure victim. The cycle of terror and violence can be stopped, but not by more terrorism nor more counterterrorism, both of which only perpetuate it.[236]

For Camus, it is not important who began the cycle of violence, but who will take steps to end it. This recognition of responsibility for *ending* the violence is what Camus believes unites all Algerians, regardless of their origin and of their past. It is the foundational moment that my reading of *Le Premier Homme* argues for.

Another important feature that they all share is the anguish that motivates Camus's appeal for a civil truce. Published in *Chroniques algériennes* under the title "Pour une trêve civile en Algérie," this appeal was, unlike the rest of the pieces, not an editorial, but a speech that Camus delivered in Algiers on 22 January 1956.[237] Although Camus's ultimate goal was the resolution of the conflict, his immediate goal remained, throughout the many years of the Algerian War, the ceasing of violence in the form of terrorist acts targeting civilians —European, Berber, and Arab alike. Having enumerated differences, Camus's speech then turns to the commonalities among Algerians: "Mais une chose du moins nous réunit tous qui est l'amour de notre terre

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[235] I am borrowing the phrase "first martyrdom" from a very astute discussion of Camus's last grappling with the Algerian question: David Carroll, "Last Words," in *Albert Camus, the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 155–177.

[236] Carroll, 174.

[237] For a more detailed account of the circumstances surrounding Camus's visit and speech in Algiers, see Paul F. Smets, *Albert Camus éditorialiste à L'Express (mai 1955 – février 1956)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 165–168; and Todd, *Albert Camus*, 857–875.

commune, et l'angoisse."[238] The syntactic awkwardness and the unlikely juxtaposition with love for the native land make anguish a more prominent commonality, one that, unlike the natural love for one's native land, requires elaboration. Camus elaborates by relating anguish to the present and to the future, to the existential as much as to the political realities of life in Algeria. It is because of this consuming common anguish that Camus launches his most vocal appeal for a civilian truce, which is intended to spare lives on both sides of the conflict. But this anguish does more than motivate Camus's call for the protection of civilian lives; it levels the playing field among all Algerians in ways that invite them to consider the lives and livelihood of others with whom they share this cherished land.

David Carroll devotes an entire chapter's analysis to the anguish Camus refers to, one which echoes what the discussion of violence suggests in *Le Premier Homme*: that all Algerians share a right to exist in this land:

> If he addresses the Algerian people primarily as a people of anguish, it is because during the war it is only their anguish that continues to link them to each other, that remains the last but most profound sign that those on both sides still believe that what he calls a "happy Algeria" is possible. […] Based on their common experience of anguish, the different communities could finally begin to work together for common goals.[239]

This Carroll adds, conforms to Camus's long-standing belief that *all* Algerians deserved social, economic, and political rights on the basis of their shared humanity with those who already enjoyed these rights in colonial Algeria. He adds:

> To recognize and address the anguish of others is also to recognize and address them as equals on a deep emotional level, regardless of whether they are friend or enemy, good or bad, one of us or one of them. To address anguish is to recognize the suffering and the right to anguish of others; it is to address others in terms of their losses and to acknowledge that their anguish is of the same nature and intensity as one's own. […] The only way to address the anguish of others, to speak of and to their anguish, is with the voice of anguish itself, that is, in a conditional, I am tempted to say, "literary," voice that is not entirely one's own, since no one can pretend to actually speak directly for or as the anguish of another.[240]

I'd like to take off from Carroll's use of the adjective "literary" to describe the voice of anguish and note that this speech marks a turning point in Camus's pronouncements

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[238] Camus, "Chroniques," 993.

[239] David Carroll, "Anguish," in *Albert Camus, the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 149.

[240] Carroll, 150.

on Algeria: the tense situation in the auditorium where he delivers his speech, the calls for his death right outside, and the many meetings he has with old friends and new actors in the arena of Algerian political affairs, transform his relative silence to date into a complete silence.[241] Perhaps not coincidentally, this also marks a more earnest return to the manuscript for *Le Premier Homme*: what he could no longer say in editorials, he could say in his literary depiction of Algeria and its people.

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As we have already seen, the bulk of *Le Premier Homme* recounts family life from the protagonist's childhood and teenage years. It is the reason why many critics since its publication in 1994 have seen it as Camus's defense of *pied-noir* presence in Algeria or as a way to commemorate a collective experience that was on the verge of coming to an end. The end, of course, was the mass exodus of 1.2 million French Algerians toward France — a land that many of them, like his mother, had never regarded as theirs in any form, *pays*, *patrie*, or *nation*. The depiction of his family and other European Algerians like them in terms that portray them as being far from the reins of colonial rule in Algeria was certainly one reason why Camus believed that they deserved to remain in the land on which they had toiled for over a century.

By turning my attention to two instances in the book that flank the long narrative of Jacques Cormery's childhood, I have brought to light the dynamics between individuals and the land that they inhabit. It is through this analysis that we are able to understand Camus's view of the history of Algeria, of its people, and of their relations in ways that seem to foreclose its future as a nation-state. It is no coincidence that Algeria as a modern nation-state run under the flag of a contrived pan-Arabic nationalism was *not* Camus's desired outcome for his native land. His many public defenses of a federated state between France and Algeria attest to that.

When he turns to literature to voice an opinion that was not being heard or heeded in his editorials or in his speeches, Camus invites us to draw a distinction that is crucial to understanding the potential he envisioned for Algeria: that between Algeria as a political entity and Algeria as a historical reality. That is, in part, why he is not able to reconcile with the dominant intellectual opinion of the time and accept an abrupt

[241] In the months preceding his visit to Algiers in late January 1956, Camus decides to break his silence and reenters the journalistic arena by agreeing to provide a series of editorials for *L'Express*. The editorials discuss topics ranging from Mozart to international affairs. A prominent topic is Algeria and its future, which he believes can only come about with the reelection of the recently deposed Pierre Mendès France. His desire to sway votes in Mendès France's favor is perhaps Camus's main reason for his return to journalism. Camus's last of the series of editorials for *L'Express* is dated 2 February 1956, although he writes one more on 24 August 1956. By this point, Pierre Mendès France has lost his bid to get elected and Camus's visit to Algiers has been concluded. His very last editorial on Algeria comes mere days after this, on 26 January 1956. Its sober and careful tone marks perhaps the end of his hopes for a satisfying resolution in Algeria and the beginning of his complete silence on the question of Algeria.

and complete rupture between France and Algeria, regardless of the consequences. Camus's refusal to accept this resolution is entirely consistent with the philosophical opinions he has articulated in the past, particularly in the mistrust of revolutions that he develops in *L'Homme révolté* — and the upheavals promised by such an end to French colonial rule in Algeria are, indeed, tantamount to a revolution. Similarly, Camus's stance is also informed by his view of individuals or revolutions as incapable of undoing the historical past. That is why he does not see the changes promised by Algerian nationalists (i.e., the F.L.N.) and supported in France by intellectuals on Sartre's camp as an acceptable outcome for the Algerian War. The *tabula rasa* they promise and work toward is, for Camus, a historical impossibility. This, for him, is true in the general sense, and especially true in the particular case of Algeria.

We see echoes of Camus's view that history cannot be undone in the preoccupation he exhibits with *rectifying*, instead of *undoing*, the many proposals for reforms that he lays out for the French government as early as 1939 in the editorials he publishes in *Alger républicain* under the heading "Misère de la Kabylie"; or in the calls for social, economic, and political reform that he launches in his May 1945 editorials in *Combat* under the heading "Crise en Algérie." Not surprisingly, these appeals are intended to repair the damage — the misery and the crisis — that the Berber and Arab populations of Algeria are suffering because of failed and discriminatory practices by French colonial authorities, including the false promise of assimilation.[242] By calling for reforms that benefit Arab and Berber Algerians, Camus is recognizing the significantly inferior state of these communities relative to the state of Algerian *pieds-noirs*. The omission of his own community highlights the primacy he ascribes to recognizing the humanity of Arab and Berber Algerians first, and their right to citizenship and political determination second. Camus's preoccupation with the state of Algeria's *pieds-noirs* becomes an issue and is vocalized only in the aftermath of rising Algerian nationalism, and especially in the years of the Algerian War, for reasons that have already been named.

In either case, Camus is consistent with his view of history, but also displays a finely tuned understanding of and concern for the state of these three communities of Algerians — Arabs, Berbers, and the poor *pieds-noirs*. In editorials published in 1955–1956 he refers to the past, current, and future state of these three communities as the "réalité algérienne," and it is in the name of this reality that he proposes, as a solution, what he calls "l'association franco-arabe."[243] Having deemed the *colons* and the *nationalistes* as responsible for "l'action terroriste et la répression — these "deux forces purement négatives"[244] — Camus's appeals from 1955 onward are addressed to those with more moderate views on either side of the conflict. The addressees are, of course, the more visible of the moderate actors such as Aziz Kessous and prominent

[242] For a thorough and subtle discussion of the evolution of Camus's view of the French colonial policy of assimilation, see Carroll, "Anguish," 131–144.

[243] See, in particular, the editorial in *L'Express* from 23 July 1955 titled "L'avenir algérien" in Smets, *Albert Camus éditorialiste à L'Express (mai 1955 – février 1956)*, 47–54.

[244] Smets, 43.

pieds-noirs who are pushing for a more peaceful end to the colonial system in Algeria. As the war progresses, Camus becomes aware that French Algerians whose socio-economic position resembles his family's are espousing more radical views that intend to keep the *status quo* at all costs. That is why, on 22 October 1955, Camus pens an editorial addressed to "les Français d'Algérie" in which he defends the move toward reforms that benefit Arab and Berber Algerians. Failure to recognize the vital need for such reforms would be "une erreur et qui peut devenir mortelle," says Camus, and later adds:

> Les Français d'Algérie savent mieux que personne, en effet, que la politique d'assimilation a échoué. D'abord parce qu'elle n'a jamais été vraiment entrepris, et ensuite parce que le peuple arabe a gardé sa personnalité qui n'est pas réductible à la nôtre.
>
> Ces deux personnalités, liées l'une à l'autre par la force des choses, peuvent choisir de s'associer, ou de se détruire. Et le choix en Algérie n'est pas entre la démission ou la reconquête, mais entre le mariage de convenances ou le mariage à mort de deux xénophobies.
>
> En refusant de reconnaître *la personnalité arabe*, l'Algérie française irait alors contre ses propres intérêts.[245]

Camus concludes this editorial by recognizing the responsibility of French Algerians in bringing about a resolution to the war:

> Plutôt que d'accuser sans trêve la métropole et ses faiblesses, mieux vaudrait alors lui venir en aide pour définir *une solution qui tienne compte des réalités algériennes*.
> […]
> Qu'ils sachent enfin, on voudrait le leur crier ici, que ce n'est pas la France qui tient leur destin en main, mais l'Algérie française qui décide aujourd'hui de son propre destin et de celui de la France.[246]

Whereas for the broader intellectual community the relevant actors are those who hold the reins of the colonial system on the one hand, and the will to oppose it in a nationalist uprising on the other hand — *deux forces purement 94egatives* — for Camus they are the French Algerians who are not immediately associated with or directly benefitting from colonial power, but who have the ability to unite and voice their desire for a resolution that grants them a peaceful coexistence with the Arab and Berber communities of Algeria. They can do this, Camus believes, because as citizens, they have the right to demand and institute change through non-violent, democratic means of the kind he has been proposing since the 1930s.[247] This proposal is not Camus's way of skirting the issue of the intrinsic violence of colonialism. But to best

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[245] Smets, 76–77; my emphasis.

[246] Smets, 78; my emphasis.

[247] Arab and Berber Algerians are excluded from this responsibility because, as non-citizens, they lack the means to enact change peacefully, legislatively, or juridically.

understand how he accounts for it we cannot ignore the discussion of cyclical violence recounted in *Le Premier Homme*. Unlike his prominent contemporaries, Camus does not see violence as essential for bringing about the end of a violent system. When violence comes up in his autobiographical book, the blame for it is rendered ambiguous much in the same way the notion of a singular lineage ends up being dispelled — for Muslim Algerians as much as for his *pied-noir* community. Similarly, when attempts are made to isolate a foundational moment in the past, they are either aborted or result in little more than anecdotal information about the protagonist's father, his family, or his community.[248]

If there exists a foundational moment for Algeria, Camus suggests that it is yet to come. But it can only come if French Algerians finally extend the *oubli* that defines Algeria to the cycle of violence whose origins are, for Camus, lost to time but still powerful enough to exact blood from either side.[249] And it can only come if French Algerians also end the *oubli* that has kept them apart from Algeria's Arab and Berber communities.[250] When Camus writes in *Le Premier Homme* that French Algerians now have to "naître aux autres," and thereby recognize "la fraternité de race et de destin,"[251] he is effectively echoing his editorials' calls for French Algerians to take "la personnalité arabe" and "la réalité algérienne" both into account and realize that, where memory and history fail them, they can turn to a recognition of one another's humanity and right to exist in this land the love for which only they can understand. "[E]n Algérie Français et Arabes sont condamnés à vivre ou à mourir ensemble," says Camus in another call for a round table in *L'Express*.[252] His literary appeal to recognize the fraternal association that binds French Algerians to Arab and Berber Algerians echoes the same alternative while also highlighting the vital responsibility that his own community, the *pieds-noirs* of Algeria, has in ensuring that Algerians persist in peace rather than perish in a cycle of violence.[253] It is their responsibility as

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[248] Because such a foundational moment or moments are necessary for a modern nation-state, the failure to find one in *Le Premier Homme* says what Camus has said elsewhere and repeatedly about Algeria not having the historical circumstances to consider itself a nation in the style of France or other established nation-states. For Camus, Algeria lacks a linear history and its constitutive communities lack an exclusive right to its history and its future. Claims that it does — such as those by the F.L.N. in the years preceding the war, during the war, and since its independence — are, for Camus, necessarily contrived and dangerous.

[249] This is the first meaning of *oubli*, i.e., as "forgetfulness," that I address in my reading of the passage earlier in the chapter. It is the *oubli* that, according to Jacques Cormery and his interlocutors, reigns supreme in Algeria. The one notable exception is violence: no community in Algeria forgets to submit to the cycle of violence among them, even though they may have forgotten — as Camus would like us to think — who committed the first act of violence.

[250] The *oubli* referred to here has the second meaning I consider in my reading earlier in the chapter, that of "neglect" or "refusal to see" another person.

[251] Camus, *Le Premier Homme*, 181.

[252] Smets, *Albert Camus éditorialiste à L'Express (mai 1955 – février 1956)*, 70.

[253] It should be noted that, implicitly recognized in this call to action is the *pied-noir* community's *failure* to act in the same fashion in the past.

fully-vested citizens to demand and garner equal rights for their fellow Algerians without demands or promises of assimilation.[254] Together, these communities will no longer be inoperative subjects, but will guarantee for one another a moderate, reasonable, and just say in the future of Algeria, if Algeria is to be ushered into the community of nation-states.

Le Premier Homme dedicates significant space to the protagonist's childhood, familial life, and education. The prominent place that this narrative occupies in the manuscript justifies past critics' interpretation of the autobiographical novel as an attempt to memorialize the lived experience of a community that risks losing its place in Algeria as a result of historical upheavals. In so doing, Camus is repeating the memorializing literary gestures of other North African writers like Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib, and Albert Memmi.[255] But because he is writing *Le Premier Homme* during the years of the Algerian War, he cannot help but also imagine the different possibilities for its future. By aborting his initial attempt to situate the birth of the protagonist, Jacques Cormery, at the origin of a lineage for him, his family, his community of *pieds-noirs*, other Algerian communities, and Algeria as a whole, Camus underscores the impossibility of tracing from the present a linear past for any of them. When this is juxtaposed with the linear national memory of France and its many *lieux de mémoire*, the reader is left to conclude that, unlike France, Algeria's unique history makes it impossible for it to forge a monolithic national memory and, with it, a viable nation in the example of France or other nation-states. Instead, *Le Premier Homme* suggests that the only viable possibility for Algeria after it shakes its colonial yoke is one that considers its unique history, the history of its people, and, especially, of the violence that has defined their relations. This is what Camus does when, after accounting for the above and after considering the political agency of the only Algerians who *are* citizens, has his narrator in *Le Premier Homme* ventriloquize what Camus himself had articulated in the press: that the responsibility rests with French Algerians who have to recognize in Arab and Berber Algerians what the colonial powers failed to recognize in the 130 years of colonial subjugation: their human dignity and their right to self-determination.

That Camus — a writer, lest we forget — failed to bring about this future or even persuade others of its possibility is not the standard we should take when considering his stance on Algeria at the height of the Algerian War. We should instead consider his position as a function of his relentless defense of human life and dignity in all its forms and across all times, and as a function of a vision for Algeria that — had it

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[254] Camus's repeated references to the "personnalité arabe" in the context of the failures of assimilationist policies (such as they were) in Algeria stress his view that it is necessary to forge an Algeria where each community can take part without first relinquishing its uniqueness, its identity. This view, according to David Carroll, "implies that an Algerian would become French *as a Berber*, *as an Arab*, *as a Muslim*. Today, this would be considered a multiculturalist position," Carroll, "Anguish," 136.

[255] Specifically, their own autobiographical novels: Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* (1951), Dib's *La Grande Maison* (1952), and Memmi's *La Statue de sel* (1953).

accounted for the reality of life for its inhabitants and not attempted to undo past violences through violence — might have avoided the many problems faced by the F.L.N. and the Algerian people in the decades following independence.

Other actors spoke for Algeria with a language that Camus — because of his distrust of revolutions, his steadfast opposition to terrorist violence against civilians, his experience with the land and the people of Algeria, and his affective relationship to his native land — could not understand or would not take part in. These actors, on the other hand, also could not and would not understand Camus's language when talking about Algeria or the 20th-century experience more broadly. Perhaps we can begin to understand it in the present.

CHAPTER THREE

In literature and beyond literature: Political engagement in Mouloud Feraoun's corpus and its affinities with the engagement of Albert Camus

« …nous croyons cependant que l'écrivain peut jeter un regard en arrière
pour tenter de découvrir, dans un passé plus serein,
les promesses d'un avenir fraternel
qu'il a voulu aider
à préparer… »[256]

« Le crédit dont nous avons besoin, les uns et les autres, pour faire admettre
la plus banale des vérités humaines inscrite en filigrane
dans tous nos ouvrages : nous sommes des hommes,
rien que des hommes,
nous avons besoin d'amitié,
de tendresse,
de fraternité. »[257]

I. "La Littérature algérienne"

In its last issue of 1957, the *Revue française* published a short essay titled "La Littérature algérienne." Penned by Mouloud Feraoun — by then an established and recognizable name in Francophone Algerian literature — the essay refers to his own work alongside the works of contemporaries like Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Mammeri, and Kateb Yacine. At the same time, the essay displays a knowledge of and admiration for Algerian writers of European descent like Gabriel Audisio, Albert Camus, Emmanuel Roblès, and others, whom we now categorize as belonging to the École d'Alger. These authors, according to Feraoun, paved the way for indigenous Algerian writers by breaking away from "un Orient de pacotille pour décrire une humanité moins belle et plus vraie, une terre aux couleurs moins chatoyantes mais plus riche de sève nourricière."[258]

It might seem as though Feraoun is crediting these European-Algerian authors with providing an example that he and other indigenous Algerian writers could subsequently emulate. However, Feraoun is careful not to credit them with this

[256] Mouloud Feraoun, "La Littérature algérienne," in *L'Anniversaire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 53.
[257] Feraoun, 58.
[258] Feraoun, 54.

pioneering role right away. Instead, he begins his essay by implying that he and other indigenous Algerians doing writerly work are "des messagers authentiques."[259] At the same time, he attributes the period's flourishing interest in Algerian literature to a public that was ready to listen and to a set of pioneering indigenous writers who were ready to speak about their experience:

> L'intérêt vient, sans doute, de ce que l'on était prêt à nous entendre et qu'on attendait de nous des témoignages sincères ; la floraison s'explique par notre impérieux besoin de témoigner sincèrement, entièrement, de saisir notre réalité sur le vif et dans tous ses aspects afin de dissiper des malentendus tenaces et de priver les consciences tranquilles de l'excuse de l'ignorance.[260]

The ignorance referred to here is understood in the following section of his essay, in which Feraoun recognizes — without malice — that, if European writers like Marcel Moussy or Albert Camus have not written about the indigenous population, it is because "ni Moussy ni Camus ni presque tous les autres n'ont pu venir jusqu'à nous pour suffisamment nous connaître."[261] If writers born and raised in Algeria are unaware of the lived experience in the indigenous neighborhoods of the cities or in more remote rural areas of Algeria, then we can safely assume that this ignorance extends to — and deepens in — the typical French reader, who is ostensibly and overwhelmingly metropolitan.

In addition to this overview of the stages of Algerian literature, Feraoun's essay makes use of a language that evokes testimony, documentation, and authenticity, and even recognizes literature as a means of claiming or defending a point of view or a particular set of rights. In light of this, we can understand the advent of writings from indigenous Algerian authors like himself as the result of the need to fill a gap left by writers of the École d'Alger. This school and the concurrent school of indigenous writers like Feraoun himself reflect what the public mentioned by Feraoun seems to hunger and be ready for: authentic messengers who provide sincere accounts of Algeria and life in it. Such authentic accounts can only come from what Feraoun calls "authentic messengers," that is, individuals who have experienced and can subsequently speak about it first-hand. Given the dichotomy of colonial Algerian society — what Feraoun calls "une des tristes réalités algériennes"[262] — writers of the École d'Alger can only speak for their respective European-Algerian experiences. Consequently, when it comes to speaking for the Arab, Kabyle, or Jewish experience in Algeria, the *messagers authentiques* have to come from those communities. Hence the need for witnesses like Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Mohammed Dib, Kateb Yacine, and others.

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[259] Feraoun, 53.
[260] Feraoun, 54.
[261] Feraoun, 55.
[262] Feraoun, 54.

If we consider Feraoun's language when referring to these Algerian writers — and particularly to those of indigenous Algerian origins — we see that nouns like *écrivain* or verbs like *écrire* are less commonly used than other combinations like *témoin/témoigner*. These witnesses and their testimonials, according to Feraoun, rely on documentary and objective writing styles that aim to convey reality more than to make formal or aesthetic statements. As such, they are also in a position to denounce — *dénoncer* — problems like hunger that haunt the everyday existence of indigenous Algerians. But some writers, who realize that "l'observation objective ne suffisait pas," opt instead for "le rôle écrasant de l'avocat."[263] In that role, they assume the duty to demand — *réclamer* — a redress of injustices in Algerian society.

Through these distinctions, Feraoun is essentially and astutely identifying the different veins of Algerian literature by indigenous authors just as they are coming into existence. These same distinctions are not unlike those made by later critics like Abdelkebir Khatibi who, in 1965, also distinguishes between autobiographical, documentarian, and realistic styles of the early years of Francophone Algerian literature on the one hand and, on the other hand, the later, more political, more militant tones and styles assumed by authors like Kateb Yacine.[264] By identifying these veins as early as 1957, Feraoun highlights both his exhaustive knowledge of indigenous Algerian authors and, more importantly, his understanding of the role of literature and the writer in colonial Algeria.

Feraoun underscores the importance of authentic forms of writing, which, for him, consist in writing about one's own experience. As we saw above, he is more likely to refer to writers as witnesses than as "writers" or "authors." "Les plus significatives de nos œuvres contiennent toutes l'essentiel de notre témoignage," says Feraoun, and continues:

> on le retrouve un peu partout, discret ou véhément, toujours exprimé avec une égale fidélité et le même dessein d'émouvoir. Chacun a parlé de ce qu'il connaît, de ce qu'il a vu ou senti, et pour être sûr de dire vrai, chacun a mis dans son livre une grande part de lui-même. Mais puisque la vision reste la même sous des angles différents, des drames identiques ont été observés : drames sociaux d'où résultent le chômage et l'émigration ; drames politiques avec les luttes intestines, les brimades administratives ou l'inhumaine opposition des races ; ceux enfin de l'ignorance, qui sont aussi cruels que les autres et auxquels on voudrait imputer l'origine de tous nos maux.[265]

Telling in this passage is Feraoun's recognition that much is shared in the way of

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[263] Feraoun, 57.

[264] For more on these and other veins in Algerian literature and elsewhere in the Maghreb, see chapter 1, titled "Situation du roman maghrébin" in Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin, essai*.

[265] Feraoun, "La Littérature algérienne," 56.

societal, economical, or political problems among the different populations of Algeria — and that is especially true among indigenous groups. Feraoun's essay juxtaposes this list of problems with a reference to a fraternal bond among writers, one that has the potential be transposed to reality:

> En tout cas, [l'honorable pudeur des écrivains algériens d'origine européenne de témoigner en faveur des indigènes] a fait naître des vocations en nous encourageant à témoigner à notre tour et pour notre compte. Tout s'est passé comme si les écrivains d'origine européenne nous avaient conviés à une confession sans réticence, après nous avoir fait entendre la leur, afin que cet assaut de franchise fût l'éclatante affirmation d'une fraternité indestructible qu'il suffirait ensuite de traduire loyalement dans les faits. Et c'était là, notre espoir…[266]

The kinship that Feraoun qualifies as "une fraternité indestructible" above highlights his understanding of writers across languages and cultures. It is a conception founded on the principle that the immediacy of a writer's lived experience makes them the best equipped to depict or speak about the particular background of their social, economic, and political position. But Feraoun's essay also suggests that there is a greater kinship in which writers have a role to play. In an earlier moment in the essay, where Feraoun refers to colonial writers, he once again evokes fraternity and hope. Fully aware of the "drame cruel qui nous déchire" — by which he most certainly means the Algerian War — Feraoun offers the following:

> Condamné à un douloureux mutisme, au cours d'un tragique affrontement, nous croyons cependant que l'écrivain peut jeter un regard en arrière pour tenter de découvrir, dans un passé plus serein, les promesses d'un avenir fraternel qu'il a voulu aider à préparer, ne serait-ce que pour se justifier, pour déclarer qu'il n'a pas failli à sa tâche, en même temps qu'il redit son espoir.[267]

The fraternal qualifier in this instance is not limited to writers; it is now the future that is fraternal. Writers in this section are not simply referred to in relation to other writers, but rather granted an operative role in this *avenir fraternel* that extends to society as a whole. As such, Feraoun suggest, writers want — and help — to prepare the coming of this fraternal coexistence in society, be it simply by restating their hope for it when it seems to be forgotten, as it was in the years of the Algerian War.

As operative agents in a particular society, writers are therefore tasked with a greater responsibility. The society they envision for the future cannot come out of nothing; that is why "l'écrivain peut jeter un regard en arrière" and in it find the promise for a peaceful future. But more than simply envision this future, the writer has to help its realization. Literature is the implied means by which writers contribute to this reality

[266] Feraoun, 55–56.
[267] Feraoun, 53–54.

that is yet to come. And writers usher its arrival by enlisting literature's ability to bear witness to a particular reality or experience, to denounce injustices apparent in a society, to defend those condemned to a life of silence in the margins, and to militate for a more just future. These are roles that a writer can play in a society. Feraoun, as we have seen, calls attention to them by opting for more juridical and operative alternatives to writer/writing in his use of *témoin*, *témoigner*, *témoignage*, *dénoncer*, *avocat*, and *réclamer*.

The Algerian writers that Feraoun mentions by name are aptly positioned to play these roles in the historical reality of 1950s Algeria. Though Feraoun's own literary writings lack the militancy of Kateb Yacine even in the midst of the Algerian War, they are nonetheless a concrete realization of the roles that Feraoun associates with writers. Whether they are considered on an individual basis or collectively, Feraoun's own works make use of what he calls "la bonne recette" when referring to Algerian writers as advocates: "Il a fallu, pour toucher et convaincre, faire appel à toute son intelligence, puiser les arguments dans son cœur, rechercher l'accent qui convient dans son propre déchirement."[268] This good recipe, he continues, "s'est impose à plusieurs qui ont, en effet, puisé en eux-mêmes leur roman, lorsqu'ils n'ont pas raconté tout simplement leur histoire."[269] Whereas the second-to-last clause in this sentence — "[ils] ont […] puisé en eux-mêmes le roman" — reaffirms the authenticity of their literary contributions, the very last one — "ils n'ont pas raconté tout simplement leur histoire" — serves to reaffirm their involvement in a more far-reaching and operative scope. Algerian writers like Feraoun and of his generation are not simply writing about their individual or familial experience, nor only about their particular ethnic or socio-economic group; rather, they are writing about those fragments with the knowledge that they constitute the greater and integral portrait of Algeria. Feraoun's own literary trajectory is itself a testament to this constant negotiation between the individual experience, the more universal experience of the Algerian writers' native community, and of the broader Algerian experience they are all writing about in collaboration. It is therefore not surprising that Feraoun's works offer more truth than verisimilitude — truth not only about himself as a Kabyle and later as a French-educated teacher in his native Tizi-Hibel, but also truth about the Kabyle community that surrounds him and the colonial Algerian society that he and other Kabyles share with Arabs, *pied-noirs*, and Jews.

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The preceding analysis of Mouloud Feraoun's article will serve as a roadmap for the perspective on his work in the following sections of this chapter. In a first instance, I will give an overview of his two novelistic works following *Le Fils du pauvre*, namely, *La Terre et le Sang*, and *Les Chemins qui montent*. Each overview will highlight themes that are salient within the work itself, but also across works by Mouloud

[268] Feraoun, 57.

[269] Feraoun, 57. Feraoun is certainly thinking of himself here and of his first novel — a heavily autobiographical novel — *Le Fils du pauvre*.

Feraoun. These themes will be reprised in a second discussion of his work as they align with the features of the writerly work that Feraoun describes in "La Littérature algérienne," as well as with the contemporaneous notions of bearing witness through literature and through writing in the 20th century, and of writerly commitment in the public and intellectual debates surrounding the Algerian War on either side of the Mediterranean. To do this, I will turn to his extensive *Journal*, written between 1955 and 1962 and spanning the deadliest years of the Algerian War, in which there is a clearer articulation of the more important themes highlighted in his previous works. Intervening in this discussion will be elaborations of the theoretical frameworks of the act of bearing witness through writing, as well as on the figure of the *écrivain engagé*. The chapter will conclude with a reading of *Journal* as a crucial form of commitment responding to the specific circumstances of Algerian history and of the Algerian War, and with a simultaneous consideration of Mouloud Feraoun as an *écrivain engagé*.

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The following is an overview of Mouloud Feraoun's most important literary and non-literary works, as seen through the lens that he himself proposes when he speaks of the role of the first generation of Algerian writers of which he is one. This section will address themes and content in works following his first book, *Le Fils du pauvre* (1950). This autobiographical novel, as we have seen in Chapter 1, gives a faithful portrait of Kabyle life in the first half of the 20th century. By drawing parallels between the individual trajectory of the protagonist and others like him, *Le Fils du pauvre* is as much an individual as a collective autobiography of the Kabyle population that the protagonist — and by extension, the author — is a member of. At the same time, the novel offers a central moment in which there is a reflection about the protagonist's transformation into a writer. The resulting writer becomes a *messager authentique* for the protagonist, the family, and the greater community. As such, he bears witness to the individual, familial, and broader Kabyle experience for the benefit of the metropolitan French reader. It is in this book that Feraoun allows his alter ego to become a *témoin* in the form of the protagonist and of a nameless narrator in order to provide for the reader the kind of *témoignage* that breaks away from orientalist portrayals of life in Algeria and from the limitations of narratives by European-Algerians. As my earlier analysis also highlights, *Le Fils du pauvre* is equally useful in beginning to depict and understand the hybridity that is characteristic of Kabyle society at in the early 20th century. The protagonist, Fouroulou Menrad, is at once a typical Kabyle boy and an embodiment of the mixture between the traditional Kabyle lifestyle of his childhood and the French-educated model that he pursues later in life. The protagonist is also an agent of this hybridity by virtue of his role as *instituteur* in his native Kabylie. This and other forms of hybridity — along with the negotiations and manifestations that they require — will become more central in Feraoun's later works, to which we now turn our attention.

II. *La Terre et le Sang*

Mouloud Feraoun's foray into a portrayal of a hybrid and ever-changing Kabyle society in *Le Fils du pauvre* takes multiple dimensions in *La Terre et le Sang*. In this novel, the author moves away from the autobiographical realm of his first book and even experiments with embodiments of this mixed society that are far removed from his alter ego.

As in *Le Fils du pauvre*, in *La Terre et le Sang* we encounter the theme of migration toward the *104etropole* as well as the intrusion of French elements in rural Kabyle society. The two phenomena are personified in the characters of Amer and Marie, respectively, each of whom strives for some level of acceptance and understanding in the village of Ighil-Nezman. Although Amer is accepted very quickly by his family and the other villagers upon his return from France after more than a decade of absence and neglect toward his family, new and old tensions arise that complicate his relation with other members of the extended family and village. On the one hand, details make it back from France that indicate that he was responsible for the accidental death of Rabah, Amer's maternal relation who was also an immigrant in Paris. On the other hand, after his return, he is suspected of having an affair with a married woman, Chabha, who happens to be the wife of Slimane, Rabah's brother.

The knowledge that Amer is at all responsible for Rabah's death automatically puts Amer and Slimane at odds with each other, for tradition requires that Rabah's blood be repaid with Amer's. For reasons that are evoked as both affective and material, Amer and Slimane resolve their differences in what seems like a permanent solution. Nevertheless, Slimane harbors underlying doubts about whether he is doing right by his dead brother. These doubts are made worse by the fact that Slimane fails to produce an heir with his wife Chabha, and even further aggravated by the ever-increasing suspicion that Chabha is having an affair with his cousin Amer. After Slimane obtains proof of the affair, he and Amer both die in a mining accident.

Two versions of the accident make it on the pages of the book. The first has Amer killed by the explosion and Slimane by falling debris when he rushes to save someone he thought he heard. The second — told in private by Lamara, another worker, to Slimane's father-in-law, Ramdane — says that Slimane distracted Lamara as he was about to call out the warning before the fuse was lit. The two version converge with Slimane rushing into the shaft after the explosion and finding his own demise. The secretive nature of the relation of the second version by Lamara to Ramdane calls the reader's attention to it, as if to say that it is the one they should believe. The fact that it is Ramdane who hears the private version of events, furthermore, recalls his role as Amer's confidant when Amer told him the truth about the accident that killed Rabah. Additionally, Slimane's distraction of Lamara echoes a role similar to that of the Polish worker André, who, back in France, convinced Amer that the bell had rung to request the car that Amer proceeded to set in motion, and which eventually killed Rabah. Just as Slimane had recently become aware of Amer's affair with his wife, André had discovered his own wife's affair with Rabah right before the accident that killed him.

These parallels ought to be regarded as more than setups for carrying out crimes of passion by two cuckolded husbands. The two men in question, André and Slimane, inhabit vastly different worlds. Their circumstances and relations to those who betrayed them with their wives are also quite distinct. Yet despite their differences, the two dramas unfold in ways that implicate them as betrayed husbands exacting revenge on the men their wives betrayed them with. However distinct, the factors of their circumstances seem to be overridden by this crime of passion, which is carried out in the same way in Northern France as it is later in the mountains of Kabylie. Although Feraoun resorts to two less-than-savory examples of adultery and the murders they each provoke, his use of salient parallels between the two instances nonetheless evokes a fundamental human inclination — i.e., to commit crimes of passion — that transgresses cultural bounds. This parallel recalls the fraternal bond evoked by Feraoun in "La Littérature algérienne" with respect to writers and individuals across cultures. In the context of a novel concerned with the interface between two different cultures, this very human act of passion seems to challenge notions of any immiscibility between them. Feraoun mounts this challenge and highlights the shared human experience by eschewing idealized portrayals of a harmonious blending of the two cultures. Instead, Feraoun presents and juxtaposes these cultures at a shared low point, as if to highlight the work that needs to be done and the energy that needs to be expended in order for these two cultures to coexist. The juxtaposition reminds individuals on both sides that, in their own ways, each culture has learned to allow for crimes of passion in their long-standing mores or laws. Crimes of passion, when considered in their abstracted totality, parallel the passions that stir within and among the different populations in Algeria in the form of dangerous tensions. Their use in the form of adultery is Feraoun's way of suggesting that this animosity among the populations of Algeria is the crime of passion that requires new attention and, more importantly, a new solution, from the populations involved.

I'd like to suggest that it is this kind of realism that merits critical attention in Feraoun's *La Terre et le Sang*. Critics are many and quick to point out that Feraoun's portrayal of colonial Algeria in the first half of the 20th century does not go far enough in criticizing the colonial structure. As I have suggested before, the standards of this expectation are informed in part by the contemporaneous and subsequent rise of texts that explicitly criticize the French colonial system and vocally militate for Algerian independence. Feraoun's approach seems to take into account the existing and inextricable relationship between France and Algeria and realizes that undoing it would require unprecedented levels of violence. The awareness of this reality is latent, if not explicit, across many works by Mouloud Feraoun. This recognition goes hand-in-hand with the broad humanistic tenor of Feraoun's work both in fiction and non-fiction. It also puts him in relation with the French tradition of the *écrivain engagé*, which we will discuss subsequently in this chapter. For the moment, it is apt to recognize in *La Terre et le Sang* a singular representation of two general conditions among the characters: as Algerians subjected to the tensions and divisions of its colonial history, and as too-human humans condemned to live together in an unprecedented setting and to engage in new forms of interaction and exchange.

III. *Les Chemins qui montent*

Although we are looking at *Les Chemins qui montent* separately from *La Terre et le Sang*, and although it was published separately four years after *La Terre et le Sang*, the narrative and characters that we meet in it constitute a sequel to its predecessor. In their critical discussion of Feraoun's work, Robert Elbaz and Martine Mathieu-Job consider the two novels together, as "un seul et même récit fictionnel en deux volets."[270] The author himself conceives of the two novels as "une chronique allant de 1910 à 1950," in which *Les Chemins qui montent* picks up the story about seventeen years after 1930, where the events in *La Terre et le Sang* conclude.[271] Despite the threads that display this continuity, there have been enough changes in the village, in the plot, in the characters, and in the style of the author's writing to warrant a separate analysis of the novel.

The only character in *Les Chemins qui montent* whom we have properly encountered in *La Terre et le Sang* is Marie, whom we last saw as the pregnant widow of Amer-ou-Kaci. In *Les Chemins qui montent* Marie functions not so much as a fully-fledged character as a plot device that triggers a reflective phase and an identity crisis in her son when she dies.[272] But it is neither Marie nor her son — named Amer, like the father he never knew — that we first encounter in the book. Instead, the character we first meet is a teenage girl named Dehbia, daughter of Nana Melha of the Aït Larbi, who had left Ighil-Nezman after a pregnancy resulting from an affair with a Frenchman, and has now returned with her young daughter. Both mother and daughter show a characteristic defiance vis-à-vis the restrictive traditions and lasting reputations that still define them in the eyes of the other villagers. This defiance, compounded by her status as an illegitimate child conceived with an outsider, leave no ambiguity about Dehbia's status as an outsider in the community of Ighil-Nezman. This status is further cemented by her having been raised and educated in her estranged French father's Catholic faith, thus making her *une infidèle* in the eyes of the villagers and of Mokrane, whom we will meet below.

Although the book opens with news of Amer's death, it is the effect it has on Dehbia that we first witness. She has come in possession of a journal he kept in the ten days preceding his death and, as she reads it, we discover her reactions to it and the reflections that they elicit. The free indirect discourse that ensues comprises Dehbia's

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[270] Robert Elbaz and Martine Mathieu-Job, *Mouloud Feraoun, ou L'Émergence d'une littérature* (Paris: Karthala, 2001), 45. "…à notre sens," add the authors, "l'œuvre dans sa globalité constitue un même texte, qui se traduit parfois sur un mode discursive sociologique et parfois sur un mode narratif," 48.

[271] Mouloud Feraoun, *Lettres à ses amis* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), 55.

[272] Marie's development as a respected character seems to have occurred in the interim between *La Terre et le Sang* and *Les Chemins qui montent*. Widowed before she could even learn the ways of traditional Kabyle life, she has her son by Amer-ou-Kaci, who becomes her only living family member after the death of Kamouma, her mother-in-law.

own reflections, snippets of a journal she herself begins to write, as well as moments narrated from the perspective of other characters like Nana Melha or Mokrane. Occupying almost half of the novel, these fragments constitute the first section of it, titled "La Veillée," which unfolds over nine chapters. The eponymous vigil recalls the practice of staying up with the body of the deceased. Instead, we see Dehbia read and watch over Amer's journal — not his body — and, with each page she reads during the night, she discloses more about herself and her life to the reader. It is in this section that we meet Dehbia's troubled mind as it is slowly revealed by her thoughts and actions recounted for the reader, and the troubled position she occupies in the village, which we discover progressively for almost one hundred pages. The first section ends with Dehbia awakening to find her mother ready to satiate her daughter's hunger and already thinking about her daughter's marriage to the *président*, whose offer to marry Dehbia she had previously turned down.

The novel is groundbreaking for Feraoun himself and for Algerian literature more broadly, in that it comprises a polyphony of voices from quite disparate characters. Breaking away from the alter-ego type of character he created in Fouroulou Menrad, and from the non-conformist male protagonist he developed in Amer-ou-Kaci, Feraoun for the first time gives a fully developed voice to a female protagonist: Dehbia. She is the first character we come to know in *Les Chemins qui montent*, and it is also through her perspective and her relation to him that we first learn about Amer n'Amer. Dehbia harbors and embodies a defiance against tradition, convention, and the predetermination that characterizes life for many other characters — both male and female — in Kabyle society. She displays this defiance both in the greater arc of her experience and in the day-to-day interactions she has with the characters who inhabit the same space. If we consider Dehbia to be the protagonist of the first half of *Les Chemins qui montent*, her antagonist is without a doubt Mokrane, who, unlike Dehbia, embodies a conformist stance toward tradition to the point of deleterious intransigence.

As avatars for the perspectives they represent, these two characters come to a head in many ways in their daily and tenuous coexistence: in matters of love and lust, pride and shame, or in the latent battle of the sexes that Kabyle society is host to. Whatever the context of their disagreements, the conflict between them is multiplied manifold by their incongruous perspectives on the role of the sexes and of the individuals in their society. Their antagonism culminates at the end of the first part of *Les Chemins qui montent*, in which Dehbia and Mokrane meet after they have each experienced a sense of loss: Mokrane feels betrayed by his wife Ouiza's suspected affair with Amer, and Dehbia feels utterly neglected by Amer now that he is devoting his attention to another woman. Though Dehbia and Mokrane's encounter in this scene is at first one of mutual solace, that is short-lived. Taking advantage of Dehbia's feeling of abandonment and further fueled by his jealousy and impending dishonor, Mokrane asserts himself in the name of tradition and of his lineage in the only way he knows: he rapes Dehbia. The rape becomes the outlet for the many carnal temptations that Mokrane has felt toward Dehbia, despite his better efforts to repress them. At the same time, the act uses the violence on her body and the inevitable dishonor on her

person as a way to dishonor Amer in the way that tradition demands of Mokrane as a betrayed husband. For this reason, Mokrane is quick to tell Dehbia, after he has raped her, that she ought to tell Amer, that he ought to know about this:

> Écoute, pour ce qui est de l'honneur, tu lui diras que c'est fait, je me suis vengé. […] Ah ! oui, tu lui diras, n'oublie pas. Mais ce n'est pas sûr, que tu lui diras ! Je suis Mokrane, moi. Mokrane n'Aït Slimane ! Il ne me connaît pas encore !273

Mokrane's words show that the rape is not so much about externalizing his gnawing lust for Dehbia, nor with asserting himself in her eyes. Instead, it is intended as a way to assert himself in the eyes of Amer. As such, Mokrane's rape of Dehbia and the statement he leaves her with call attention to a greater antagonism: that between him and Amer.

Amer's is the second voice we meet in *Les Chemins qui montent*. His *récit* is given in the form of a journal, which he begins to write immediately after his mother's — i.e., Madame's — death and burial. Not finding solace in the platitudinous condolences and consolations of his peers, Amer launches his own reflection on his mother's death. Although it is purportedly begun as a therapeutic outlet for the grief over his mother's death, Amer's journal quickly becomes about himself, specifically, about his solitude. This solitude first places him in the position of an outsider with respect to everyone else in Ighil-Nezman. As the second day following his mother's death arises, Amer imagines the inhabitants of the village awakening to begin their day in their daily fashion. "Alors on sera tout à fait évéillé, prêt à jouer la comédie," he says, and begins the paragraph that follows by stating his refusal to participate in this comedy:

> La question pour moi, est de décider si précisément je vais continuer de jouer la comédie. Ma position est simple : je ne réponds que de moi-même. Que dois-je faire à présent ? Remarquez que je sais très bien ce que je ferai. Si j'écris en ce moment, c'est uniquement pour me justifier ou plutôt pour m'expliquer, parce que, bien sûr, ce n'est pas l'opinion des autres qui me préoccupe. J'ai besoin de me comprendre, de fixer tous les arguments, de les emprisonner là, parmi ces feuillets, et qu'ils ne m'échappent plus. Une fois qu'ils y seront tous, nets et précis, eh bien ma mère, tu devines ? Bon. Patience alors.274

A 25-year-old orphan, Amer feels he suddenly has to answer for himself — "répondre […] de moi-même." The way he elects to do so is one of definition and delineation: he has to understand *and* contain himself (*se comprendre*); he has to name and isolate (*fixer*, *emprisonner*) his understanding of himself and his place in the world in a way that presently resists redefinition (*qu'ils ne m'échappent plus*) and variation (*nets et précis*). In other words, he strives for the kind of definition — and, with it, the

273 Mouloud Feraoun, *Les Chemins qui montent* (Alger: ENAG/Éditions, 2006), 95.
274 Feraoun, 112.

determinism — that characterizes traditional Kabyle life, as exemplified by the character of Mokrane.

Amer's undertaking is doomed from the beginning, for he is paradoxically aware of being an outsider, of not belonging either to the Kabyle or to the French determinism. When in France for a period of four years, Amer is considered a "Noraf." As such, he discovers that, in the eyes of French society, he is ranked below other provincial or European immigrant populations.[275] This is the case for him despite his being half-French. Similarly, despite being half-Kabyle and despite having been raised in Ighil-Nezman, he is seen as an outsider in this society, as well. This alienation is further deepened by his emigration to France, for which he is regarded with greater suspicion by the villagers in Ighil-Nezman. We see his frustration with this perspective in his journal, where he describes his precarious — if not impossible — position in either the French or Kabyle society:

> Tas d'imbéciles, vous ne voulez pas de moi, je sais. Où voulez-vous que j'aille ? Croyez-vous que les Français, mes oncles, veulent de moi, eux ? Erreur ! Demandez à vos enfants. Ils vous diront comment je me suis comporté chez mes oncles, si j'ai failli à ma nature de Bicot, si j'ai, une seule fois, donné le change ; si je n'ai pas partagé les humiliations, la chambre et la soupe des gars d'Ighil-Nezman, à Paris et ailleurs. Tas d'imbéciles, je vous déteste mais vos enfants sont mes frères. Ils m'écoutent et nous nous comprenons…[276]

This passage makes it clear that Amer is more inclined to keep his Kabyle identity. Yet, in the same page, he feels obligated to note that two stones have just hit his roof. Though the thrower of the stones is not named, Amer's journal leaves little doubt as to his identity: it is Mokrane, who hates Amer and whom Amer, in return, disdains. We are in the second entry and second day of Amer's journal. But just as he begins to assume or defend his identity as a Kabyle, we see that there is resistance from Mokrane, who, as we have seen, represents the unyielding traditional mentality of Ighil-Nezman. "L'histoire [entre moi et Mokrane] serait longue à raconter," says Amer toward the conclusion of his entry, adding, "Longue, obscure, insaisissable, au point que je doute qu'il y ait vraiment une histoire. Nous sommes, lui et moi, dans cette situation : il me hait et je le méprise. Nous n'y pouvons rien."[277] Amer will return to his feelings toward his Kabyle identity in a later entry, in which he admits that he is not happy about having been born "dans ce pays maudit," where he wants to belong and, at the same time, finds it impossible to do so.[278] This society's refusal to accept him progressively assumes Mokrane's traits and Amer ultimately reveals that their animosity has been in place since they were children.[279]

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[275] Feraoun, 120–21.
[276] Feraoun, 118.
[277] Feraoun, 118.
[278] Feraoun, 146.
[279] Feraoun, 160–161.

Alongside the ever-deepening resentment for Mokrane in Amer's journal, the reader is also witness to the change in Amer's feelings for Dehbia. Whereas earlier in his journal he admits, at most, desiring Dehbia without wanting to get involved in an "amour éternel" with her,[280] toward the end he admits loving her in the same way she loves him,[281] though a later exchange between them suggests that theirs is not so much romantic love as it is an alliance occasioned by their being different — i.e., outsiders — in the Kabyle society of Ighil-Nezman.[282] This situational affinity, if not love, stands in sharp contrast to the relationship they each have with Mokrane. Whereas their status as outsiders is what creates and feeds their antagonism with Mokrane, when it comes to the understanding they seek, their differences become the key to their positive attitude toward each other. This contrast helps to reinforce the notion that their hybridity sees advantages only in the private domain. In the broader, societal sphere, they are condemned to be outsiders and their difference with the native population of Ighil-Nezman are not only irreconcilable but fatal.

The latter is precisely the end for Amer, who is discovered dead from a revolver wound to the head the morning following his last entry. The reader is informed of his death in yet a different voice added to the books polyphony: that of a *fait divers*. The column is written in an objective tone that sharply contrasts the two hundred pages that precede it. It rules Amer's death as a suicide and identifies grief over his mother's death as the main motivation behind it, aggravated by the anisette and the empty vial of phenobarbital (*gardénal*) discovered by his side. Thanks to the ever-escalating resentment between Amer and Mokrane, and thanks to Amer's mention of approaching steps at the end of his last journal entry, the reader knows that this was murder and that the perpetrator is Mokrane. But the erroneous conclusion of the newspaper correspondent indicates once again the need for "messagers authentiques" that Feraoun advocated in "La Littérature algérienne."[283] The complete ignorance or distortion of facts that the *fait divers* displays is further compounded by a lack of reflection about the situation in Ighil-Nezman and in Kabylie more broadly: although Amer's "suicide" is identified as the second (following that of a "vieille folle") in a short period of time, the column insists on describing Ighil-Nezman as a "paisible village." This tone-deafness betrays not simply a lack of facts, but also a lack of interest in the lived reality of these indigenous societies on the part of French authorities. What French authorities — and that includes the media — might dismiss as an individual act or an innocuous blip in the otherwise unremarkable life of a static community, is, in fact, rooted in deeper problems that are not necessarily underlying — everybody in

[280] Feraoun, 129.

[281] Feraoun, 182.

[282] Feraoun, 202.

[283] The newspaper's lack of understanding regarding this particular situation — and by extension, the state of affairs in Ighil-Nezman or in Kabyle society in general — is made more egregious at the end of the *fait divers*. Contrary to what the reader already knows, the correspondent identifies Amer as "un jeune homme estimé de tout le village car il n'a aucun ennemi," Feraoun, 208.

the village knew of the animosities, for instance — but simply invisible to those who do not understand or are not willing to explore the forces at play. What the reader of the *fait divers* fails to learn, the reader of Feraoun's account of Ighil-Nezman knows all too well.

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The need for an authentic messenger in Algeria is perhaps greatest during the years of the Algerian War (1954–1962). With blood running hot and spilling in a senseless cycle of violence, and with this violence being nourished by false accounts from either side, the model of the authentic messenger we have so far read about and seen is no longer sufficient. Whereas in *La Terre et le Sang* and in *Les Chemins qui montent* this agent was primarily concerned with relating the static aspects of Kabyle society along with the threats to this *status quo*, the years of the Algerian War demanded of Feraoun a greater attention to the changes occurring on a daily — sometimes hourly — basis. Feraoun's position for this kind of accounting was at once favorable and dangerous. Favorable because, as a French-educated *instituteur* he had access to French officials and French press that were not accessible to the general population in Kabylie; and simultaneously dangerous because his allegiance to one side of the war or the other could be — and *was* — questioned at any time.

According to his close friend and editor of the posthumous *Journal*, Emmanuel Roblès, it was these inevitable threats against Feraoun that "l'incitèrent à agir et à témoigner."[284] This immediate urge to bear witness to the situation in Algeria coupled with his understanding for the vital role of authentic messengers might very well have served to distance Feraoun temporarily from fiction. Fiction had, up to that point, been a necessary and fruitful narrative mode for the young author. It had satisfied his desire to contribute an authentic account to the composite portrait of Algeria being drawn by other Algerian writers, and, moreover, the Kabyle experiences he recounted therein had helped transform him into the more seasoned writer he had become by 1955. Yet, as *La Terre et le Sang* and — especially — *Les Chemins qui montent* have shown us, the dichotomy of truthful (or authentic) and reported accounts still persists. More importantly, so does the dissonance between the two, which, by the end of *Les Chemins qui montent*, had become too grievous. It seems, therefore, that, with his *Journal*, Feraoun is consciously and urgently bridging the gap between the two. The credit for the harmony between the two narrative forms does not go entirely to Feraoun himself, nor to his use of the journal form that clearly predates his *Journal*. I would argue that the credit rests primarily with the role of the witness — the *témoin* — that Feraoun, like many other writers of the 20th century, assumes in the complex and precarious years of the Algerian War.

The role of the writer as a witness goes hand-in-hand with their role as a journalist or chronicler of events. It was a role that, for a multitude of complex reasons, was not occupied either by the political agents, nor by the media at the time. To a great degree,

[284] Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal: 1955-1962* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2011), 9.

the media and political figures were equally split and engaged in a debate about what to do and what future lay in store following the many upheavals of the 20th century. In the years of the Algerian War and those leading up to it, this debate considered what would become of Algeria, of France, of its colonial holdings, and, more broadly, of colonialism itself. The debate split those involved into the camps for and against Algerian independence, and fractured them even further on issues dealing with the proposed means and ends for either alternative. In the midst of this debate, as with others like it, the situation "on the ground" and the lived experience during such upheavals became easy casualties to the broader debates being carried on political, military, moral, and intellectual grounds. It is in this neglected space that, throughout the 20th century, writers have intervened to serve as witnesses. It is precisely in this space that Mouloud Feraoun intends to situate his *Journal* as it covers events in his native Kabylie (and later Algiers) first, and the broader questions second.

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IV. Writers and testimony

In their seminal work on testimony, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub contribute the perspective of their respective disciplines on the role of testimony in the domains of literature, psychoanalysis, and history. Critical readers of Felman's contribution to this work have rightfully recognized that in this work "Felman shows that no single conception of the witness can be arrived at within a single discipline. Rather, it becomes imperative to investigate how witnessing exceeds the conceptual limits of particular disciplines."[285] The discipline concerning us is literature and, more broadly, any narrative form that bears witness to specific historical events in ways that other forms of relating such as journalism or historiography cannot.[286]

Felman's co-author, Dori Laub, looks at testimonies in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and writes about what she calls "the historical imperative to bear witness."[287] No sooner has Laub identified this imperative than she is forced to recognize that, during the Holocaust, this "historical imperative to bear witness could essentially *not be met during the actual occurrence*," for the historical and factual understanding required for the process of witnessing to occur was simply not there.[288] In an earlier discussion, Laub similarly recognized the impossibility of finding the right time or the right

[285] Shoshana Felman et al., *The Claims of Literature: A Shoshana Felman Reader*, 1st ed (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 9.

[286] In Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), Felman refers primarily to literature when she theorizes the role of the witness and the act of bearing witness. My analysis makes use of Felman's conclusions about the literature of testimony by expanding it to different narrative forms, particularly Mouloud Feraoun's *Journal*.

[287] For more on this notion, see her chapter titled "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening" in Felman and Laub, 57–74; original emphasis.

[288] Felman and Laub, 84.

listening to enable one "to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought*, *memory* and *speech*."[289] It is on a combination of these two obstacles — if not impossibilities — that she bases her discussion about the belatedness of the act of bearing witness, as well as the witness's choice to live in life what their thoughts, memories, and speech cannot fathom or articulate. It would therefore seem that the act of bearing witness — and, by virtue of its performance, the reclaiming of one's position as a witness — cannot occur concurrently with the events witnessed.[290]

Coming from a different perspective — and looking at Albert Camus's *The Plague* — Felman seems to suggest that this impossibility to articulate one's testimony is overcome by one's recourse to the literary form:

> Camus' own testimony, as opposed to the journalist's, cannot be simply referential but, to be truly historical, must be *literary*. If the failure to imagine out of which history as holocaust proceeds stems, precisely, from the witnesses' failure to imagine their own implication and their own inclusion in the condemnation, Camus' own literary testimony must, above all, wrench the witnessing away from this historical failure of imagination. Literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a holocaust.[291]

In an earlier section of the same chapter, "Camus' *The Plague*, or a Monument to Witnessing," Felman explains why Camus's work lends itself appositely to her analysis and theories about testimony in literature, saying that Camus

> exemplifies the way in which traditional relationships of narrative to history *have changed* through the historical necessity of involving literature in action, of creating a new form of *narrative as testimony* not merely to record, but to rethink and, in the act of its rethinking, in effect *transform history* by bearing literary witness to the Holocaust.[292]

She returns to an analogous notion of "historical necessity" when she quotes Camus's assessment of the historico-political atmosphere of the day in his 1948 "Ni victimes, ni bourreaux." Camus is quoted as saying that "consciousness is always lagging behind reality," and that "[h]istory rushes forward while thought reflects."[293] He

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[289] Felman and Laub, 78; original emphasis.

[290] The context, we should not forget, is that of bearing witness to traumatic experiences, particularly those of the Holocaust, as reflected in the testimonies of Holocaust gathered in Lanzmann's *Shoah*.

[291] Felman and Laub, 108; original emphasis.

[292] Felman and Laub, 95; original emphasis.

[293] Albert Camus, *Neither Victims nor Executioners*, trans. Dwight MacDonald (Chicago: World Without War Publications, 1972), 44, quoted in Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 114.

therefore recognizes the cognitive gap that Laub, as we saw earlier, associates with the act and ability to bear witness. Camus subsequently states that "this inevitable backwardness becomes more pronounced the faster History speeds up" and reminds his reader that the first half of the 20th century has seen more changes than the previous two hundred years.[294] Felman sees in Camus's rapidly changing world and, particularly, in his ending of *La Peste*, an unmistakable display and performance of "the new awareness and the new moral and political imperative of an *Age of Testimony*."[295] Crucially, Felman affirms that "literature of testimony"

> is not simply a statement (any statement can but lag behind events), but a performative *engagement* between consciousness and history, a struggling act of readjustment between the integrative scope of words and the unintegrated impact of events. This ceaseless engagement between consciousness and history *obliges* artists, in Camus' conception, to transform words into events and to make *an act* of every publication; it is what keeps art in a state of *constant obligation*.[296]

In times of crisis and profound questioning, therefore, literature — and a new form of it in the Age of Testimony — conforms to the need for immediate consciousness of history by becoming more than a statement: it becomes an act, an engagement that helps to bridge the consciousness gap that gets in the way of testimony when trauma impedes the act of bearing witness.

It is not surprising to see Felman quote Camus's words, republished at the height of the Algerian War, in describing the place and role of the agent of such acts, of such engagements.[297] The agents are of course artists, an umbrella term under which Camus always included writers. One of Camus's most trenchant passages comes at the beginning of his lecture at the University of Uppsala, during his visit to Stockholm to receive the 1957 Nobel Prize in Literature: "our era," says Camus, "forces us to take an interest in it. The writers of today know this. If they speak up, they are criticized and attacked. If they become modest and keep silent, they are vociferously blamed for their silence."[298] But theirs, he recognizes, was an area that demanded an act of the artist, one that would pluck them away from their previous comfort and thrust them

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[294] Ibid., quoted in Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 114.

[295] Felman and Laub, 114. In the same breath, Felman defines this age as one "whose writing task (and reading task) is to confront the horror of its own destructiveness, to attest to the unthinkable disaster of culture's breakdown, and to assimilate the massive trauma, and the cataclysmic shift in being that resulted within some reworked frame of culture or within some revolutionized order of consciousness."

[296] Felman and Laub, 114; original emphasis.

[297] Felman also quotes at length from Camus's 1957 lecture at the University of Uppsala, titled "Create Dangerously." For the English edition of the lecture, see Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, trans. Justin O'Brien, 1st American ed. (New York: Knopf, 1961), 249–72.

[298] Camus, 249.

into what he called a "compulsory service."[299] Never one to shirk from a difficulty or from what he perceived as the duty of the writer, Camus concedes that

> It is better […] to give the era its due, since it demands this so vigorously, and calmly admit that the period of the revered master, of the artist with a camellia in his buttonhole, of the armchair genius is over. To create today is to create dangerously. *Any publication is an act, and that act exposes one to the passions of an age that forgives nothing*.[300]

V. *Journal (1955–1962)* as a work of testimony and political engagement

It is easy — and I would say correct — to see this lecture as a part of Camus's years-long apologia for his public silence during the years of the Algerian War. They were truly an age that forgave nothing. Across the Mediterranean, another writer, Mouloud Feraoun, is doubly aware of living in an unforgiving age: first as an Algerian, and second as a writer. Having already written and published two successful novels in which he assumes the role of the authentic messenger he so extolls in "La Littérature algérienne," Feraoun is confronted with the consuming realities of life in Algeria during the War of Independence. In his first two novels (*Le Fils du pauvre* and *La Terre et le Sang*) and the third one that was underway (*Les Chemins qui montent*), he had borne witness to the Kabyle experience as a mostly static existence, though, as we have seen, he never shied away from delving into the difficulties and conflicts occasioned by the intrusion of French cultural elements into the age-old equilibrium of Kabyle society. In these works, one could say, he is bearing witness to an experience *belatedly*. However current the economic and cultural conflicts he recounts in these novels, they require very little distance and no urgency in becoming the writer's testimony. History, in other words, is trotting along at its usual pace in these narratives, and therefore, even in Algeria.[301]

With the open conflict of the Algerian War, however, the Algerian *status quo* finds itself topsy-turvy as pro- and anti-independence factions struggle to establish a new order or maintain the old, and as any Algerian in between struggles to subsist and avoid a meaningless death. As everything is brought into question and as people begin to communicate with their weapons, it is painfully clear that the accelerated form of history evoked by Camus as characteristic of the 20th century — and with it the trauma that gets in the way of the act of bearing witness — has finally arrived in Algeria. I'd like to think that Mouloud Feraoun's *Journal* came out of the writer's

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[299] Camus, 250.

[300] Camus, 251; my emphasis.

[301] It could even be argued that, because of its colonial status, the pace of history in Algeria is slowed down relative to other countries, as a means of maintaining the balance of power and relations that had existed under the French colonial yoke since the end of the 19th century.

realization that, at this time, his writing could no longer afford the luxury of belated testimonies or what Camus calls "backwardness" with respect to history. The disappearance of this luxury gives rise to a necessity — one that requires Feraoun to engage with history in real time while he both records and attempts to make sense of the senseless acts that are taking place around him. In Felman's words, as he bears witness, Feraoun must "wrench the witnessing away from this historical failure of imagination."[302]

Feraoun's *Journal* is replete with testimonies resulting from an avidness to speak, to record, to give sense to events around him. The accelerated and dynamic pace of history with which he is contending is evident in the frequency of his entries — at times weekly, often multiple times a week, frequently daily, and sometimes multiple times a day. The lengths of his entries also vary greatly from one to the other, but also from year to year: from his first entry on 1 November 1955 until the end of that same year, Feraoun writes 64 pages; between January and December of 1956 he writes 180 pages; in 1957, he writes 107 pages; in 1958 he pens only 38 pages; and in 1959 only 14 pages, ending without an explanation on 30 August. When he resumes his journal on 25 January 1960, he notes:

> Il a donc fallu que je reprenne aujourd'hui ce cahier abandonné depuis des mois. Non pas qu'il n'y ait rien eu à y noter me concernant ou concernant tout le monde, mais *l'hiatus sera toujours facile à combler lorsque le détail n'a rien de particulier*.[303]

Ever the writer, Feraoun seems to treat his *Journal* in part like one of his novels. The expository stage during the first few years of the war takes up more space than later events. As Feraoun states above, the paucity of entries later on is not due to a lack of events to note; rather, it is because the hiatus will be easier to compensate for by omitting particular details. In this admission, Feraoun is not choosing to neglect the particularities of the Algerian War that he has dedicated hundreds of pages in prior years. As I have maintained, giving attention to particular events and individuals is *precisely* what he intends to do as he records and bears witness to those events when he sets out to note things in his *Journal* for a larger, albeit later public. What his sentence means to convey instead is the weariness of his non-writer persona — his too human side — in the face of endless and repeating senseless acts caught in an ever-deepening eddy of violence and reprisals.[304] As such, it is also an echo of the *Journal*'s

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[302] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 108.

[303] Feraoun, *Journal*, 425; my emphasis. The page counts given above are from this same edition of *Journal*.

[304] Though I will not delve into it, I am recognizing here the psychological toll of the Algerian War on those who experienced it. The effects of the war — along with the effects of the 130 years of the colonial system in Algeria — are still felt today, as argued in a recent work, which, in the absence of clinical accounts, aptly turns to literature for an analysis of "colonial trauma." For more on this, see Karima Lazali, *Le Trauma colonial : une enquête sur les effets psychiques et politiques contemporains de l'oppression coloniale en Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2018).

tacit recognition of the kind of history that requires new and immediate testimony — the kind that needs to respond to the senseless violence characteristic of the 20th century, according to Camus and Felman — that reaches colonial Algeria in unmitigated and unforgiving force in the years between 1954 and 1962.

As suggested above, Feraoun reacts to this arrival with a change in discourse that moves away from the format of the novel to that of the journal. Despite the personal experiences he inserts in it, his *Journal* functions more like a newspaper than a diary. In this fusion of the particular with the general, Feraoun attempts to combine the account of a *messager authentique* with that of a newspaper. As we saw in our discussion of *Les Chemins qui montent* — where the narrator's truthful account is juxtaposed with the highly untruthful and out-of-touch *fait divers* that reports Amer's death — these two forms of writing (one could even say testimonies) exist independently of each other to the point of utter dissonance. This dissonance reflects the chasm between the lived experience of Kabyle and the lack of understanding that colonial French authorities had of this experience. It was a pointed critique of the larger Manichaean separation of colonial Algeria that had been in place for over a century. The turmoil that brought these two worlds into open armed conflict also created the need for a mode of discourse that brought formerly dissonant voices together — it brought about Feraoun's *Journal*.

Feraoun's dual position as a Kabyle on the one hand and as an *instituteur* on the other was instrumental in bridging this gap. Straddling the two domains, he had access to French authorities at different levels of the colonial administration as well as to regional actors of the independentist Algerian rebellion. Entries in his *Journal* where he reports conversations he had with one party are just as numerous as entries on contacts he had with the other party. More importantly, it must be recognized that the "party" that speaks the most through his *Journal* is the multitude of Algerians confiding in him or relating to him events — often violent at that — that they had experienced in the hands of either French police (or military forces) or Algerian revolutionaries. It is in recording and conveying these accounts that Feraoun ensures a continuation of his commitment to authentic messengers. This, I would like to suggest, constitutes a different type of commitment: that of a writer or intellectual.

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When we speak of the commitment of writers or intellectuals, particularly in the years following World War II, notable examples like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus spring to mind. Sartre, in particular, dominated the post-war public intellectual debates until his death in 1980, a date which many have identified as the definitive end of the writer as a public intellectual, or the *écrivain engagé*.[305] The change in the responsibility of the writer was preceded by different, more radical changes that

[305] Most notably, Pierre Nora in his essay "Que peuvent les intellectuels ?," *Le Débat* 1, no. 1 (1980): 3–19, in which he argues that the responsibility for public intellectual debates has, by 1980, transferred from writers to social scientists operating in the academic domain.

occurred within the domain of writers themselves. One of these changes is theorized, deplored, and criticized in Julien Benda's *La Trahison des clercs*. Though first published in 1927, Benda excoriates the agents of a change that began in the 19th century, with the rise of nationalism and other ideologies, to which he collectively refers as "passions politiques."[306] The titular betrayal for Benda consists in writers and intellectuals shifting their attention, during the advent and popular embrace of these political passions, from a defense of universal values to a defense of particular political passions, thus granting their support to a group of people while excluding others.[307] With the writers' commitment to truth and justice left by the wayside, Benda recognizes that the world — by which he most certainly means the West or even Europe specifically — has entered what he calls "l'âge du politique."[308] This is a precursor to what Tony Judt writes decades later when he says that, "in recent years,"

> intellectuals themselves […] have been the most assiduous and enthusiastic narrators of their own contribution to the national story. But it is not by chance that most histories of intellectual life and writings in France cleave quite closely to the conventional narrative of political history: for it was intellectuals who contributed more than most to the self-understanding of modern France in just those conventional terms.[309]

Consequently, Judt later states, "[m]ost twentieth-century French intellectuals […] are not a very instructive guide to what was happening in the France of their times, since so much of their writings merely reflected back into the public sphere the country's own long-standing political divisions."[310] These divisions were certainly in place by the time of Benda's *La Trahison des clercs*, and it should be stressed that, with the rise of fascism, Nazism, Soviet Communism, and the dichotomy of the Cold War that followed Benda's 1927 work, these divisions deepened even further.

A similarly unyielding division no doubt occurred among French and Francophone

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[306] Benda, *La Trahison des clercs*, 10. Under this term, Benda includes mainly "les passions de races, les passions de classes, les passions nationales."

[307] Benda defines these universal values as *truth* and *justice* within the context of the "fonction [des intellectuels]," which is, according to him, "précisement de dresser, en face des peuples et de l'injustice à laquelle les condamnent leurs religions de la terre, une corporation dont le seul culte est celui de la justice et de la vérité," Benda, 50. Ultimately, these are perhaps best defined by the examples of writers he elevates, among which Voltaire and Zola feature most prominently because of their involvement in the Calas and Dreyfus Affairs, respectively. Later French thinkers will also theorize and refer to these notions of "universal values," albeit toward different ends. See, most notably, "Tombeau de l'intellectuel" in Jean-François Lyotard, *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1984), and Denis, *Littérature et engagement*.

[308] Benda, *La Trahison des clercs*, 31.

[309] Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 10.

[310] Judt, 11.

intellectuals during the years of decolonization, which, for France, reached its zenith with the Algerian War. As Judt so rightfully observes, French intellectual debates of the 20th century faithfully reflect these political tensions. The years between 1954 and 1962 were certainly no exception. The issue being debated was, of course, colonialism and its escalation into a fully realized — yet undeclared — war. Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* led the anti-colonialist charge from the political left, with right-wing voices and publications in opposition, and Gaullists' opinions split on the many issues raised either by the broader question of colonialism or by the Algerian War in particular. On 6 September 1960, less than two years from the end of the war, 121 mostly leftist intellectuals signed a statement written and edited by Dionys Mascolo and Maurice Blanchot, in which they demanded independence for Algeria and condemned the use of torture by the French forces operating in Algeria.[311] Known widely as the "Manifeste des 121," the document also aimed to inform the French public of the atrocities their own government was committing in both sides of the Mediterranean. A full month and one day later, right-leaning intellectuals opposed to Algerian independence issued their own manifesto titled "Manifeste des intellectuels français pour la résistance à l'abandon," in which they supported French Algeria on the basis that it would avoid an inevitable dictatorship after independence.[312]

Sartre had been vocal about the Algerian War well before the "Manifeste des 121" — in the daily press as well as in *Les Temps Modernes*. It is in the latter that he penned, in 1956, a scathing critique of colonialism titled "Le Colonialisme est un système."[313] In the example of his very active engagement since the end of World War II, Sartre remained a relentless critic of colonialism and of the French government's actions in Algeria until the end of the war in 1962. For anyone familiar with the public debates of the period, it is therefore not shocking to see later critics and historians refer to the Algerian War as "*la* guerre de Sartre."[314] I am referring to Sartre's ubiquity during the Algerian War as a way to differentiate between him on the one hand, and Albert Camus and Mouloud Feraoun on the other. The case for Albert Camus as an *écrivain engagé* has been made elsewhere and from different approaches. For the purposes of this chapter, I would simply like to distinguish briefly between his mode of *engagement* and Sartre's, using terms employed above in our brief discussion of the perceived role of the *écrivain engagé* in the intellectual history of France.

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[311] Signatories of the manifesto — formally titled "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie" — included names like Simone de Beauvoir, André Breton, Marguerite Duras, Alain Resnais, Nathalie Sarraute, Jean-Paul Sartre, etc..

[312] As the title suggests, its signatories also condemned the "defeatism" they saw in proponents of Algerian independence. Curiously, the initiative for this manifesto came not from writers, but from academics. Writers who signed it include Jean Paulhan and Pierre Lyautey. For more on these manifestos and others, see Jean-François Sirinelli, "Guerre d'Algérie, guerre des pétitions ? Quelques jalons," *Revue Historique* 279, no. 1 (565) (1988): 73–100.

[313] See Sartre, "Le Colonialisme est un système."

[314] Sirinelli, "Guerre d'Algérie, guerre des pétitions?," 73; original emphasis. Sirinelli echoes this title here, though it was first coined by Roland Dumas.

Both Sartre and Camus were staunch defenders of Benda's recognized universal values of truth and justice. They differed markedly, however, on how best to attain and maintain them. Driven by the imperative for justice during the Algerian War, Sartre was willing to align himself with such "political passions" as the French Communist Party (PCF) or with the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria. In so doing, he openly espoused their politics as the means to achieve justice for Algerians in the form of independence. Both the PCF and FLN supported revolution as the pathway that would lead to Algerian independence. In the case of the FLN, in particular, which was operating on the ground, this meant unequivocal recourse to violence against the colonizer, an idea that had gained an especially wide acceptance since the successful war of independence in Indochina and since the publication of Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* in 1961.[315] Camus's vision of Algeria did not see it as an independent country, but rather as part of a dual federation with France. In private and in public, Camus articulated a profound concern for poor European Algerians like his own family — who, he repeatedly argued, had merely subsisted there for over a century — as his principal basis for his hesitations on an independent Algeria.[316] In the midst of the violence that defined the Algerian War, and despite his general silence on particular developments, Camus was especially and relentlessly vociferous in his condemnation of the violence that touched civilians of all ethnic and cultural groups in Algeria. The question of violence and its place in the process of decolonization was at the root of the difference between his pronouncement and engagements on Algeria and those of Sartre. The end, for Camus, did not justify the means. For Sartre, it did. There is much more nuance to this distinction between the two writers, but it can nonetheless be used to align Camus more closely with the tradition of Voltaire and Zola, both of whom had been ardent defenders of truth and justice in the face of flagrant violations by an abusive state apparatus. For Camus, a recourse to violence was a betrayal to the justice that might have been and could still be established in Algeria.

This is not to say that Camus speaks to the crises of his day in the same manner and using the same language as Voltaire and Zola. As we saw in our earlier discussion of the importance of testimony, Camus is constantly aware of the necessities of his age, the age of testimony. But he is just as conscious of history and of the human price that

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[315] See Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*. In an essay titled "De la violence," Fanon argues that violence against the colonizer is the sole method of achieving independence, because it could be seen as a reaction to the multiple and persistent forms of violence perpetrated by the colonizer on the colonized, and because it was the clearest way for colonized subjects to assert themselves as free and independent.

[316] Although Camus was not oblivious to the advantages that the status as Europeans granted his family and those like them in Algeria, he nonetheless did not regard more than a million *pieds-noirs* as agents of the exploitative colonial order that had been firmly in place in Algeria since the 1870s. Another reason for his hesitation was the fear of an independent Algeria being subsumed into a pan-Arabic empire under strong-handed charismatic leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser — a fear compounded by the creation of the United Arab Republic in 1958, which was regarded as an annexation of Syria by Nasser's Egypt. For more on Camus's stance on Algeria, see Camus, "Chroniques."

a revolutions of the scale now threatening Algeria would have to exact. Revolutions, for Camus, cannot undo history, least of all without violence.[317] It is not surprising therefore to see Camus's writings take the form of a chronicle, both in his fiction (most notably *La Peste*) and in his essays (namely, *Chroniques algériennes*).

On the other side of the Mediterranean, Mouloud Feraoun has been busily writing different forms of chronicles since the years of World War II, when he set out to write *Le Fils du pauvre*. As we saw above, beginning with the first anniversary of the Toussaint Rouge, he finds it necessary to change his scope from a chronicle of Kabyle life to a chronicle of life and events in Algeria during the war. We have already discussed the merits of Feraoun's *Journal* as a form of writing resulting from what Shoshana Felman calls The Age of Testimony. In the remaining section, I would like to return to the *Journal* and regard it not simply as Feraoun's way of bearing witness to life in Algeria during the Algerian War, but also as an act of commitment that places him squarely in the tradition of the *écrivain engagé*.

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Mouloud Feraoun's complete aversion to violence during the years of the Algerian War pervades the entries in his *Journal*. As we have observed, this violence is, in part, a reason for the imperative to testify, to make sense of it and of the fast pace of history as it unfolds in the events between 1955 and 1962. As such, the *Journal* becomes, in the words of Shoshana Felman, "a performative *engagement* between consciousness and history." I'd like to propose that we also think of the *Journal* as an *engagement* from an *écrivain engagé*. The case for Mouloud Feraoun as an *écrivain engagé* is not being made here for the first time; it is an assessment of him that has been gaining traction since the early 1990s. In a tribute to Feraoun by Tahar Djaout — a fellow Algerian writer who would later suffer a similarly violent end — the *Journal* is described as follows:

> Le *Journal*, dernière œuvre élaborée par Mouloud Feraoun, laisse apparaître toutes les énergies créatrices, la puissance de témoignage et les ressources d'écriture que le romancier conteur, mort à 49 ans, aurait pu investir dans des travaux littéraires ultérieurs. Durant la guerre implacable qui ensanglanta la terre d'Algérie, Mouloud Feraoun a porté aux yeux du monde, à l'instar de Mammeri, Dib, Kateb et quelques autres, les profondes souffrances et les espoirs tenaces de son peuple. Parce que son témoignage a refusé d'être manichéiste, d'aucuns y ont vu un témoignage hésitant ou timoré. C'est en réalité un témoignage profondément humain et humaniste par son poids de sensibilité, de scepticisme et d'honnêteté.[318]

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[317] For a thorough discussion of the problematic nature of revolutions, as viewed by Camus, see Camus, "L'Homme révolté."

[318] Tahar Djaout, "Boomerang. Résurrection de Feraoun," *Algérie-Actualité*, no. 1293 (August 1990): 32.

The perception of Feraoun as "hésitant ou timoré" is one that has remained pervasive since the years of the Algerian War. As I have previously maintained and argued, Feraoun's figure merits a rehabilitation as a politically conscious and politically engaged writer. He has been getting this treatment from critics such as Christane Chaulet Achour, Jack Gleyze, and, as recently as 2013, José Lenzini, whose book title leaves no doubt about Feraoun's *engagement*: *Mouloud Feraoun : un écrivain engagé*.[319]

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On 17 August 1961, Mouloud Feraoun sits down to read almost six years' worth of entries, notes, press articles, and newspaper clippings that he has amassed as part of the project that would eventually become *Journal, 1955–1962*. A reflection reminiscent of the questioning and introspection of Montaigne's *Essais* follows: "Je suis effrayé par ma franchise, mon audace, ma cruauté, et parfois mon aveuglement, mon parti-pris," says Feraoun, then promptly asks, "Pourtant ai-je droit d'y toucher, de retourner, d'ajuster, de rectifier?"[320] The negative answer itself comes obliquely from a series of rhetorical questions through which Feraoun justifies the frankness, audacity, cruelty, and blindness he first remarks on. He then continues,

> Et pourquoi ai-je ainsi écrit au fur et à mesure si ce n'est pas pour témoigner, pour clamer à la face du monde la souffrance et le malheur qui ont rôdé autour de moi ? Certes, j'ai été bien maladroit, bien téméraire, le jour où j'ai décidé d'écrire mais autour de moi qui eût voulu le faire à ma place et aurais-je pu rester aveugle et sourd pour me taire et ne pas risquer d'étouffer à force de rentrer mon désespoir et ma colère ?[321]

The reflection on his work for the *Journal* serves to remind Feraoun himself, as well as his eventual reader, that the account of the Algerian War they are reading is one that is in tune with the psychological and existential effects that the inhumanity of the "saignée unique dans l'histoire de l'Algérie"[322] wrought on Algerians who were powerless victims to the violence of the war. As a witness to this war who was also privileged enough to remain informed, to maintain objectivity as best he could, and to record accounts from all sides involved, Feraoun readily assumes at this point the significance of what he reluctantly began in 1955. Calling it his *devoir*, he fully intends to publish the *Journal*, stating as a purpose,

> Simplement ceci : après ce qui s'est écrit sur la guerre d'Algérie, bon ou

[319] See José Lenzini, *Mouloud Feraoun : un écrivain engagé* (Arles: Solin : Actes sud, 2013).

[320] Feraoun, *Journal*, 459.

[321] Feraoun, 459.

[322] Feraoun, 419.

> mauvais, vrai ou faux, juste ou injuste, il convient qu'à cela s'ajoute mon journal. Comme une pièce supplémentaire à un dossier déjà si lourd. Rien de plus. Et cette pièce, le moment est venu de l'y ajouter. Le moment ou jamais.[323]

In a previous chapter, I argued that we ought to look at Mouloud Feraoun's literary writings as complements to the official historical record about colonial Algeria, addressing primarily his determination to provide a record of Kabyle life in the first part of the 20th century — a facet of colonial Algeria which was already being undermined by French historical narratives and by rising Arab-centric nationalism. With the *Journal*, Feraoun plays the same role in recording a specific series of events in Algerian society more broadly,[324] but he is no longer having recourse to the literary devices that helped him fictionalize Kabyle life in previous works. Instead, he is fully and earnestly assuming the role of a chronicler, and consequently requesting that his *Journal* be read alongside other records of the Algerian War. Feraoun was keenly aware of historiography's penchant for the erasure of minoritarian communities from the centralized narrative of national history. The record of the Algerian War risks a similar fate with the erasure of the particularity of victimization that the violence of the war inflicted. As if already expecting the post-independence national narrative to focus on Algeria as "le pays d'un million et demi de martyrs," Feraoun pursues a dogged documentation of the human toll of violence in ways that go beyond statistics.[325] More than just a documentation of the toll of violence on individuals, families, communities, Feraoun also performed a constant condemnation of violence on either side. It is in this regard that he — like Camus, whom we briefly discussed above — contravenes the predominant intellectual voices of the day, which called for

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[323] Feraoun, 460.

[324] By this point, the subject of his writings in *Journal* is not simply his native Kabylie, but the greater Algerian society, which is clearly reflected in the demonyms and ethnonyms that Feraoun begins to use. When he is referring to specific cities or neighborhoods with a predominantly Arab population, he uses the ethnonym "Arabes"; when relating stories coming from Kabylie, he uses the demonym "Kabyles." Increasingly toward the end of the *Journal*, especially as Algerian authorities from the FLN and other groups began working with de Gaulle's provisional government toward independence, Feraoun begins referring to Algerians collectively as "musulmans." This change occurred likely out of a recognition of the effect that these talks would have on both Kabyle and Arab Algerians, and certainly with an optimistic nod to their ultimate recognition as sovereign *citizens* — a status that Muslim Algerians, unlike *pieds-noirs* and Jewish Algerians, had not previously enjoyed under French colonial rule.

[325] A double critique of French press in Algeria and FLN propaganda pervades Feraoun's *Journal*. Many of his entries begin with a newspaper report or tract and are followed, wherever possible, by an account of who the victim was, how they were regarded by either French forces or the FLN, how they were regarded by the community, as well as what family and legacy they left behind. Feraoun captures in a few words the press situation with which he has had to contend for years in an entry on the last day of 1961 (referring this time to the rise in violence perpetrated by the OAS): "Les journaux […] publient chaque matin une liste sous la rubrique 'attentats', une, deux, trois colonnes. Les noms, le lieu, l'arme. Qui et pourquoi, on n'en sait rien," Feraoun, *Journal*, 479.

violence as a necessary and justified means of ending colonial rule in Algeria and elsewhere.

Far from regarding the violence of the Algerian War as an expiatory violence necessary to turn the tables on the colonizer and attain independence, Feraoun's condemnation of it is akin to the defense of justice that is touted by Julien Benda as one of the duties of the intellectual.[326] Just as Voltaire and Zola (to use Benda's prototypes of *engagement*) had spoken against systemic injustices in the defense of particular individuals, so Feraoun focuses on the particular effects that the violence proposed by other intellectuals has on the ground in Algeria. In other words, he adamantly resists the abstraction that allowed the ideologies of the day — and, in a similar fashion, the calls of intellectuals pushing for Algerian independence at all cost — to justify violent means by the ends they would bring about. That is why Feraoun returns to the *Journal* as frequently as he does, even when he claims to have abandoned it. In so doing, he resurrects each time his commitment to give dimension, a voice, a memory to the countless lives lost and quickly transformed into statistics by either French authorities and press, or FLN propaganda.

Feraoun's commitment to this "non-alignment" during the Algerian War condemns the vicious cycle of violence in which French forces and the FLN alike plunged the Algerian population. It also undermines the role of perpetrators on either side when it comes to speaking for the rights of Algerians — European and indigenous alike. If the two rivals of the Algerian War and their respective proponents in the intellectual debates of the time represent what Benda called "political passions," Feraoun rises above them by virtue of his unwillingness to espouse either perspective when the integrity of human life is compromised. If the unforgiving condemnation of violence is a sign of his commitment to *justice*, Feraoun's commitment to *truth* comes through in the language he uses when speaking of that violence. Refusing to sterilize it with euphemisms that, once again, veer toward abstraction, Feraoun does not mince words when he speaks of the many atrocities committed by either side during the Algerian War itself, but also in previous years by French authorities.[327] Though unsure of how

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[326] This is not to say that, unlike his more vocal or militant contemporaries, Feraoun is turning a page and ignoring colonial violence. That is quite far from what the *Journal* intimates or states explicitly. Sensing the end of the war on 12 July 1959, an optimistic Feraoun writes, "L'heure des bilans semble très proche," and subsequently state that he will abandon "ce récit," which he calls "Un récit sans prologue et qui n'aura pas d'épilogue. Le prologue il fallait le chercher dans un siècle de colonialisme et pour nous de servitude," Feraoun, 419. More than a year later, in November 1960, Feraoun refers once again to more than a century of "les pires humiliations," and to the treatment of indigenous Algerians as "bâtards" by the French — and in the same breath he draws parallels between past struggles for independence and the current war; Feraoun, 430–31.

[327] On the latter for instance, he returns to the epithet "bâtards" he has previously employed in reference to indigenous Algerians, and compounds on it. Shortly after the referendum of 8 January 1961 for Algerian independence, in an uncharacteristically unreserved tone and diction Feraoun says, "[Les Français] ont *mauvaise conscience devant un lourd héritage d'abus* qu'ils ne se préoccupent plus de voiler. Il leur reste à se partager les

to refer to the members of the FLN earlier in the war, he quickly learns what to call them based on what acts committed by them he refers to. At times, they are "militants," at other times, "rebelles" or "maquisards." But when the violence of their reprisals on civilians is the subject of a journal entry, he will not be afraid to call them "terroristes." When the OAS enters the scene of the conflict, Feraoun does not hesitate to draw similarities between their operations and those of the FLN in prior years: "Les 'activistes' s'organisent un peu comme le FLN: terrorisme, exactions, exigences impératives, menaces."[328] Though the language he can dispense when referring to French authorities is limited by the official positions they occupy, Feraoun nonetheless is very careful to distinguish between police or military forces and civilian administrators, opting to call them by name, if possible, and always accounting in unequivocal terms for the acts of terror, torture, and extrajudicial killings they carry out. He is especially conscious of administrators occupying cultural or educational roles and adds, wherever he can, a portrait of the person to entries about colleagues he knows personally or fellow educators who do work similar to his.

Similarly, Feraoun's *Journal* repeatedly returns to another crucial truth, one that is disregarded by the two sides of the conflict because they find it politically inconvenient: the sheer immersion of the French in all aspects of Algerian society and the resulting hybrid society we find in the 1950s. As we have seen in our previous discussions of his literary works, Feraoun is keenly attuned to this hybridity and has never shied away from adding nuance to it and, subsequently, making it a part of the complement to the official historical record that his work contributes. In the years of the Algerian War, however, such talks of hybridity and coexistence take a much more political dimension that immediately put Feraoun at odds with the independentist propaganda of the FLN.[329] The perspective that Feraoun casts on the situation — which is far from politically expedient for proponents on either side of the conflict — arises from the same logic as his rejection of anti-colonial violence as expiatory for a century of violence committed by colonial authorities in Algeria: namely, both imply an effacement that depends either on outright physical violence to individuals and property, or on a violence to the historical record and its concrete manifestations in Algeria in the 1950s.

With independence all but certain by the end of 1960, Feraoun's *Journal* displays a

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derniers oripeaux, les dernières faveurs d'*une putain unanimement honnie* qu'ils se hâteront de renier […]. Ce sera peut-être à nous qu'elle a si *honteusement bernés depuis un siècle* à garder tout de même son souvenir : la meilleure image que notre enfance a pu se faire d'elle un jour ou l'autre alors que *la putain* était jeune aussi et qu'*elle se faisait violer* par ses propres *bâtards* sous nos regards admiratifs et affamés. *Une putain* qui se disait fille de la France et qui était elle aussi *une bâtarde* : l'Algérie de papa, mère inconnue !" Feraoun, 449; my emphasis.

[328] Feraoun, 455–56.

[329] Indeed, by many of his contemporaries, by more militant authors, and by later critics of his work, Feraoun is regarded as an "apologist" for French Algeria. This ought not to be taken immediately as a defense, on Feraoun's part, of alternative geopolitical solutions offered, such as a French-Algerian federation.

historical reflection that attempts to inform the historical situation to which he was a witness. He talks about the struggle of indigenous Algerians' forefathers against colonialism and draws parallels to the present struggle. But he also adds,

> On devrait pouvoir réunir une multitude d'histoires relatant les milliers de drames. Les milliers de morts, les clameurs de rage, les torrents de larmes et les mares de sang qui auront marqué comme des stigmates cette terre où nous avons eu le malheur de naître et qu'on veut nous enlever comme si nous étions des bâtards.[330]

Despite the evocation of violence perpetrated by French authorities for more than a century, Feraoun nevertheless sees the importance of what has occurred in 130 years of French colonialism in Algeria and refuses to accept an independent Algeria built on a violent erasure of that memory and of that history: "Mais quand l'Algérie vivra et lèvera la tête, je souhaite qu'elle se souvienne de la France et de tout ce qu'elle lui doit."[331]

Ever mindful of the concrete, lived experience of this colonial history, it is perhaps with respect to the *pieds-noirs* that Feraoun offers the strongest acceptance of 130 years of French colonial rule. We saw evidence of Feraoun's admiration for fellow *pied-noir* writers in our discussion of "La Littérature algérienne" in the opening pages of this chapter.[332] His journal entries discussing the status of the *pieds-noirs* more broadly come auspiciously on the heels of the creation of the OAS and in the midst of its indiscriminate violent attacks. By opting to address their status and the choice they face with regard to the imminent independence at this point, Feraoun is first of all drawing an important distinction that attempts to undo the facile and dangerous conflation of the *pieds-noirs* with the OAS operatives. Secondly, he articulates the stakes of the choice that they face in an independent Algeria:

> Les meilleurs d'entre les Français d'ici craignent pour leur avenir ici. Ils oublient que les musulmans craignent aussi pour leur propre avenir ici. Seulement, nous, nous savons que nous sommes condamnés à vivre et à mourir ici. Eux savent qu'ils seront malheureux ici et ils craignent d'être malheureux là-bas. Là-bas, en France, ils ne seront ni plus

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[330] Feraoun, *Journal*, 431. His view of Algeria as an unfortunate place to have been born in echoes a sentiment similar to what Camus and Aziz Kessous say elsewhere about Algeria: that indigenous and European Algerians are condemned to live or to die together.

[331] Feraoun, 420.

[332] Feraoun offers further evidence of this in the *Journal* itself, where he seems to articulate — as a reminder to the French intellectuals he has just met and perhaps as a reminder to himself and his readers — an affinity with European Algerians: "Tous ceux que j'ai rencontrés savaient que je n'étais ni français, ni intégrable. Pour eux il suffisait que je sois moi-même et ils souhaitaient que beaucoup d'Algériens musulmans me ressemblent. J'aurais voulu leur dire que les Algériens me ressemblent, tous y compris les Européens. Rien que pour souligner l'absurdité de cette guerre que la France ne veut pas terminer," Feraoun, 404.

> heureux ni plus malheureux que d'autres. Ils seront comme les autres. Eux ne veulent pas être comme les autres ni ici, ni là-bas. Question d'habitude. Mais l'heure du choix approche, semble-t-il. Moi je les envie de pouvoir choisir. À leur place, je n'hésiterais pas. À ma place aussi, je peux choisir, me dira-t-on. De quel droit choisirais-je ? Mes ancêtres n'ont pas conquis la France en 1830.[333]

By "[l]es meilleurs d'entre les Français" Feraoun certainly means the *pieds-noirs* who have worked and toiled in Algeria without really holding the reins or reaping the direct profits of the colonial system. As for those who have run and profited from the system, the implication is that they do not belong in a decolonized Algeria. The majority of European Algerians, however, is faced with a choice: to stay in Algeria and accept to share equal rights and means with indigenous Algerians, or to go to France where they will no longer enjoy the privileges that the colonial system grants them but not the Muslim majority. Though he makes use of "us" and "them" in this passage, Feraoun withholds the animosity that this duality would display in the discourse of the most vocal of pro-colonial and pro-independence agents. Nevertheless, Feraoun implicitly recognizes the necessity of a paradigm shift among the *pieds-noirs* — one that, for the sake of coexistence in an independent Algeria, requires them to relinquish privileges granted by the colonial system and accept civic and juridical equality with indigenous Algerians. Similarly, by *envying* their ability to choose, Feraoun recognizes the choice itself between a life in Algeria or a life in France as a privilege, despite the difficulties it also presents. This is a crucial passage in the *Journal* that helps to unlock for the reader how Feraoun imagines a coexistence between indigenous and European Algerians in an independent Algeria.

As his poignant balance of give-and-take, and of the juxtaposition of the present and the past both demonstrate, this potential coexistence is a precarious reality fraught with sacrifices, but not one toward which Feraoun remains pessimistic. In a later entry, prompted by the rising influence of the OAS, his *Journal* speaks of fraternal coexistence and, in the same breath, of the irreparable cost of that future: "…*en dépit de l'OAS*, l'Algérie sera indépendante, *les musulmans fraterniseront avec les Européens*, le pays sera industrialisé, le pétrole exploité, de même *le pauvre bougre et les morts continueront de s'en foutre*."[334] A similarly cautious optimism comes through in a conversation with a French Algerian colleague and "Travailleurs de la Paix" volunteers that Feraoun recounts:

> Je leur ai dit en gros que les musulmans en veulent davantage à la France et à son armée qu'aux pieds-noirs. Avec les pieds-noirs, on se tue, on se déteste, on se connaît. Les musulmans n'ont pas peur d'eux, vu qu'ils sont moins nombreux. Nous admettons qu'ils soient Algériens comme nous et nous savons qu'avec eux nous finirons par fusionner, former un seul peuple. Dans un sens ou dans l'autre. Ceci est dans

[333] Feraoun, 444–45.

[334] Feraoun, 453; my emphasis.

l'ordre des choses, pensons-nous.[335]

Although the language of the two paragraphs that follow is less kind to the *pieds-noirs* by virtue of the enumeration of their faults and privileges, Feraoun's brief *discours* to the French youths nonetheless ends by mentioning an "Algérie de demain qu'ils [les pieds-noirs] auront tout de même contribué à construire," and by blaming France for failing to mitigate early on the conflict that, for Feraoun, is fundamentally one of disagreement "entre les musulmans et les non musulmans."[336]

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By merely discussing the future of the *pieds-noirs* in Algeria, Feraoun treads a line that operatives on either side of the conflict see as already settled: one side believes they will have to leave independent Algeria, the other that they will have to remain in a future *Algérie française*.[337] Feraoun's rejection of this conception of the future of Algeria, as well as his steadfast denunciation of the violent means employed by the French authorities, by the FLN, and later by the OAS help us to situate him outside of the realm of the *passions politiques* that each of those parties represents. His adamant refusal to espouse such expedient political passions,[338] to justify physical violence as a means of achieving political goals, to accept a disregard for the concrete societal manifestations of 130 years of colonialism, as well as his unwavering commitment to elevate justice and to value truth above all of the above make of Feraoun an *écrivain engagé* whom Julien Benda would not have accused of betraying his lofty duties. And although Benda's notion of the *écrivain engagé* (or, more broadly, the *intellectuel engagé*) may have relied on their ability to defend *truth* and *justice*, the felicitous and infelicitous examples of intellectual commitment he relies on hint at an understanding of those values as universal, and therefore abstract. One can even rewrite them as *Truth* and *Justice*. Moreover, the intellectual's role, for Benda, is that of an arbiter who blows the whistle or calls out "j'accuse!" when established power structures (he mentions governments and religions) violate these universal values. With the rise of more powerful and dangerous ideologies following Benda's 1927 work, it is difficult to envision how a writer might maintain such a distance vis-à-vis a power structure or an ideology, or rely on the universal and abstract values of

[335] Feraoun, 464.

[336] Feraoun, 465.

[337] As late in the conflict as 1961 with the creation of the OAS and even in subsequent months until Algerian independence, either side strongly believed in its vision of a future Algeria, as evidenced by a persistent exercise of the "loi du talion" between OAS and FLN.

[338] Even after the future of an independent Algeria becomes the only likely outcome of the war, Feraoun refuses to become involved in politics and to capitalize on his good name and reputation. His *Journal* recounts at one point a very uncomfortable encounter with two individuals from his native Kabylie, who ask him to run for political office. Feraoun adamantly turns down the offer by saying "Je ne veux pas être député. Je ne veux pas faire de politique. Jamais je n'en ferai. Ce n'est pas dans mes cordes." When pressed, he insists that courage for him "consiste à dire ce que je pense. Je n'ai pas failli à ce sentiment qui est aussi un *devoir*," Feraoun, *Journal*, 395–98; my emphasis.

Truth and Justice without seeming to return to the metaphorical Ivory Tower of ages past. This is especially true if they are to maintain an operative role in the public sphere in which they live and work. Though in this chapter we have analyzed Feraoun's *Journal* for the merits that help it be qualified as *écriture engagée* and the author as an *écrivain engagé* based on the criteria set up by Julien Benda, I also believe that his work and figure will be better served by a later discussion on how Feraoun gives a concrete manifestation to a new form of writerly engagement. Feraoun's form of commitment is akin enough to those elevated by Benda, but at the same time, different enough in how it tackles the relevant issues of the day. Though he may not have single-handedly heralded this form of commitment, its similarities with the commitment of other writers of the 20th century — particularly those outside of the metropole — warrant a closer inspection that will help complicate and define the figure and work of the *écrivain engagé* in the face of the ideologies, militarism, upheavals, atrocities, and postcolonial relations in the 20th century. It would only be fitting to base this analysis on what Feraoun identifies as "la source de nos communs malheurs" in a letter to Albert Camus, which the recipient chose to publish in *Preuves* in 1958. Namely, the inability of indigenous Algerians to share with European Algerians the privilege of denouncing or fully demanding their rights in Algeria:

> Mais il faut bien reconnaître qu[e les Français d'Algérie] ont tiré tout bénéfice d'une ambiguïté soigneusement entretenue, que nous [les indigènes] n'avons jamais eu la possibilité de *dénoncer*, nous contentant, avec plus ou moins de véhémence, plus ou moins d'illusions, plus ou moins de bonheur, de *réclamer* notre part de ce bénéfice comme prix de notre attachement (forcé) à la France. Cette équivoque, à mon avis illégitime, est *la source de nos communs malheurs*.[339]

Feraoun's use of *dénoncer* and *réclamer* will recall the juridical language of the essay we discussed in the opening pages of this chapter. It is in such instances of failure on the part of governments, of the state, and of the existing power structures that Feraoun sees and claims a space for a writer to effect a different form of engagement and a redress of justice.

[339] Mouloud Feraoun, "Lettre d'un Algérien musulman : la source de nos communs malheurs," *Preuves* 91 (September 1958): 74; my emphasis.

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