

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Qur'anic Invocations:

Narrative Temporalities in Twentieth Century Maghrebi Literature

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Satisfaction of the

Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

In Comparative Literature

by

Hoda El Shakry

2012

© Copyright by

Hoda El Shakry

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Qur'anic Invocations:

Narrative Temporalities in Twentieth Century Maghrebi Literature

by

Hoda El Shakry

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Gil Hochberg, Co-Chair

Professor Nouri Gana, Co-Chair

Qur'anic Invocations: Narrative Temporalities in Twentieth Century Maghrebi Literature

investigates the dialogic relationship between literary and theological discourse in modern Arabophone and Francophone literature of the Maghreb. The novels of al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, Assia Djebar, Driss Chraïbi and Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī critically explore the complex colonial histories and conflicted articulations of national identity, language and literature in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. While the 130-year French imperial presence in the region left an indelible cultural and linguistic imprint on the Maghreb, nationalist attempts at homogenizing these countries under a shared Arab and Islamic heritage were equally divisive. This dissertation examines the intersecting discourses of nationalism, modernity and postcolonialism in fiction of the late colonial and post-independence period between 1945 and 1985. I posit that these novels engage with Islamic Thought in order to complicate, nuance or challenge the temporality of these grand

historical narratives. In the process, however, they trouble the boundary between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ discourses. In large part, this confluence reflects the very notion of *Adab* that underwrites both religious and literary discourse in the Arab literary tradition. A concept that historically denoted the moral dimensions of individual and social conduct in the Islamic sciences, *Adab* also signifies the intellectual pursuit of knowledge and more currently, the corpus of *belle lettres*. For while they employ Qur’anic symbology, imagery and motifs, these texts also intervene into debates on the apostolic tradition of hadith, Islamic exegesis, history and jurisprudence. Further, they reimagine the novel in dialogue with and opposition to Arabic and French literary as well as historical discourses. These elements are reflected in the heteroglossic and polyphonic structure of these texts, which undermines historical teleologies and myths of origins.

My first chapter, “Revolutionary Eschatology: Islam and the End of Time in Waṭṭār’s *al-Zilzāl*” [The Earthquake, 1974], analyzes Waṭṭār’s mobilization of eschatological imagery to question the ideological underpinnings of Algerian nationalist discourse. I explore *al-Zilzāl*’s critical engagement with the rhetoric of Arabism and Islamism in post-revolutionary state politics. In my second chapter, “Heterodoxies of History: Algerian National Identity in Djébar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia*” [Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade, 1985], I investigate the interweaving of the French colonial occupation and settlement of Algeria with the Arabo-Islamic conquest of the region in the seventh century. I posit that the novel’s polyphonic structure and resistance to a single authoritative voice challenges religious, ethnic and linguistic narratives of origins, as well as the politics of transmission and interpretation in Islam. The third chapter, “The Thin Line of Imperialism: Parsing the Qur’an in Chraïbi’s *Le passé simple*” [The Simple Past, 1954],

examines the controversial representation of French imperialism and Islamic patriarchy as mutually imbricated ideologies. I argue that Chraïbi offers an alternative mode of historical and literary temporality in the motifs of the *passé simple* and *la ligne mince*. My final chapter, “The Poetic Landscape of Islamic Thought: Creation and Existence in al-Mas‘adī’s *Mawlid al-Nisyān*” [The Genesis of Forgetfulness, 1945], explores the novel’s fusion of Sufism, Existentialism, Islamic Thought and Arabic literary discourse. Al-Mas‘adī’s ethical literary project, I suggest, reads artistic representation as a mode of creation.

The dissertation of Hoda El Shakry is approved.

Lia Brozgal

Aamir Mufti

Gil Hochberg, Committee Co-Chair

Nouri Gana, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Note on Translation and Transliteration	vii
Acknowledgments	viii
Curriculum Vitae	xii
0. Introduction	1
1. Revolutionary Eschatology:	
Islam and the End of Time in Waṭṭār's <i>al-Zilzāl</i>	15
2. Heterodoxies of History:	
Algerian National Identity in Djébar's <i>L'Amour, la fantasia</i>	45
3. The Thin Line of Imperialism:	
Parsing Islam in Chraïbi's <i>Le passé simple</i>	76
4. The Poetic Landscape of Islamic Thought:	
Creation and Existence in al-Mas'adi's <i>Mawlid al-Nisyan</i>	113
5. Conclusion	147
Bibliography	151

NOTE ON TRANSLATION & TRANSLITERATION

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Arabic and French are my own. When available, I have used existing translations into English, but made modifications that are indicated in the appropriate footnotes. Arabic words and names have been transliterated into the Latin alphabet using a modified system based on the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). For words ending in the letter ه for example, I have opted to include the final 'h.' Arabic names of authors who publish in French or English (such as Driss Chraïbi or Assia Djebar) have not been changed for the sake of consistency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the contributions of a number of individuals and institutions. The research and writing of this project were funded by generous support from the American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS), the Foreign Language & Area Studies (FLAS) Program, the University of California Interdisciplinary Psychoanalytic Consortium (UCIPC), as well as UCLA's Center for European & Eurasian Studies (CEES), Graduate Division and Department of Comparative Literature. Chapter One was published in a slightly modified form as "Revolutionary Eschatology: Islam & the End of Time in al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's *al-Zilzāl*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 42:2-3 (2011): 120-147. I thank Brill for permission to reprint and the gracious feedback offered by the anonymous reviewers at *JAL*. I have also benefited from presenting various incarnations of this project at the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), Harvard University, the University of Texas at Austin, the Pennsylvania State University and the University of Pennsylvania.

My interest in Comparative Literature and the Maghreb began as an undergraduate at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. I am indebted to the outstanding scholars and mentors I worked with: Richard Serrano introduced me to literature of the Maghreb, Richard Dienst demystified literary theory, Elaine Chang's seminars exposed me to postcolonial criticism, and Janet Walker mentored me in the methodologies of Comparative Literature.

UCLA provided a rigorous intellectual community and I thank the faculty and staff who inspired and supported me throughout my graduate career: Eleanor Kaufman, Kirstie M. McClure,

Michael Cooperson, Ali Behdad, Efrain Kristal, Michelle Clayton, Susan Slymovics, Kenneth Reinhard, Stathis Gourgouris, Vinay Lal, Françoise Lionnet, Katherine King, Courtney Klipp, Michelle Anderson and Michelle Lambarena. I am particularly indebted to my outstanding doctoral committee. Aamir Mufti helped shape my approach to Secular Criticism and Islamic Thought. Lia Brozgal graciously advised me in Francophone literature and criticism, and her keen editing eye and professional mentoring proved indispensable. Nouri Gana provided guidance in modern Arabic literature and criticism, tirelessly editing my transliterations and translations. I owe a special thanks to Gil Hochberg has been both a mentor and a friend. She believed in my work even when I was plagued with doubts, and her commitment to producing conscientious scholarship has inspired both my academic career and this dissertation.

To the graduate students in the Department of Comparative Literature at UCLA that served as colleagues and friends – providing friendly faces at conferences, professional advice, and most importantly, levity during the trials and tribulations of graduate school – I extend a warm thanks: Spencer Jackson, Katherine McCloone, Lisa Felipe, Neetu Khanna, Talar Chahinian, Marian Gabra, Simchi Cohen, Noa Bar, Peter Lehman, Susannah Rodriguez Drissi, Amy Tahani, Kirk Sides, Myrna Douzjian, Tamar Boyadijan, David Fieni, Jordan Smith, David Gabriel, Carol Viers and Simona Livescu. Similarly, academic conferences provided a space of intellectual exchange that put me in contact with scholars whose work I admire: William Granara, R.A. Judy, Roger Allen, Tarek El-Ariss, Wail S. Hassan, Mohamed-Salah Omri, Elizabeth Holt, Nader K. Uthman, Ghenwa Hayek, Olivia Harrison, Etienne Balibar, Fatima Sadiqi, Jack Halberstam, Saba Mahmood, Stephen Sheehi, Sadia Abbas and Amal Amireh.

I could not have survived my return to academia, nor move from New York, without the support and love of my west-coast family. I owe an immeasurable debt to those who fed me, drove me and made me laugh over the years: Vivian Alcalay, Robin Baral, Carla Blair, Anil Baral, David Simpson, Su-Rmi Givens, Angie Smith, Asia Baczyk, Adriana Manago, Sharon Cech, Tina Lee, Shervin Tag, Shadee Malaklou, Nancy Halpern Ibrahim, Nikki Giacobazzi, Peter Geantil, Eric Wang, Karim Wahba, Amr Assaid, Mia Fernandez, Eliza Shamshian, Douglas Nakazaki, Gabriel Plunk, Matt Fuller, Walter Clark and Stephen Sykes. While traveling for research I was fortunate to find satellite families from Middlebury Vermont to Fès, Rabat and Paris. Thank you to: Sarah Eltantawi, Emily Kao, Sophie Marment, Doug Honegan, Eric Nowicki, Dave Dowd, Nicole Laureano, Rachel Eva Schley, Annabel and Gil Soltz for making the unfamiliar feel like home.

I am particularly indebted to my fellow academics who served as both intellectual interlocutors as well as friends, and I hope to continue being inspired by their work and friendships: Sina Rahmani, Kyle Wanberg, Emily Selove, David Bennett, Hassan Hussein, Sharareh Frouzesh, Nahrain al-Mousawi, Awad Awad, Ahmed Alwishah, Anita Husen, Amanda Rogers, Andrea Turpin, Paul Amar, Samira Haj, Mahmood Ibrahim, Devra Weber, George Lang, Nasrin Rahimieh, Mohammad Rafi, Shervin Emami, Nasser Mufti and Alice Mandell.

I am exceptionally grateful for my brothers-in-law, Mark Mazower and Nadeem Haj, who have provided constant support – both academic and personal. My niece and nephew, Selma & Jed Mazower, are an unparalleled magical presence in my life. As one of four sisters, my life has been filled with powerful women who have driven and inspired me since childhood. My

maternal grandmother Zaynab Shahata (1911-1998) was an exceptional woman whose joyous spirit in the face of life's challenges has been a guiding presence throughout my life. My childhood friend Amira Hanafi has inspired me with her talent as a writer, artist and fellow traveler. Nassie El Zoghby has taught me to approach life passionately and fearlessly, and her friendship has been an ongoing source of joy in my life. Leah Feldman embarked on this journey with me from the beginning and has provided ceaseless support – academic, emotional and culinary. Her intellectual acumen and unparalleled generosity have left an indelible mark on this dissertation and my life. My sisters Omnia, Marwa and Leila have served as intellectual interlocutors, mentors, confidants and most importantly, true friends. Their support and love continues to fuel all of my life's successes. I would never have entered academia were it not for the integrity and brilliance with which Omnia and Marwa approach their academic and personal lives. My sister Leila has been a lifelong companion whose creativity and boundless love underline everything I do; and for that, I am eternally grateful.

And finally to my parents Sayed El Shakry and Aida Nawar for their constant support and faith, I dedicate both my love and this manuscript. My father's tireless ambition and intellectual thirst continue to astound me. My mother taught me to approach my life and work ethically, and more crucially, with the confidence of unconditional love. She also proved a phenomenal editor for my Arabic translations. They have inspired my fascination with Arabic literature and Islamic Thought, and their sacrifices have made this humble project possible.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Hoda El Shakry

EDUCATION

B.A., Comparative Literature
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, *Summa cum laude*, January 2001

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Associate Professor/Faculty Fellow
New York University, Gallatin School, 2012-2013

Teaching Fellow
University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Comparative Literature, 2010-2011

Teaching Associate,
University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Comparative Literature, 2007-2009

PUBLICATIONS

- “Revolutionary Eschatology: Islam & the End of Time in al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār’s *al-Zilzāl*,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 42:2-3 (2011): 120-147.
- “Apocalyptic Pasts, Orwellian Futures: Elle Flanders’ *Zero Degrees of Separation*,” *GLQ* Vol. 16 No. 4 (2010): 611-621.

PAPERS & TALKS

- "Reorienting Modernity: Islamic Discourse in 20th Century North African Literature," The University of Pennsylvania, 2012.
- "The Politics of Islamic Poiesis: The Literary Project of Mahmud al-Mas'adi," The Pennsylvania State University, 2012.
- “Worlding Islamic Eschatology: Imperialism & the End of Time in Maghrebi Literature,” *Worlding Modern Arabic Literary Geographies*: American Comparative Literature Association, Vancouver, 2011.
- “Postcolonial Aftershocks: The Politics of Qur’anic Discourse in al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār’s *al-Zilzāl*,” *Jil Jadid Graduate Student Conference in Arabic Studies*: University of Texas, Austin, 2011.
- “Deconstructing Representation: Allegory, Mimesis and The Politics of Language in Arab Literary Discourse,” *Creoles, Diasporas, Cosmopolitanisms*: American Comparative Literature Association, New Orleans, 2010.
- “Crossing the Line - *La ligne mince* in Driss Chraïbi’s *Le passé simple*,” *Maghrebi Literature[s] Across Boundaries*: Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 2009.

- “The Disorder of Imperialism - The Politics of Psychoanalysis in Moroccan Literature,” *Arrivals and Departures*: American Comparative Literature Association, Longbeach CA, 2008.
- “Tense Eruptions - Parsing Memory and Trauma in North African Francophone Literature,” *Trans, Pan, Inter: Cultures in Contact*: American Comparative Literature Association, Puebla, Mexico, 2007.

CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION

- Conference Chair: *Conscripted Subjects: Disciplined Society, Critique and the Humanities*, Department of Comparative Literature, UCLA, 2011.
- Panel Chair “*Neutral*” *Grounds: Rethinking the Limits of Hybridity*, American Comparative Literature Association, New Orleans, 2010.
- Conference Organizer: *Modalities of Change*, U.C. Interdisciplinary Psychoanalytic Consortium Annual Meeting, Lake Arrowhead, California, 2009.

ACADEMIC HONORS & AWARDS

- UCLA Dissertation Year Fellowship (DYF) for dissertation completion, 2011-2012
- UCLA Center for European & Eurasian Studies (CEES) Dissertation Fellowship for research in France, 2011
- University of California Interdisciplinary Psychoanalytic Consortium (UCIPC) Hayman Dissertation Fellowship for psychoanalytically-informed early dissertation research, 2010
- UCLA Graduate Research Mentorship (GRM) Fellowship for faculty-mentored research, 2009
- American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS) TALIMS Short-Term Research Grant for research in Morocco, 2009
- Horst Frenz Prize Nominee for best graduate student paper at the annual conference of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), 2008
- Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) Critical Language Scholarship for Arabic study abroad, 2008 (declined)
- UCLA Graduate Research Summer Mentorship (GRSM) Fellowship for faculty-mentored research, 2008
- Middlebury College Grant for summer Graduate Arabic Program, Middlebury College, 2008
- National Foreign Language & Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship for Arabic study in Morocco at the Arabic Language Institute in Fès (ALIF), 2007
- UCLA Comparative Literature Departmental Fellowship for coursework completion, 2006

Introduction

أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ① خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ② أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ
الْأَكْرَمُ ③ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ④ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ⑤

Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth
Createth man from a clot.

Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who teacheth by the pen
Teacheth man that which he knew not.

Qur'an, *Al- 'Alaq* [The Clot]¹

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized... These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization – this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel”²

In light of public discourses surrounding the politicization of Islam, this dissertation explores the epistemological, ethical and political dimensions of literary representations of Islamic discourse in the Maghreb. The current study investigates this confluence in twentieth century Arabophone and Francophone Literature from the former French colonies of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Focusing on the late colonial and post-independence period between 1945 and 1985, I explore these questions in relation to both colonial and nationalist ideologies. By interpolating and interrogating debates on Islamic history, jurisprudence and Qur'anic exegesis, I argue that these literary works stage an aesthetic intervention into critical issues of national and social polity. Their integration of Islamic Thought allows them to address critical socio-political configurations of the twentieth century – such as imperialism, globalization and capitalist modernity – while simultaneously addressing the shifting role of Islam. By challenging the

¹ Qur'an: 96:1-5, Pickthall Translation.

² Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination* Michael Holquist Ed., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Transl. (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981) 262-263.

relegation of Islam to the private realm – as part of the secularization of the colonial project – these works reframe the very binaries of public and private, local and global as well as secular and religious.³

As the countries of the Maghreb fell under French imperial control – Algeria as a settler colony (1830-1962), Tunisia as a protectorate (1881-1956) and Morocco as a protectorate (1912-1956) – they were each subject to policies that helped secure France’s strategic presence in the region. The ideological tenets of this *mission civilisatrice* entailed a drastic reconfiguration of the social, cultural and economic constitution of these countries. With such practices as the enforcement of the French language in education, government and public sector spheres, cultural production in the region was irrevocably impacted.⁴ Moreover, French colonial policy was infamously divisive with respects to the Berberophone languages of the indigenous *Amazigh* populations and Arabic – a contentious issue in the heteroglossic context of the Maghreb.⁵ These factors influenced not only the language politics of Arabic and French usage in the Maghreb under French occupation, but also the role of language in nationalist discourse during independence. The debate over national language was thus propelled by colonial efforts to control the region, in

³ On the privatization of Islam in relation to colonial legal policy, see: Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); as well as William E. Connolly’s *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 75.

⁴ For an overview of French pedagogical practices and policies in North Africa, see Alf Andrew Heggoy and Paul J. Zingg, “French Education in Revolutionary North Africa,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 7 (1976): 571-678.

⁵ The *Imazighen* (singular: *Amazigh*) are the indigenous populations that inhabited North Africa west of the Nile valley prior to the Arab conquests of the 7th century. Between the 7th and 12th centuries, the *Imazighen* – who spoke a variety of dialects from the Afro-Asiatic language family including *Tamazight* – were dispersed throughout various parts of the Sahara. The history of the *Imazighen*, particularly in relation to various attempts to assimilate them, is somewhat beyond the scope of this project. Historian James McDougall offers a highly nuanced analysis of Algeria’s Berberophone populations in relation to various articulations of Algerian nationalism. See: James McDougall, “Myth and Counter-Myth: ‘The Berber’ as National Signifier in Algerian Historiographies,” *Radical History Review* Issue 86 (Spring 2003): 66-88.

addition to post-independence attempts to homogenize these countries culturally, linguistically and religiously under the signifiers ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim.’

While there are cultural and social similarities among the countries of the Maghreb, this project is sensitive to the distinct histories that differentiate Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Although I employ the term ‘Maghreb’ as shorthand, I am aware that it is a contested term. The countries included and excluded from this designation are tied to colonial expansion within the region, post-independence efforts to unify the area under a claimed shared – and often ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ – history, in addition to global development and trade relations. My use of the term engages with its social capital as a label that is in circulation, and therefore one that warrants attention. Since my project seeks to be attentive to the ideological mappings onto the constitutive countries of this region – as part of the colonial project itself, as well as how the region is read in anthropological, historical and critical literature – it is productive to adhere to this designation, albeit critically.⁶

Few studies of Maghrebi literature employ a comparative framework that engages with both the Arabophone and Francophone literary traditions of the Maghreb. Similarly, as with other ‘third world literature,’ the critical tendency is to read these works exclusively through the lens of postcolonialism. My pairing of Arabophone and Francophone texts, however, seeks to do more than fill an empirical lacuna. Rather, it troubles the various authoritative narratives about the meetings between East and West, and Islam and Post-Enlightenment secular Europe that often

⁶ While the Arab Maghreb Union (*Ittiḥād al-Maghrib al-Arabī*) of 1989 encompasses the countries of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, the use of the term derives from its Arabic etymology meaning ‘place of the setting sun’ from the root *gh-r-b* or west. During French imperial rule (1830–1962) the name *Maghreb* was generally used to designate the countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia where the French had established a stronghold in the region.

underpin readings of this body of literature. Consequently, I rely on critical theory that frames these interactions beyond binary schematizations. In particular, this project is informed by Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and heteroglossia, Édouard Glissant's conceptualization of relationality as well as Abdelkebir Khatibi's articulations of diglossia and bilingue in the context of the Maghreb.⁷ More crucially, this study engages with the diverse cultural, linguistic and idiomatic registers of the region. I explore resonances of: Arabic literature and criticism of the classical through modern period, the Qur'an, the apostolic tradition of hadith, as well as French literary, philosophical and critical writing.

This study is comprised of four chapters, each examining a specific Maghrebi novel: al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's 1974 *al-Zilal* [The Earthquake], Assia Djebar's 1985 *L'Amour la fantasia* [Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade], Driss Chraïbi's 1954 *Le passé simple* [The Simple Past] and Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī's 1945 *Mawlid al-Nisyān* [The Genesis of Forgetfulness].⁸ The central question animating this project is: how do these authors engage with Islamic Thought in order to complicate, nuance or challenge the grand historical narratives of the nation, modernity and postcoloniality? At stake in such an exploration is the very means through which modernity has been discursively constructed in relation to colonial and nationalist ideologies. More crucially, I address how the dialogic relationship between theological and literary sources impacts our very understanding of both novelistic and historical discourse. In this regard, I highlight the literary integration of the Qur'an as a textual object, while also reflecting on the relationship between

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*; Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denöel, 1983) and "Diglossia," in *Algeria in Others' Languages* Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁸ Al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl* (Beirut: al-Dar al-ʿArabiyya li-l-ʿUlūm, 2007), written 1974; Driss Chraïbi, *Le passé simple* (Paris: Denöel, 1954); Assia Djebar, *L'amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985); Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī, *Mawlid al-Nisyān* (Tunis: al-Dar al-Tunisiyya lil-Nashr, 1974), written 1945.

discourse and religious praxis. My focus on narrative temporality investigates how the construction of time in these novels serves to complicate the historical narratives of colonialism and modernity. I argue that the transformation of the Qur'an into a living literary discourse blurs the line between 'secular' and 'religious' discourses. These interventions further challenge orthodox hermeneutical practices in Islamic Thought, as well as various narratives and genealogies of Islamic history. Moreover, by reworking narrative temporality in a colonial setting, these novels reorient the periodization of the nation away from the temporal demarcations of 'pre-colonial' and 'post-colonial.'

The first chapter, "Revolutionary Eschatology: Islam and the End of Time in Waṭṭār's *al-Zilzāl*," analyzes the use of Qur'anic imagery in al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's apocalyptic 1974 novel *al-Zilzāl* [The Earthquake]. I investigate Waṭṭār's employment of Qur'anic eschatology to question the ideological underpinnings of Algerian nationalist discourse. In particular, I emphasize the novel's critical engagement with the rhetoric of Arabism and Islamism in post-revolutionary state politics. The chapter explores *al-Zilzāl*'s hybrid genre, conscious manipulation of narrative time and space, as well as its incorporation of various registers of the Arabic language. I argue that by reworking the symbols and mythology of Islamic eschatology, *al-Zilzāl* challenges hegemonic post-revolutionary discourses of Algerian national identity, language and literature.

Chapter Two "Heterodoxies of History: Algerian National Identity in Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*," explores Assia Djébar's 1985 novel *L'Amour, la fantasia* [Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade]. I emphasize her interweaving of the Arabo-Islamic conquest of the region in the seventh century with the colonial occupation and settlement of Algeria by French forces. Her

novel renders legible the occluded subjects of ‘official’ Algerian and Islamic history, specifically women, as well as the representational violence of linear narratives of historical time. I highlight the novel’s resistance to a single authorial voice through its fractured narrative structure, jolting movement through time and space, and polyphonic array of genres and sources. I posit that Djébar’s critique of religious, ethnic and linguistic narratives of origins must be read in dialogue with her skepticism towards the politics of transmission and interpretation in Islam. Her literary and ethical project is founded on an understanding of discourse as inherently heteroglossic and Islamic piety as an individual intellectual practice.

Chapter Three, “The Thin Line of Imperialism: Parsing Islam in Chraïbi’s *Le passé simple*,” examines Driss Chraïbi’s controversial 1954 novel *Le passé simple* [The Simple Past] written on the brink of Moroccan independence. It explores the novel’s portrayal of the mutual imbrication of French imperialism and Islamic patriarchy in their respective reliance on teleological and genealogical narratives of pure origins. I argue that the disruption of these modes of historical inscription emerges most prominently in the metaphor of the French grammatical tense the *passé simple*, as well as the image of *la ligne mince* [the Thin Line]. A hallucinatory apparition that speaks to the narrator throughout the novel, I posit that *la ligne mince* offers a vision of conceptualizing history and language as epistemological sites of disruption.

The final chapter, “The Poetic Landscape of Islamic Thought: Creation and Existence in al-Mas‘adī’s *Mawlid al-Nisyān*,” investigates Mahmud al-Mas‘adī’s 1945 novel *Mawlid al-Nisyān* [Genesis of Forgetfulness]. The novel narrates the story of a physician who abandons his quest for a drug to defeat time for a journey of spiritual self-awareness. Staged as a tragicomedy,

Mawlid al-Nisyān integrates early Islamic philosophy, the Qur'an and Sufism in its reconceptualization of time, memory and the relationship between God and the world. A renowned public intellectual and policy maker in post-independence Tunisia, al-Mas'adī was a controversial literary figure whose metaphysical novels were often critiqued as apolitical. Arguing that these personas are in fact inextricably linked, this chapter posits that al-Mas'adī's literary project enacts an *Islamic Poiesis* – an engagement with Islamic Thought that reads artistic representation as a mode of creation. This is performed in the novel at the crossroads of Sufism and existentialist philosophy, as well as Islamic Thought and Arabic literature.

I bring these diverse texts together because each novel inserts Islamic discourse into a heteroglossic nexus of linguistic, cultural and literary traditions. Every chapter, however, develops its own theoretical paradigm to demonstrate how this serves to unsettle static representations of national language, literature and identity. Rather than providing an alternative 'grand narrative,' I am interested in reading these works through and against the intersecting discourses of nationalism, postcolonialism and modernity. In this regard, the study engages with the body of work introduced by Edward Saïd and known as secular criticism. In his development of the theory of secular criticism, Aamir Mufti defines it as “a practice of unbelief... [that] struggles above all with the imposition of national (or civilizational) molds over social and cultural life, against all unmediated and absolute claims of membership in a national (or civilizational) community.”⁹ My project shares secular criticism's skepticism surrounding the imposed claims – national or otherwise – of social, cultural and linguistic communities.

⁹ See Aamir R. Mufti, “Critical Secularism: A Reintroduction for Perilous Times” *boundary 2* Vol. 31 No. 2 (2004): 1-9, 2 and Edward Saïd, “Secular Criticism” in *The World, The Text, The Critic* (London: Vintage, 1983) 1- 30. For an engagement with the transcendental tendencies of some schools of secular thought, see Stathis Gourgouris, “Detranscendentalizing the Secular” *Public Culture* 20.3 (2008): 437-445.

While each country of the Maghreb experienced its own specific trajectory, this forty-year period witnessed a flourishing of politically inflected cultural and literary journals by a growing intelligentsia.¹⁰ Maghrebi intellectuals of this generation were largely concerned with the uniquely heteroglossic nature of local cultural production, debating the language question in relation to conflicting delineations of national identity. Their literary and theoretical writings were often attentive to the linguistic diversity of the region – the Berberophone languages of the *Amazigh* populations, local dialects of Arabic, as well as the colonial language of French.¹¹ In this regard, I investigate how writers of both languages explore the “complex multiplicity (linguistic, cultural, ideological, and class)” of the region.¹² Such authors as Driss Chraïbi and Assia Djebar sought to complicate monoglossic representations of French discourse in the Maghreb. Similarly, al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār and Maḥmūd al-Mas’adī were interested in developing the Arabic literary tradition while addressing the cultural legacy of French imperialism.

In the colonial metropole, there was a simultaneous attempt to absorb Francophone works of the Maghreb within the French literary milieu, as well as to distinguish them in their embodiment of a distinctly ‘Arab consciousness’ or *mentalité*.¹³ Seth Graebner for example, demonstrates how discourses of time and history are mobilized in both French historiography and the practices of literary publishing houses to designate a distinctly Maghrebi subjectivity and epistemology. He

¹⁰ Examples include *Atlantes* (Morocco, 1968-1969), *Confluent* (Morocco, 1956-1967), *Novembre: Revue culturelle algérienne* (Algeria, 1964-1965) and *Souffles-Anfas* (Morocco, 1966-1972).

¹¹ For discussions of this debate, see: Abdelkebir Khatibi’s *Maghreb Pluriel* and “Diglossia;” Abdelfettah Kilito’s *Lan tatakalam lugatī [Thou Shall Not Speak My Language]* (Beyrut: Dār al-Ṭalī’a, 2002); Jacques Derrida’s *Le monolinguisme de l’autre ou la prothèse d’origine [Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin]* (Paris: Galilée, 1996); as well as the collection *Du bilinguisme* featuring interviews with Jalil Bennani, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Abdelfettah Kilito and Abdelwahab Meddeb (Paris: Denoël, 1985).

¹² James McDougall, “Myth and Counter-Myth,” 67.

¹³ Most notably, the French publishing houses Albin Michel, Denoël, Folio, L’Harmattan, Points and Seuil were the primary publishers of Francophone literature from the Maghreb.

cites the reinterpretation of the polymath Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) by French historians of the nineteenth century who sought to demonstrate “the circularity of North African history and its supposed unproductivity.”¹⁴ These orientalist interpretations became the foundation of a standardized lexicon of French literary criticism. Graebner cites the “Avertissement” or warning issued by the French publishing giant Seuil in editions of Algerian writer Kateb Yacine’s renowned novel *Nedjma*.¹⁵ The warning cautions readers of the novel’s convoluted structure, which it argues is rooted in an Arab conceptualization of historical time as circular and cyclical.¹⁶ These literary accounts helped further the colonial project in their delineation of North African historical, and therefore cultural stagnation, underscoring the critical impetus behind this project.

Such trends also manifest in critical literature on the Maghreb, which tends to privilege Francophone works from the region. The critical emphasis on Francophone Maghrebi literature is dictated by a host of factors, including: questions of accessibility and circulation, as well as disciplinary breakdowns within Western academia – such as the addition of Francophone literature and culture to French departments at most universities. As a number of scholars have pointed out, however, the very delineation of ‘Francophone Literatures’ is itself politically circumscribed.¹⁷ In the words of Nicholas Harrison:

Indeed, this use of ‘francophone’ — a term that might appear to mean French-speaking — to refer to writers of French from outside France, but not to all of them, is coded in such a way as to imply this distinction of critical practice, and is all about assigning certain writers to an ethnic/cultural ‘group’; while writers such as Ionesco, Beckett and even Camus have generally been studied on ‘French’ literature courses without much attention to their non- French origins, the North African novel, like other ‘post-colonial’

¹⁴ Seth Graebner, *History’s Place: Nostalgia and the City in French Algerian Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007) 256.

¹⁵ Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Seuil, 1956).

¹⁶ For an account of the “Avertissement” as well as the author Michel Chodkiewicz’s editorial justifications of the relationship between Arab historiography and narrative structure, see Graebner, *History’s Place*, 257-8.

¹⁷ See for example Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin* (Rabat: SMER, 1979) 38.

texts, has, as we have seen, been tied academically to its notional ‘place of origin’, ‘which would appear to constitute’, as Charles Bonn puts it, ‘both its originality and its limit’.¹⁸

In light of these concerns, my analysis attempts to explore Maghrebi literary production in dialogue with the French imperial legacy – linguistic, socio-cultural and political – as well as along a nuanced diachronic register of local references, idioms and practices. In this regard, I build upon the scholarship of Arabophone literary critics of the Maghreb such as: Roger Allen, Debbie Cox, William Granara, Ronald Judy, Lindsey Moore and Mohamed-Salah Omri.¹⁹

In my analysis of these novels, I am particularly attentive to the semiotic social networks – meaning, the intersections of language with culture – that are affirmed and denied by hegemonic colonial and national structures.²⁰ As Abdelkebir Khatibi argues in his essay “Diglossia,” bilingualism and multilingualism are not specific to the colonial encounter in the Maghreb. Rather, they mark a crucial element in the construction of the modern nation-state. He posits that Diglossia does not imply the layering or replacement of one language with another. It is instead

¹⁸ Nicholas Harrison, “Representativity (with reference to Chraïbi),” *Paragraph* Vol. 24 Issue 3 (November, 2001): 30-43, 37.

¹⁹ See *Moroccan Folktales* Roger Allen, eds (Syracuse University Press, 2003) and Roger Allen & Mohamed Albakry, “The Literary world of Mohamed Zefzef: Three Short Stories” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 10.2 (2007): 129-136; Debbie Cox, *Politics, Language and Gender in the Algerian Arabic Novel* (New York & Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); William Granara, “Mythologising the Algerian War of Independence: Tahir Wattar and the Contemporary Algerian Novel,” *The Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 4 No. 3 (Autumn 1999): 1-14; Ronald A. T. Judy, “On the Politics of Global Language, or Unfungible Local Value,” *boundary 2* Vol. 24 No. 2 (Summer 1997): 101-143; Lindsey Moore’s *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2008); and Mohamed-Salah Omri’s *Nationalism, Islam and World Literature* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006). In Arabic literary criticism there are a number of works focusing on twentieth century Arabophone writings of the Maghreb, such as Abdelmalek Murtad’s *Nahdat al-Adab al-Arabi al-Mu’asir fi al-Jaza’ir: 1925-1954 (The Contemporary Arabic Literary Revival in Algeria: 1925-1956)* (al-Shirkah al-Wataniyya lil-Nashr wa al-Tawziy’a, al-Jaza’ir, 1969). The work describes the flourishing of the Arabic literary tradition in late colonial Algeria in contradistinction to the Francophone tradition.

²⁰ This touches on the structuralist/formalist distinction between *langue* and *langage*. See Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1916). Bakhtin similarly discusses ‘lived language’ through the lens of discourse. See: Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

the dialogic and transformative relationship *between* and *among* languages.²¹ Bakhtin similarly locates heteroglossia in the conditions – social, historical, linguistic and cultural – that permit “a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships.”²² Whereas the theoretical tendency of postcolonial scholars has been to read hybridization as either a social or subjective experience, Bakhtin delineates the phenomenon in a semantic realm that is inflected by the dynamic between language and culture. By disrupting linear narrative structure, linguistic purity and subjective coherence, the novels of al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, Assia Djebar, Driss Chraïbi and Maḥmūd al-Mas’adī restructure the very politics of the nation, modernity and postcoloniality.²³

It is in this spirit that I employ the terms ‘Arabophone’ and ‘Francophone’ rather than Arabic and French, to signify a more conjoined linguistic history. The countries of the Maghreb were subject to hostile colonial encounters dating back as early as 900 B.C.E, and experienced a diverse range of cultural and linguistic influences including: the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Vandals, the Visigoths, the Byzantine Greeks, the Arabs, the Ottomans, the Portuguese, the Spaniards, as well as the French. Reading these novels across such encounters and histories opens up canonical Maghrebi texts to new pairings and poetic investigations. This allows for previously elided historical and cultural influences – from the pre-Islamic history of North Africa to post-independence Arabist and Islamist rhetoric – to be read back into the literary discourse of the region.

²¹ Another term Khatibi coins to refer to the collision of language and culture is Schizoglossia. More crucially, Schizoglossia acknowledges the manner in which languages are conditioned by asymmetrical relations of power. See Abdelkebir Khatibi, *La mémoire tatouée* (Paris: Denoël, 1971) 211 and “Diglossia.”

²² Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 263.

²³ On the relationship between linear narrative time, print capitalism and the nation as “an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,” see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London & New York: Verso, 1983) 6.

My reading of these works individually as well as relationally does not seek to label the Maghreb as an inherently hybrid space – linguistic or otherwise. There is an epistemological danger in framing Maghrebi cultural production as simply a blend of French and Arabic languages, traditions or influences. Rather, I wish to rethink the boundaries that seemingly separate them. While it is tempting to read these encounters symptomatically as the folding of one tradition into another stronger one, such analyses generate a fixed model of power relations that only functions in one direction while relegating cultural forms to static locales. Rather, it is critical to acknowledge the “structural complicity between these two modes of transformational politics born out of both anti-colonial revolt and colonial command... each discourse of power partially constitutes the other, even as each adapts to the other’s adaptations.”²⁴ My analysis is thus attentive to the dialogic relationship between anti-colonial or post-independence rhetoric and certain colonial structures – even in the context of resistance.

As this study is concerned with questions of narrative time, I will briefly touch on the politics of the novel in the Arab context. There is a common tendency in Anglophone literary criticism to read the Arabic novel as a cultural borrowing of nineteenth century Europe. Given the colonial context of this period, such a reading is, as the Arabic literary critic Samah Selim argues, highly developmentalist. She proposes that literary scholars resist the urge to rely on the European novel as the original source of Arabic literary discourse and instead:

... take up the much more difficult task of constructing a new critical language with which to describe local forms of modern narrativity... [T]o point to a critical methodology that uncovers the relationship between form and ideology as an expression of historical hegemony, and then examines the various narrative strategies and social pressures

²⁴ David Anthony Fieni, *Decadent Orientalisms: Configuring the Decay of Colonial Modernity in French and Arabic* (Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2006) 109.

through which this relationship is formally reproduced, qualified, distended or subverted in local narrative praxis.²⁵

Rethinking the relationship between the European novel and the development of the genre in the Arab context does not mean disregarding certain historical realities concerning the influences of imperialism, capitalist modernity or globalization. Rather, it necessitates repositioning the center/periphery and global/local models that dominate such discourses.

Such a repositioning requires examining the relationship of discourses of modernity, secularism and Orientalism to colonial history. As Edward Saïd demonstrates in *Orientalism*, modernity – as a product of the secular science of History developed in the eighteenth century – relied on the creation of an oriental (colonial) other. Through the sciences of philology, psychiatry and anthropology, with their respective missions of linguistic, psychological and cultural decoding, there emerged a distinct orientalist *doxology* tethered to imperialism. The project of Orientalism according to Saïd, was both the creation and taxonomy of the orient, as well as its positioning within a secular model of modernity.

Saïd argued that colonial modernity entailed a particular mapping of time onto ‘History’ as the preeminent secular science. However, it essentially replaced God as an organizing principle with science, identifying modernity as its ultimate *telos*: “having transported the Orient into modernity, the Orientalist could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old.”²⁶ As some critics have argued, secularism itself functioned like a quasi-religious system in its replacement rather than

²⁵ Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004) ix.

²⁶ Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979) 121.

reconfiguration of a divine order.²⁷ In this modified order, secularism self-consciously generated a dialectical other as part of its episteme – a *Muslim other* according to Abdelkebir Khatibi. Critiquing Orientalism as a fixed ontology, Khatibi characterizes it as “une unité solidaire entre l’essentialisme, le positivisme et la métaphysique” [an integral unity between essentialism, positivism and metaphysics].²⁸ He argues that the nineteenth century witnessed a replacement of God with “une démonie technique” [a technical demon], driven by Orientalism’s structural attraction to Islam as its dialectical other.²⁹

The disengagement of Islam from an oppositional model of Orientalism reveals the relationship of ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ discourses as co-constructed epistemes. In their literary refashioning of Islamic thought, the novels of al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, Assia Djebar, Driss Chraïbi and Maḥmūd al-Mas’adī posit Islam as a vehicle for understanding and challenging modern social phenomenon, and in so doing, they redefine modernity itself. This project then does not simply propose the inclusion of Islam as an elided source of modernity into an already existing model. Rather, I suggest a reframing of Islam – as well as modernity, imperialism and globalization – as shifting sites of confluence and even conflict.

²⁷ See Mathieu E. Courville, *Edward Said's Rhetoric of the Secular* (London & New York: Continuum Books, 2010) and William D. Hart, *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁸ Abdelkebir Khatibi, "L'orientalisme désorienté," in *Maghreb pluriel*, 122-3

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

Revolutionary Eschatology:

Islam and the End of Time in Waṭṭār's *al-Zilzāl*³⁰

تذهل المرضعة عما أرضعت. وتضع كل ذات حمل حملها. ويسكر الناس وما هم بسكارى. لا. إنما يذهب مدخر عما ادخر من زيت وسكرٍ وسميد ، ويضع كل ذي سلة سلته ، وكل ذي بضاعة بضاعته. ويسكت الناس لحظة عن الحديث. هذه هي صفة الزلزال في قسنطينة ، فالمرضعة ذاهلة عما ترضع بعد ، وهي في الشوارع تركض خلف المواد الغذائية. الأحمال في بطون بقرات إبليس هاته ، ليس أعزّ من خمس لترات زيتاً ، أو خمسة كيلو سكرًا. أما هؤلاء ، فأبي سكر أكثر مما هم فيه ، إنهم على ما يبدو ، في هذه الحال ، يهيمنون على وجوههم ، منذ أمد طويل.

The nursing female will be distracted from her nursling. Every pregnant female will abort her pregnancy. And people will be drunk but not in intoxication.

No. More likely, every hoarder of oil, sugar and semolina will abandon what he's hoarded. Everyone carrying a basket or shopping cart will drop it and everyone will stop talking for a moment. This is the description of The Earthquake of Doom for Constantine. The nursing female will be distracted from her nursling only after she runs through the streets chasing after food. All the fetuses in the stomachs of these cows of Satan are less valuable than five gallons of oil, or five pounds of sugar. And could these people possibly be drunker than they are now? They've been showing signs of drunkenness for a long time.

al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*³¹

Beginning with an invocation of the Qur'anic surah *al-Hajj* [The Pilgrimage], this passage from al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's 1974 novel *al-Zilzāl* [The Earthquake] resignifies Islamic eschatology in its portrayal of post-revolutionary Algeria.³² Invoking Constantine's 1947 earthquake, as well as

A version of this chapter was published in the *Journal of Arabic Literature* 42.2-3 (2011): 120-147.

¹Alternate spellings of the author's name include: Tahar Ouatar, Tahar Ouettar, Taher Wattar and Tahar Wattar. All English citations from *al-Zilzāl* reference the published William Granara English edition, though where indicated, I have made modifications to his translations to preserve certain nuances in the Arabic. Footnotes indicate the Arabic edition, followed by the Granara translation. I have used the following editions: al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl* (Beirut: al-Dar al-'Arabiyyah li-1-'Ulum, 2007) and *The Earthquake*, trans. William Granara (London: Saqi Books, 2000).

³¹ Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 83-4; *The Earthquake*, 88 (Translation Modified). I have modified the opening lines referencing the surah *al-Hajj*, replacing "suckling females" with "nursing females," "discharge her burden" with "abort her pregnancy," and "men" with "people" to indicate the gender neutrality. I have also substituted Granara's "heathen bitches" with "cows of Satan" per the Arabic.

³² Qur'an 22:2.

the Qur’anic foretelling of the earthquake of the Day of Resurrection, Waṭṭār represents the apocalypse through both prolepsis and analepsis. Satirically narrated through the perspective of the misanthropic Shaykh ‘Abd al-Majīd Bū al-Arwāḥ, the novel traces his return to the city of Constantine after an absence of sixteen years.³³ Bū al-Arwāḥ seeks to evade the nationalization of private property planned under the 1970s agrarian revolution by registering his extensive land holdings with distant relatives. His plans are thwarted, however, when he is confronted with Constantine’s transformation under Algerian socialism. Disturbed by the seeming dissolution of social hierarchies, Bū al-Arwāḥ is haunted by increasingly prescient images of the Earthquake of Doom. A caricature of the religious elite who prospered under French imperialism, Bū al-Arwāḥ employs the surah *al-Hajj* – which warns of the major signs of the apocalypse – to critique Algeria’s post-revolutionary socialist regime.

Waṭṭār seamlessly integrates the surah into Bū al-Arwāḥ’s monologue, even removing the Qur’anic vowelings. The referenced portion of *al-Hajj* reads as follows:

يَوْمَ تَرَوْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ وَتَضَعُ
كُلُّ ذَاتِ حَمَلٍ حَمْلَهَا وَتَرَى النَّاسَ سُكَرَىٰ وَمَا هُمْ
بِسُكَرَىٰ وَلَٰكِنَّ عَذَابَ اللَّهِ شَدِيدٌ ﴿٢﴾

The passage further shifts the tone of the surah by excluding the cautionary warning that opens it with: “One day you will see...” Not only does this signal Bū al-Arwāḥ’s self-appointed role of the messiah, but it also transforms the temporality of apocalyptic rhetoric. Bū al-Arwāḥ removes the surah from its moral context of spiritual accountability and inserts it instead within a material

³³ Bū al-Arwāḥ’s name is rendered as two words: *Bū* – a contraction of *Abū* meaning father – and *al-Arwāḥ* meaning ‘the souls.’ The telling name encapsulates Bū al-Arwāḥ’s perceived role as a spiritual saviour who warns of the looming end of times.

economy of consumption and greed. He further infuses the surah's symbolic representation of the apocalyptic end of life – invoked through its references to aborted fetuses and abandoned infants – with a markedly gendered critique of Algerian society. Such subtle manipulations of Qur'anic text are performed throughout the novel and contribute to Wattār's attempt to turn the Qur'an into a living literary discourse.

This chapter investigates the manner in which *al-Zilzāl*'s eschatological register allows the novel to overturn various historiographic, political as well as social orders and hierarchies, in order to challenge dominant narratives of Algerian national identity. My focus on Wattār's mobilization of Islamic eschatology emphasizes how the literary use of theological concepts can blur the boundaries between 'secular' and 'religious' forms of discourse, illustrating their dialogic relationship. In its broader theological sense, eschatology denotes an apocalyptic end of time, history or humanity. Islamic eschatology encompasses a complete reordering of the world through the foretold major and minor signs of the apocalypse, the Day of Resurrection [*Yawm al-Qiyāmah*], as well as the final judgment. However, Islamic theologians offer a diverse range of exegetical interpretations of Islamic eschatology.³⁴ While many emphasize the literal end of the world, some Sufi theologians interpret eschatology as a metaphysical end to reality and unification with the divine.³⁵ *Al-Zilzāl* integrates Islamic eschatology into both its thematic

³⁴ The most prominent exegetes of Islamic eschatology include: Muḥammad al-Bukhari (810–870), Abū Hamed Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazzali (1058-1111), Ibn al-Nafis (1213-1288) and Ismail ibn Kathīr (1301–1373). For a discussion of the Islamic eschatological tradition, see: David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 2002); Timothy Gianotti, *Al-Ghazali's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Ihya'* (Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill Press, 2001); Al-Ghazali, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife – Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-ma ba' dahu*, Book XL of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences – Ihya' ulum al-din*, trans. T.J Winter (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1989).

³⁵ A detailed discussion of Sufism, broadly defined as a mystical form of Islamic practice and piety, is beyond the scope of this chapter. For an overview of Sufism see: *Al-Qushayri, Principles of Sufism*, trans. B.R. Von Schegell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990); Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh

content as well as its narrative structure. The novel is replete with references to Islamic figures, events and symbols, in addition to its strategic incorporation of Qur'anic surahs and hadith.³⁶

The primary concepts of eschatology – namely the end of time, resurrection and states of limbo – here translate into an aesthetic lexicon that upends historical time, constructing narrative time and space anew in the pages of the novel.

My analysis of *al-Zilzāl's* eschatological motifs and structure expands on Mikhail Bakhtin's delineation of the eschatological chronotope in his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes towards a Historical Poetics." Bakhtin defines chronotopes as structuring principles for narrative time that demonstrate "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."³⁷ The eschatological chronotope manipulates representations of mythological, historical or religious events in order to enact historical inversions. It transforms present and past events through their literary insertion into a voided future time-space:

[T]he future is emptied out [...] The future is perceived as the end of everything that exists, as the end of all being (in its past and present forms) [...] Eschatology always sees the segment of a future separating the present from the end as lacking value; this separating segment of time loses its significance and interest, it is merely an unnecessary continuation of an indefinitely prolonged present.³⁸

In the eschatological tradition, the apocalypse is often interpreted as a linear trajectory towards an inevitable 'end' – of humanity, existence or the world. Apocalyptic rhetoric in *al-Zilzāl*,

University Press, 2007); and Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

³⁶ Hadith refers to sayings and practices ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad that were largely collected in the 8th and 9th centuries. While it is considered a distinct body of religious scripture from the Qur'an, hadith is highly regarded, particularly among orthodox schools of Islamic jurisprudence, as a valuable resource in Qur'anic exegesis, the establishment of shari'a [Islamic law] and *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence that builds on shari'a law].

³⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 84.

³⁸ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 148.

however, does not simply expose a totalizing end in itself. Rather than ordering history as a series of colonial ruptures, the novel's eschatological structure transforms the present into a suspended state of destruction, chaos and trauma bound to an emptied future. In so doing, it looks to free the present (and by extension the future) from the ideological projections into which it has been conscripted. By reworking the symbols and mythology of Islamic eschatology, I argue that *al-Zilzāl* stages a political, aesthetic and historiographic intervention into the very foundations of Algerian nationalist discourse.

Through *al-Zilzāl*'s eschatological framework, Waṭṭār unsettles a 'postcolonial' model of historical time. Rather than reading Algerian national history as tethered to a violent 130-year French occupation, bookended in the 'pre' and 'post' colonial, Waṭṭār demonstrates the mutual imbrication and structural affinities of these historical moments. The novel therefore resignifies the apocalyptic concept of 'the end' to illustrate the untenability of teleologically staged historical narratives. *Al-Zilzāl* critically investigates emerging discourses in late twentieth-century Algeria surrounding issues of national language, literature and identity. Specifically, it explores the deep history of Algerian nationalism, Arab socialism, nationalization, agricultural reform, Arabism [*urūbah*] and Islamism.³⁹ More crucially, the novel reads these movements in relation to early Islamic history, the Arab invasion of North Africa, the institutional reforms of the French colonial administration, and globalization.

³⁹ My use of 'Arabism' echoes James McDougall's definition of the term as "connoting a positive identification with 'being Arab' (culturally) and with 'Arab solidarity' (politically) and to denote the political programs organized around such (self-)identification." See James McDougall, "Dream of Exile, Promise of Home: Language, Education and Arabism in Algeria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 251-270, 266. A more neutral equivalent would be the term 'Arabness' which is favored by some scholars and more closely resembles the French *arabité*. I have opted for 'Arabism' because I believe it more precisely captures the social and political policies that promote 'Arabness' as such. Similarly, my use of the term 'Islamism' is not meant to imply any affinities with sensationalist representations of 'political Islam,' 'Pan-Islamism' or 'Islamic fundamentalism.' It merely indicates a cultural, social and historical identification with Islam as a source of religious identity.

“Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, Algeria is my homeland”⁴⁰

In order to contextualize the political nuances of *al-Zilzāl* it is crucial to frame the novel within a broader discussion of the history of Algerian nationalist discourse. As historian James McDougall argues, the modernist discourse of Algerian national identity borrowed in large part from the Algerian Salafi reformers who promoted a “unitary, undifferentiated and exalted model of community upon which the revolutionary order would come to rest.”⁴¹ *Al-Zilzāl* employs eschatological symbolism to unsettle precisely this purist ideology. This is revealed in the novel’s representation of the complex history of colonial-era pedagogy and language policy, the Islamic reformist movement, nationalist rhetoric, as well as post-revolutionary policies around education, Islam, agricultural and economic reform.

These issues play out in the novel against the heterogeneous history of Islam in Algeria. While the majority of the Muslim population is Sunni of the *Mālikī* school, there remain small *Ḥanafī* and *‘Ibādī* contingencies, as well as a minority community of schismatic *Khawārij*.⁴² Algeria also has a long tradition of Sufi brotherhoods, to which a number of the ‘ulamā’ themselves

⁴⁰ This was a popular nationalist slogan mobilized by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) during Algeria’s battle for independence.

⁴¹ James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 3.

⁴² *Mālikīs* represent one of four schools of orthodox *fiqh* in Sunni Islam along with the *Ḥanafīs*, *Shāfi‘īs*, and *Ḥanbalīs*. They believe that Islamic jurisprudence should be based on the Qur’an and the sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad – which is defined as including both hadith and the legal rulings of the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs – and the practices of the *Salaf*. The *Salafiyyah* are an orthodox sect of Islam referring to followers of the *Salaf* – the first three generations of Muslims known as *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* or the pious predecessors. They consisted of the *Ṣaḥābah* [Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad], the *Ṭabī‘ūn* [Followers of the Prophet Muḥammad] and *Ṭabī‘ al-Ṭabī‘ūn* [Followers of the Followers]. The practices, interpretations and exegetical writings of these three generations are considered doxa among the *Salafiyyah*.

belonged during the medieval period.⁴³ This delicate balance of ‘orthodox’ Sunni Islam with more localized iterations of Islamic practice, which included saint-reverence, was further disrupted by various French colonial policies.⁴⁴ A major figure signaling this history in Wattār’s novel is the Algerian reformer Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥāmid Bin Bādīs. One of the prominent reformers of the early twentieth century, Bin Bādīs (1889-1940) founded the Algerian Association of Muslim ‘Ulamā’ in 1931. He was also largely influenced by the Muslim reformist schools of the Mashriq to which he was exposed during his studies at Zaytūnah University in Tunis – particularly by the writings of Muḥammad ‘Abdu (1849-1905) and his student Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-97).⁴⁵ As Islamic sociologist Charles Kurzman explains:

Ibn Bādīs formulated a program that asserted the Arab and Islamic identity of Algerians, stressed Arabic and Islamic education, and prepared Algerians for independence from the French. In addition, he proposed a modernist interpretation of the Qur’an that attributed the decline of Islamic society to mystical practices, intellectual stagnation, disunity, and political despotism.⁴⁶

This rhetoric was largely spread through the reformist journals *al-Muntaqid* [The Critic] and *al-Shahāb* [The Meteor]. It also informed the pedagogical practices of the network of free Islamic and Qur’anic schools established by the association in order to provide an Arabic alternative to the French educational infrastructure.⁴⁷

⁴³ For a history of Sufism in Algeria, particularly the prominent Rahmaniyyah *ṭarīqah* [order] of the 19th century, refer to Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters – Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 138-168.

⁴⁴ See Leon Carl Brown, “The Islamic Reformist Movement in North Africa,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 2.1. (1994): 55-63, 56.

⁴⁵ On the relationship between the reformist schools of the Maghrib and Mashriq, see Charles Kurzman, ed. *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 93. It is worth noting that the Islamic Modernists Muḥammad ‘Abdu and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī were also concerned with the intersection of science and Islam. Their conceptualization of modernity linked Western progress to the early Islamic world, thereby reorienting the axis of modernity outside of a Eurocentric worldview. For more on the Islamic Modernists see: Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) and Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) 49-51.

⁴⁶ Kurzman, 93.

⁴⁷ The French educational system in Algeria was highly centralized and administered largely by the Jesuit missionaries *Pères Blancs* and *Soeurs Blanches*. Arabic was marginalized in the domains of education, cultural

Algeria's first independent president Ahmed Ben Bella (1962-1965) inaugurated the country's aggressive Arabicization [*ta'rib*] policy, primarily through the implementation of mandatory hours of Arabic study.⁴⁸ He also instituted a number of Soviet-influenced economic policies such as the nationalization of private industry and an agrarian reform policy.⁴⁹ Additional reforms emerged under president Houari Boumédiène (1965-1978) who shifted attention to urbanization and the industrial sectors of Algeria's economy, funded in large part through the nationalization of Algeria's oil industry. Boumédiène's *revolution culturelle* continued to emphasize Arabic and Islam as the primary vehicles of Algeria's modernization and its reinstatement to pre-colonial glory. While these reforms carried on the political projects initiated by the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) during the battle for independence, they privileged "an Algeria founded on ('pure') Arabic and ('pure') Islam [that] left little room for other languages – the Berber and Arabic dialects of the population – and cultural expression, including the everyday, lived Islam of both Berberophones and Arabophones."⁵⁰

Under both Ben Bella and Boumédiène, the rhetoric of the Algerian reformists was apparent in the state's self-fashioning as a 'technocratic orthodoxy' that fused together religious authority

production as well as state bureaucracy, and its instruction largely fell under the jurisdiction of Islamic schools or madrasahs. For more on the pedagogical practices of these Qur'anic schools see: Brown, 59 and Kurzman, 93. An overview of France's policies with respects to education and language policy is offered in Farid Aitsiselmi and Dawn Marley's "The role and status of the French language in North Africa," in *Studies in French Applied Linguistics* ed. Dalila Ayoun (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2008). The data they reference is from M. Benrabah, *Langue et pouvoir en Algérie: histoire d'un traumatisme linguistique* (Paris: Séguire, 1999) 79.

⁴⁸ Farid Aitsiselmi and Dawn Marley, "French language," 197.

⁴⁹ Phillip Chiviges Naylor, *France and Algeria: a History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 2000) 56.

⁵⁰ James McDougall, "Myth and Counter-Myth: 'The Berber' as National Signifier in Algerian Historiographies," *Radical History Review* Issue 86 (Spring 2003): 66-88, 68.

and the promise of modernization.⁵¹ *Al-Zilzāl*'s eschatological register reconfigures precisely this double invocation of a glorious Islamic past, with a future of progress and development. Reformist rhetoric was further reflected in the very model of Algerian socialism that *al-Zilzāl* critiques for its blatant contradictions. This political constellation entails what Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui refers to as *double ideologization*: the manner in which ideologies, particularly Marxist, simultaneously became assimilated, 'Arabized,' and prone to dogmatism.⁵² The post-revolutionary government thus "made itself legitimate by claiming that it alone could do both in upholding religion and in modernizing the country. The intercessor between God and development is no longer a saint, a prophet, or a mufti, but rather, the state apparatus."⁵³ Indeed, one could argue that there is a certain structural parallelism between this technocratic orthodoxy and the emergence of Orientalism as defined by both Edward Saïd and Abdelkebir Khatibi. For as Saïd demonstrates, orientalism's very authority was derived from a restructuring of the religious order, such that God was replaced by the secular sciences and the cult of modernity.⁵⁴ The very need to fortify the state apparatus with the authority of religion (specifically *Mālikī* Sunni Islam) can therefore be read dialogically with the pervasive colonial infrastructure created under French rule. Both hinge on colonial teleologies that envision a future modernity, precisely the framing of historical time that becomes unraveled in *Waṭṭār*'s novel.

⁵¹ Jean-Claude Vatin, "Revival in the Maghreb: Islam as an Alternative Political Language," in *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1982) 233.

⁵² See Abdallah Laroui: *La crise des intellectuels arabes: traditionalism ou historicisme?* (Paris: Librairie Française Maspero, 1970) 106-7.

⁵³ Vatin, 233.

⁵⁴ Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 121 and Abdelkebir Khatibi, "L'orientalisme désorienté," *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denöel, 1983) 122-3.

Narrative Apocalypse

Born to an *Amazigh* family in Sedrata in eastern Algeria, al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār (1936-2010) was a prominent journalist, critic and writer, as well as an active member of the FLN.⁵⁵ While his primary spoken language was *Tamazight* and politically Waṭṭār was a notable defender of Berberophone languages, his formal education was almost exclusively in Arabic. He began his studies at an Islamic madrasah and eventually moved to Constantine in 1952 to study Islamic jurisprudence at the Ben Bādīs Institute. Waṭṭār continued his religious education at Zaytūnah University in Tunis between 1954 and 1956, eventually leaving the university to join the ranks of the FLN. Though initially formed as a revolutionary body that led the resistance movement in Algeria's war of independence (1954-1962), the FLN controversially emerged as the dominant and only constitutionally acknowledged party in Algeria's post-independence government. The party fused together three primary ideological tenets: Algerian nationalism, socialism and Islamism. Following independence, Waṭṭār moved back to Algeria where he assumed the position of FLN Party Controller. While he held his post until 1984, Waṭṭār's political leanings eventually diverged from the FLN's official party line, and he was increasingly marginalized for his Marxist views – a conflict that is played out in Waṭṭār's 1974 novel *al-Lāz* [The Ace].⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The *Imazighen* (singular: *Amazigh*) are the indigenous populations that inhabited North Africa west of the Nile valley prior to the Arab conquests of the 7th century. Between the 7th and 12th centuries, the Imazighen – who spoke a variety of dialects from the Afro-Asiatic language family including *Tamazight* – were dispersed throughout various parts of the Sahara.

⁵⁶ One of the novel's protagonists, Zaydān, is investigated by the FLN for his involvement in the Algerian Communist Party, which is seen as a threat to the unity of Algeria's anti-colonial nationalist efforts. For a more in-depth discussion of the novel *al-Lāz* see: Debbie Cox, "The Novels of Tahar Wattar: Command or Critique?" *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 28 No. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 94-109 and "Symbolism and Allegory in the Algerian Arabic Novel," *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (1998): 193-204; Ronald A. T. Judy, "On the Politics of Global Language, or Unfungible Local Value," *boundary 2* Vol. 24 No. 2 (Summer 1997): 101-143; and William Granara, "Mythologising the Algerian War of Independence: Tahir Wattar and the Contemporary Algerian Novel," *The Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 4 No. 3 (Autumn 1999): 1-14.

Deeply invested in Algeria's language politics, Waṭṭār infamously stated when asked by an interviewer whether the murder of the Francophone novelist Tahar Djaout in 1993 was a loss for Algeria, that it was “a loss for his children, a loss for his wife, and a loss for France...”⁵⁷ Djaout's murder was among the first of a wave of violent killings targeting Algerian journalists and intellectuals, most of whom were Francophone, that took place during the 1990s.⁵⁸ While the exact details of his murder remain a mystery, many believe it to be the work of the militant Islamist organization *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA). Due to his controversial statement, Waṭṭār's works have often been read as promoting an Arabist or Islamist agenda.⁵⁹ While I argue that *al-Zilzāl* reveals the ambivalent and complex position that Arabism and Islamism occupy in Algerian history, it is necessary to contextualize this within Waṭṭār's broader views on Francophonie. During the interview Waṭṭār explained that it was precisely over “the issue of the Arabic language and national identity” that he and Djaout had a falling out. He continues: “Tahar Djaout was mistaken when he considered the French language to be an Algerian and national language. French, in Algeria, is the language of the administration, the language of the elite [...] This is one form through which French colonialism continues and it is our right to refuse this. It is [in fact] our responsibility to refuse it.” Although *al-Zilzāl* contests the unilateral institutionalization of Arabism and Islamism as statist policies, Waṭṭār's denial of Tahar Djaout

⁵⁷ This comment is from an interview that aired on the Franco-German station *Arte* in 1994 and over the BBC in the U.K. All references to the interview are from my translation of the Arabic, available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3RREPoRp0A>.

⁵⁸ According to the organization Reporters sans frontières, at least 57 journalists were murdered between the years 1993 and 1997. See Julija Šukys, *Silence is Death: The Life and Work of Tahar Djaout* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007) 29.

⁵⁹ Some examples include: Lahouari Addi's "Les Intellectuels qu'on assassine," *Esprit* (January 1995): 130-38, and “Algeria and the Dual Image of the Intellectual,” *The Century of the Intellectual: From the Dreyfus Affair to the Rushdie Affair*, eds. J. Jennings and T. Kemp-Welch (London & New York: Routledge, 1997). The controversy is also discussed in: Patricia Geesey, “Exhumation and History: Tahar Djaout's *Les Chercheurs d'os*,” *The French Review* Vol. 70 No. 2 (December 1996): 271-279, 278; Madeleine Dobie, “Francophone Studies and the Linguistic Diversity of the Maghreb,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23.1-2 (2003): 32-40, 35 and Debbie Cox, “Command,” 95.

as a ‘legitimate’ voice of the Algerian nation simultaneously renders legible Waṭṭār’s refusal of a Francophone legacy for post-revolutionary Algerian national identity.

While there is limited English language scholarship on al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, the work of William Granara, Debbie Cox and Ronald Judy are significant contributions that further situate Waṭṭār’s oeuvre and politics. Cox’s analysis of Waṭṭār’s fiction emphasizes his political and religious affiliations, in addition to the state’s regulatory influence on the literary milieu of the time. She argues that the anticipation of government censorship shaped many of the structural and thematic motifs of his fiction. Cox thus reads the political ambivalence of Waṭṭār’s writing as simultaneously symptomatic of and in opposition to the state ideologies of 1970s Algeria, a time he would come to revisit in *al-Zilzāl*. In her reading of *al-Lāz* for example, Cox highlights the novel’s representation of the conflicts and contradictions that plagued the FLN surrounding questions of “unity, identity, the role of religion, and history itself,” a theme continued in both *al-Zilzāl* and Waṭṭār’s 1975 novel *Urs Baghl* [A Mule’s Wedding].⁶⁰

Although Cox’s analysis offers a productive lens for understanding the manner in which state ideologies and policies can shape cultural production, my focus on *al-Zilzāl*’s eschatological framework emphasizes Waṭṭār’s political project to resignify Algerian nationalist history – a crucial aspect of his literary oeuvre that cannot be overlooked. In this respect, my argument builds on William Granara’s analysis of Waṭṭār’s fiction as mythological reworkings of Algerian national history. Granara argues that Waṭṭār’s novels incorporate events and rhetoric surrounding the Algerian war of independence, while simultaneously reimagining Algeria

⁶⁰ Cox, “Command,” 99.

through “mythological themes of quest, voyage, descent into the underworld, rites of passage from youth (innocence) to adulthood (experience), death and resurrection, hero-births, withdrawal and apotheosis.”⁶¹ In addition to touching on the prevalence of Islamic motifs in Waṭṭār’s writing, Granara’s reading – which expands on Northrop Frye’s taxonomy of mythology – taps into the structural and thematic significance of how time is both represented and generated in his works. While I build on Granara’s exploration of mythology in Waṭṭār’s writing, my analysis focuses more specifically on *al-Zilzāl*’s resignification of eschatological symbolism. I argue that it is precisely through the novel’s eschatological movement between the past, present and future that Waṭṭār critically reimagines early Algerian history, French imperialism, the Algerian war of independence, as well as the post-revolutionary state.

Al-Zilzāl’s eschatological register resonates in both the apocalyptic representation of Constantine as a site of ruin, decay and death, as well as in the tormented temporality through which Bū al-Arwāḥ navigates this dystopic space in the compressed span of one afternoon. The novel is composed of a polyphonic array of narrative voices and temporal spaces that derail any sense of either a linear narrative or singular subject. Bū al-Arwāḥ’s account is highly fragmented and alternates between dialogue, stream of consciousness, memories, dreams and hallucinations. This is further interrupted by the frequent intrusion of voices representing the masses of Algerian society. The novel’s constant shifts between speakers, genres of speech, past and present, as well as reality and fantasy, generate a disorienting narrative structure. Like Bū al-Arwāḥ’s consciousness, the city of Constantine occupies a threshold past-future temporality – it is both a relic of an atavistically imagined pre-colonial past, and a haunting reminder of utopian colonial

⁶¹ Granara focuses on the novels: *al-Lāz*, *al-Zilzāl* and *al-Sham’ah wa-l-dahālīz* [The Candle and the Underground Tunnels]. William Granara, “Mythologising,” 1-2.

modernity gone awry.⁶² To return to his work on time and narrative, Bakhtin theorizes the threshold as a physical, psychological, social or temporal site of liminality and transgression. Due to the interconnected nature of narrative time and space, the threshold is also linked to our very understanding of consciousness in the novel.⁶³ *Al-Zilzāl*'s eschatological chronotope functions precisely within a threshold economy in so far as it generates a temporal and spatial suspension that brings together worlds – historical and mythical, past and future – in the time and space of an Algerian afternoon.

Al-Zilzāl achieves this sense of suspension as it shuttles between a variety of discursive traditions, as well as their attendant historical and ideological narratives. The framework of eschatology allows the novel to demonstrate the multiplicity but also simultaneity of cultural, linguistic, political and religious influences animating Algerian history. To follow Bakhtin further, we can read these divergent registers and discourses as so many hybrid utterances that still emerge from a single locus of enunciation.⁶⁴ Intentionally distorting the boundaries between various kinds of speech, *al-Zilzāl* undermines authoritative historical narratives, state-endorsed social and political configurations, as well as narrative genres and structures.

⁶² On the subject of the threshold, particularly in relation to Islamic thought, anthropologist Stefania Pandolfo's work on the Qur'anic concept of the *Bazakh* is rather relevant. Focusing on Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn Khaldun, Pandolfo reads the *Barzakh* as a "heterological space [...] a partition, a bar or barrier, an isthmus between two; the intermediate zone between two states or things [...] both a limit and an *entre-deux*, the *entre-deux* of the limit: something that stands between two things, both separating and joining them, combining the attributes of both." Stefania Pandolfo, *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 9/188. Ebrahim Moosa also explores the concept of the threshold or *dihltz* in his book *Ghazālī and the Poetics of the Imagination* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁶³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 167-172.

⁶⁴ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) 60-61.

While the novel's hybrid structure plays an important role, *al-Zilzāl*'s use of different registers of Arabic likewise challenges the institutionalization of Arabism and Islamism as discursive orthodoxies that exclude other possible iterations of Algerian national identity. Bū al-Arwāḥ's thoughts and speech are almost exclusively delivered in Qur'anic and classical Arabic, standing in marked contrast with the masses that drown out his Qur'anic recitations with their discussions of poverty, corruption and globalization. Their dialogue is rendered in a modified Modern Standard Arabic that is infused with the rhythm, cadence and inflection of colloquial Algerian Arabic. This distances Bū al-Arwāḥ's Qur'anic Arabic from the everyday lived discourse of the Algerian social body, a distance the novel compels its readers to mediate. In so doing, *al-Zilzāl* presents a heteroglossic rather than binary model of Arabic that encompasses a wide array of registers of speech. Furthermore, Bū al-Arwāḥ's self-interested use of the Qur'an and hadith to justify his abusive relationships with women and expand his land holdings, demonstrates the ability of religious discourse to be manipulated.⁶⁵ The Arabic language is thus the form of official discourse, as well as the very currency of its undoing.⁶⁶ Waṭṭār's novel lays out these contradictions most explicitly in Bū al-Arwāḥ's simultaneous externalization and internalization of the Qur'anic vision of the end of times.

⁶⁵ This conforms to Waṭṭār's representation of Bū al-Arwāḥ as an unreliable narrator. Such archetypal figures feature prominently in satirical Arabic literature of both the classical and modern period. Scholar David Fieni for example compares the 'picaresque' Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ with Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī's 9th century *Maqāmāt*. "Decadent Orientalisms: Configuring the Decay of Colonial Modernity in French and Arabic," Diss. (Los Angeles: University of California, 2006) 116.

⁶⁶ As Cox demonstrates, this also features prominently in Waṭṭār's earlier novel *al-Lāz* where he hybridizes various registers of Arabic (Qur'anic, vernacular and Modern Standard) and resignifies Qur'anic words to connote more secular, nationalist or political meanings. Debbie Cox, *Politics, Language and Gender in the Algerian Arabic Novel* (London: Edwin Mellon Press, 2002) 108.

Engaging with the long history of travel writing in the Arabic literary tradition, *al-Zilzāl* uses geography and time to reorient social, historical and political mythologies.⁶⁷ In this regard, the novel integrates a variety of tropes from the classical Arabic tradition ranging from the genre of travel writing [*riḥlah*], to the archetype of the corrupt shaykh.⁶⁸ In addition to Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ's journey from Algiers to Constantine being a *riḥlah* or voyage as Granara argues, it also figures as a hijrah. The novel here plays with the Qur'anic surah that opened this chapter, *al-Ḥajj*, which references the journey of the Prophet Muḥammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. As miriam cooke argues, the Prophet's hijrah is rhetorically invoked in literary travel tropes in part because "Islam's insistence on actual and symbolic travel allows for simultaneous self-positionings in the local and global and then back to another local, in the present and the past, and then back to a transformed present."⁶⁹ Indeed Waṭṭār resignifies the surah, demonstrating Bū al-Arwāḥ's spiritual journey as one towards religious disillusionment rather than enlightenment.

Constantine, the urban backdrop of Bū al-Arwāḥ's hijrah, provides the ideal setting for *al-Zilzāl*'s apocalyptic unfolding. Situated on an elevated plateau and framed by a deep ravine, Constantine is a city intersected by seven bridges. In the novel, Constantine is suspended between unfulfilled dreams of colonial grandeur and the harsh reality of post-revolutionary

⁶⁷ This tradition is discussed extensively in Fathi A. El-Shihibi, *Travel Genre in Arabic Literature: A Selective Literary and Historical Study* (Florida: Dissertation.com, 2006); *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the 17th Century*, ed. Nabil Matar (New York & London: Routledge, 2002); *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild (London: Saqi Books, 1998).

⁶⁸ In his critical introduction to the English translation of the novel, William Granara makes the observation that "[t]he basic structure of the novel is the journey (*riḥlah*), a popular subgenre in Arabic literature in all its phases." Granara, *The Earthquake*, 18. This point is further discussed in Granara, "Mythologising," 7.

⁶⁹ miriam cooke, "Women, Religion, and the Postcolonial Arab World," *Cultural Critique* No. 45 (Spring, 2000): 150-184, 158.

contradiction, as the promise of modernity has been replaced by the destruction of the very idea of a future:

هذا هو شأن العوالم السفلى. تتردى. تتردى ، حتى تدوب. حتى لا يبقى فيها سوى سفليتها...

This is what happens to every netherworld [*al-‘alāwin al-safalā*]. It deteriorates, crumbles, until nothing of it remains except its lowliness [*saflītihā*].⁷⁰

Structured over seven chapters – each named after one of Constantine’s bridges – the novel’s temporality mirrors the spatiality of the city. Relics of the colonial French past, the architecturally impressive suspension bridges were constructed as part of the French geo-political domination of Algeria.⁷¹ The bridges function as physical signposts along the way to Constantine’s foretold demise. Beginning with *Bab al-Qantarah*, the reader then moves to *Sīdī M’sid*, *Sīdī Rashīd*, *Majāz al-Ghanam* [The Bridge at Flock Crossing], *Jisr al-Maṣ‘ad* [the Elevator Bridge], *Jisr al-Shayāṭīn* [Demons’ Bridge], and finally *Jisr al-Hawā* [the Bridge of the Abyss]. The successive movement across these threshold bridges mirrors the eschatological overtones of the novel, which ends with the psychotic breakdown of Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ and the possible demise of the city.

As Bū al-Arwāḥ traverses the city of Constantine he is troubled by what he perceives as a perverted social(ist) order that unites people of all classes, ethnicities and genders. He reads this social upheaval as symptomatic of the disarray Algeria had fallen into after the departure of the French, who maintained order through a clearly demarcated social hierarchy. He is also highly critical of socialist programs that allow for unchecked social mobility: affordable medical care,

⁷⁰ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 112; *The Earthquake*, 109.

⁷¹ The French colonial restructuring of Algeria resonates with the ‘Hausmannization’ of Paris in the 1860’s. On the geo-spatial policies of French colonial urbanization, architecture and city planning, see: *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City Through Text and Image*, eds. Zeynep Celik, Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Terpak (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2009).

social welfare and even public education. With an almost ethnographic focus on identifying phenotypes and dialects, Bū al-Arwāḥ criticizes the hybridization of the city and interprets it as a sign of the coming apocalypse:

الوجوه أيضاً تتميز في قسنطينة. الملامح ، تختلف من شخص لآخر ، القامات كذلك. زمن الاستعمار ، كانت الملامح عامة: أوروبية ، وعربية. أما الآن ، فلا. ملامح الشاوي الصاعد من أعين البيضاء (أو من أعين مليلة) ، أو (باتنة) ، أو (خنشلة) ، أو (شلغوم العيد)... الملامح ، كالروائح ، تعلن عن نفسها بنفسها ، بشكل صارخ في هذه المدينة.

The faces are all distinct in Constantine. Facial features vary from one person to another, as do people's physiques. At the time of the occupation, features were more generic: Arab and European, but not now. Today, you can tell the difference between the Shawi Berber from 'Ain al-Baida' or 'Ain M'Lila, from Batina, Khanshala or Shalghoum al-'Id [...] Their facial features, like their smells, reveal their true identities in loud screams that echo throughout the city.⁷²

Bū al-Arwāḥ's recent awareness of Constantine's diversity reveals a reality previously occluded, at least for him, by the racial dynamics of French imperialism; Algeria is not simply 'Arab.' His emphasis on the ethnic diversity of the *Imazighen* not only demonstrates the heterogeneity of Algeria's 'Berber' populations, but also their increased presence throughout the country. While Bū al-Arwāḥ's surprise exposes his own perceptual blindness, it also reflects the evolving social and economic realities of post-revolutionary Algeria, fueled in large part by socialist policies that nationalized and centralized industrial development and agriculture.

Al-Zilzāl's representation of Constantine's hybridized social makeup – as with Djébar's *L'Amour, la Fantasia*, which I discuss in Chapter Two – undermines the very idea of cultural homogeneity within the diverse ethno-linguistic context of Algeria. Furthermore, Wattār's satirical portrayal of Bū al-Arwāḥ's inability to reconcile himself with post-revolutionary

⁷² Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 10-11; *The Earthquake*, 29 (Translation Modified). I have replaced Granara's "different" with "distinct" to emphasize Bū al-Arwāḥ's reading of physical markers of race. I have also replaced "odours" with the neutral "smells" and kept the Arabic "features were more generic" to highlight the racial bifurcation of occupier/occupied during the colonial era.

Algerian socialism calls into question the complicity of the religious elite in conscripting Algerian national identity. More crucially, *al-Zilzāl*'s use of eschatological symbolism allows Waṭṭār to critique these modes of thinking from within the very discourses themselves. Through the novel's complex reworking of the Qur'an, Arabic and lived Islam, Waṭṭār seems to be proposing a more nuanced vision of the role of Islam and Arabic in post-independence Algeria that breaks away from atavistic understandings of religious consciousness and national identity. To illustrate, in the below passage Bū al-Arwāḥ explains Constantine's fate as the epicenter of the Earthquake of Doom by invoking the country's repeated occupations:

لعل هذا هو تاريخ المدينة من يوم كانت. انتهت بانتهاة البربر وابتدأت بابتداء الرومان ، وظلت تبدئ وتنتهي بين البربر والرومان ومختلف الأجناس حتى جاء العرب. استأنفت تاريخها معهم حتى جاء الأتراك. انتهت وابتدأت ، حتى جاء الفرنسيون. وها هي تنتهي وتبدئ من جديد. إن الزلزال الذي يضع حداً لحياة هذه العاهرة لم يحدث بعد. وحين يحدث ينتقم من كل ماضيها الأسود الملطخ.

Maybe that's the history of the city from the first day. It ended with the end of the Berbers and started with the beginning of the Romans. It continued beginning and ending between Berbers and Romans and other peoples until the Arabs came. The city resumed its history with them until the Turks arrived. It ended and began until the French came. And now it is ending and beginning all over again. The earthquake which is going to be the demise of this whore of a city has not come yet. When it does, it will do so with a vengeance against its dark and soiled past.⁷³

The passage's emphasis on Algeria's cyclical colonial occupations touches on the temporal manipulations of the eschatological framework. Algerian history is represented as continuous iterations of endings and beginnings, repeated until the city's inevitable demise. Bū al-Arwāḥ also describes Constantine within the sexual economy of prostitution, claiming that the apocalypse will come in order to avenge its sordid colonial past. While Waṭṭār seems to be

⁷³ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 75-76; *The Earthquake*, 81 (Translation Modified). My translation modifications emphasize the cycles of ending/beginning referenced in the Arabic, and include: "the end of the Berbers," "the beginning of the Romans," and "It ended and began until the French came." I have also maintained the order of "And now it is ending and beginning all over again" over Granara's "And here we are beginning and ending once again" because it captures the inverted eschatological temporality. Finally, I have replaced Granara's "sordid" with "dark and soiled" as it echoes the darkness and filth imagery throughout the novel.

contesting a ‘pure’ Algerian ethnic, linguistic or religious genealogy, it is worth noting that he begins the historical narrative with the destruction of the Berbers. In light of Waṭṭār’s *Amazigh* background and vocal support of the Berberophone community, as well as his choice to write in Arabic and study Islamic jurisprudence, no singular form of cultural self-identification is privileged here. However, his animosity to the French colonial legacy is sharply palpable in the novel’s critical representation of Bū al-Arwāḥ’s nostalgia for French rule and the bourgeois privilege it afforded his class.

The Soviet influence on Algeria’s post-revolutionary model of Arab nationalism is one of Bū al-Arwāḥ’s primary targets in *al-Zilzāl*. His fervent defense of Arabism and Islamism borrows from the reformist rhetoric of Shaykh Ben Bādīs under whose tutelage his character studied. Like Ben Bādīs, Bū al-Arwāḥ proposes an orthodox model of Islamic jurisprudence that relies on the Qur’an, hadith, and practices of the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*. However, whereas Ben Bādīs situated his reformist rhetoric vis-à-vis French colonialism, Bū al-Arwāḥ romanticizes French rule. He blames all of Algeria’s challenges on the new socialist regime, which he argues has deviated from the proper Islamic path:

الدين الإخلاص للسلف. وكل بدعة ضلال.

Religion is being loyal to our ancestors [*al-Salaf*]. Any reckless innovation [*bid‘ah*] is an aberration [*ḍalāl*].⁷⁴

Mobilizing Islamist rhetoric, Bū al-Arwāḥ distinguishes between the model of Algerian nationalism promoted by the Ben Bādīs school of reformers, and that of the post-revolutionary state. Moreover, he historically situates the reformist school as the ‘true’ Arab people:

⁷⁴ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 12; *The Earthquake*, 31 (Translation Modified). I have modified Granara’s translation to signal Bū al-Arwāḥ’s specificity of “Salaf” rather than “ancestors” and the harsher “aberration” over “leads us astray.”

إبن خلدون يخلد في النار على عبارته ، فالعرب الذين جاؤوا بالدين الحنيف ، لا يمكن أن يكونوا شعاع لخراب الحياة... لكن ها هو الواقع يصدقه ، فلم يقتصروا على تخريب الحياة فقط ، وإنما انطلقوا إلى الدين أيضاً يخربونه.

- العربي يبني بيد ويخرب بأخرى.

[...] هؤلاء ليسوا عرباً. وليسوا بربراً ، ولا حتى وندالاً أو تتاراً أو مغولاً أو أقباطاً. وهؤلاء إما أن يكونوا روساً سلطهم الله على البلد ليحطموا مقوماتها ، وإما أن يكونوا بلا أصل ولا فصل ولا دين أو ملّة ، فيوم كنا نعمل بدافع العروبة والدين ، وبضمير العربي الحر ، إلى جانب ابن باديس وأهل الفضل والعلم من صحابته وتلاميذه كنا نعمر ولا نخربن نعمر الألسنة بلغة الضاد ، لغة القرآن الكريم ، نعمر الأقدمة بالدين ، بالحديث والسنة ، وما كان عليه السلف.

Ibn Khaldūn will burn in hell for what he wrote, that it was the Arabs who brought the one, true, monotheistic religion, and that it is impossible that they symbolize the destruction of life. But the fact of the matter is that they not only destroyed life, they destroyed religion as well. The Arabs build with one hand and destroy with the other. [...] These are not Arabs, nor are they Berbers, nor Vandals, nor Tatars, Mongols or Copts. They are either Russians whom God has sent to devastate our land, or they are people without roots, religion or denomination. When we as Arabs, pure and free of mind, labored to defend Arabism and our religion, alongside Ben Bādīs and his companions and disciples, men of nobility and learning, we did so as builders and not destroyers. We spread the pure Arabic language, the language of the Holy Qur'an, and we opened people's hearts to the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad [hadith and sunna] and the sacred customs of the Salaf.⁷⁵

Bū al-Arwāḥ's animosity towards the Tunisian polymath Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) stems from his disagreement with Ibn Khaldūn's universal glorification of Arabs. Bū al-Arwāḥ believes that post-revolutionary Algeria is governed and populated by an entirely different genus of 'Arab.' His alignment of modern Algerians with Russians or people without racial or religious affiliation, demonstrates his fear of Soviet-influenced Arab nationalism. More crucially, Bū al-Arwāḥ sees the socialist policies of the new regime as incompatible with the true principles of Arabism and Islamism espoused by Ben Bādīs and his followers: the promotion of the pure Arabic language [*Lughat al-Dād*], Qur'anic Arabic [*Lughat al-Qur'an al-Karīm*], the practices of the Prophet Muḥammad [hadith and sunnah] and the conventions of the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*. What is striking about his speech on the decline of Algerian civilization is the relative invisibility of

⁷⁵ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 33-4; *The Earthquake*, 47 (Translation Modified). I have replaced Granara's "race, religion or state" with "roots, religion or denomination" to emphasize the religious overtones, and "ancestors" with "Salaf."

French imperialism. Bū al-Arwāḥ cites the major groups who had an occupying presence in the region – the Arabs, Berbers, Vandals, Tatars, Mongols and Copts – with the exception of the French. This touches on a critical point in Bū al-Arwāḥ’s revisionist history. Although Ben Bādīs’ rhetoric was largely anti-colonial in its condemnation of French decadence, the Algerian reformist movement of the 1930s also generated an elite class of religious scholars who prospered under French rule. Bū al-Arwāḥ’s family lineage is testimony to the various collusions that helped facilitate France’s occupation of Algeria. From his great-grandfather through his father, his patrilineage entails cooperating with the French in exchange for illustrious military honors and large quantities of land. This anti-clerical critique of the ‘ulamā’ and religious elite also features prominently in the work of Assia Djebar and Driss Chraïbi, which I will return to at length.

While Bū al-Arwāḥ’s criticisms of Algerian socialism are largely inspired by his material self-interest, they also reveal the contradictory logic of the new state. *Al-Zilzāl* highlights the incongruity of post-revolutionary socialist rhetoric and reforms, with the reality of the country’s rampant capitalism. Bū al-Arwāḥ maps the Qur’anic rhetoric of the apocalypse onto the growing overconsumption and waste that plague the city of Constantine:

لعلّ إحساس الناس المتواصل بالزلزال يدفعهم إلى إنفاق كل قطعة نقود تقع بين أيديهم ، وإلى التهافت على كل بضاعة تنزل. أنهم ينهبون لعلهم ، كالمحكوم عليهم بالإعدام.

Perhaps it’s the incessant feeling of the earthquake that compels people to spend every bit of money that falls into their hands and to snap-up every good that hits the market. They pillage away like criminals sentenced to die.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 35; *The Earthquake*, 48 (Translation Modified). I have modified Granara’s translation by maintaining the materiality of “goods” over “anything in sight.” I have also removed “looting in a mad rush against what little time they have left,” and retranslated it as “They pillage away...”

Wattār goes further, offsetting his character Bū al-Arwāḥ’s anti-capitalist critique by linking the country’s capitalist consumption with the French economic investment in Algerian infrastructure under the occupation:

ملاى بالبضائع ، وتخترن فيها ملايين الأطنان من المون ، ومئات الآلاف من قواريسر الغاز ، وملايين الملايين من أطنان رصاص وإسمنت القنوات والمجاري [...] من هذا العالم السفلي ، حيث تناسب المياه ، هاربة في كل قطرة من قطراتها ، بذرة من طين وأكلاس الصخرة المسكينة.

It is jam-packed with merchandise and loaded with millions of tons of goods, hundreds of thousands of gas bottles, millions and millions of tons of lead and cement, canals and pipes [...] From this netherworld the water seeps out, and escaping in its every drop is a particle of earth and a fragment of this wretched rock.⁷⁷

The very materiality of the list highlights the geographic restructuring of Algeria according to French colonial policies of expansion, settlement and development, a legacy of an older order romanticized by his conflicted character Bū al-Arwāḥ as the novel charts his hijrah through Constantine.

Aborted Pasts, Sterile Futures

During the Friday prayer that Bū al-Arwāḥ attends immediately upon arriving in Constantine, the sermon is on the Qur’an’s description of the Earthquake of Doom. The Imam employs the image of destruction and upheaval to describe the moral implications of the end of times:

الذهول ، والهلع ، وامتلاء النفس باللون الداكن ، تلكم هي الحالة التي وصف بها تعالى ، قيام الساعة ، وهى حالة شاء تعالى أن يخصّ بها الزلزال الذي استعاره سبحانه للتعبير عن قيام الساعة.

Disorientation, terror, and the filling of the soul with darkness. This is how Almighty God has described the condition at the final hour, and the Almighty has chosen to use the earthquake to allegorically illustrate that final hour.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 37; *The Earthquake*, 50-1 (Translation Modified). I have replaced “junk” with the more neutral “merchandise.”

⁷⁸ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 14-15; *The Earthquake*, 33 (Translation Modified). I have modified Granara’s translation of this passage significantly to indicate the Imam’s emphasis on the passage’s ‘allegorical’ use of the earthquake. I have also replaced “confusion, restlessness” with “terror,” and “dark shadow” with “darkness.”

The Imam here invokes the Qur'an's metaphoric use of the earthquake to describe a more spiritual and psychological experience. He even uses the literary term *isti'ārah* – meaning metaphor or allegory – to demonstrate its figurative use in the surah. It is Bū al-Arwāḥ who interprets the passage literally and envisions an actual earthquake destroying Algeria. Even though Bū al-Arwāḥ interprets the earthquake physically, he himself experiences it psychically, spiritually and ethically as precisely a darkness invading his soul [*al-lawn al-dākin*]. Bū al-Arwāḥ complains of a viscous liquid [*al-māddah al-sā'ilah*] that spreads throughout his body:

اللون الداكن يتحرك في القلب ، بل المادة السائلة ، تشرع في الذوبان. الحرارة ترتفع. الركبتان يسارع إليهما الوهن. العنق يودّ التلوي. الرأس فوقه ثقل. الذراعان تصبحان عبأً كبيراً على الكتفين.

The darkness was spreading in his heart. That viscous fluid was melting. It was getting hotter. He was growing weak in the knees. His neck was getting stiff and his head was pounding. He felt an enormous weight on his shoulders.⁷⁹

In these moments Bū al-Arwāḥ enters an epileptic-like trance and is often driven to violent thoughts and acts. In line with *al-Zilzāl*'s eschatological register, the novel uses the grotesque and the corporeal to reconfigure the world both symbolically and materially, thereby inverting social and political hierarchies.⁸⁰ While Bū al-Arwāḥ manipulates religious discourse to serve his own personal and financial interests, it is ultimately the Qur'anic surah that turns on him. The Day of Reckoning forces Bū al-Arwāḥ to confront his past and ultimately be defeated by his former indiscretions, both ethical and religious. As Cox astutely observes, “[t]hat this critique [of the religious elite] is expressed in Bu al-Arwah’s Quranic language functions to subvert the

⁷⁹ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 82-3; *The Earthquake*, 87 (Translation Modified). I have replaced Granara’s “The dark shadow was moving inside him” with the slightly less poetic “The darkness was spreading in his heart” to maintain Wattar’s image of the gradual colonization of Bū al-Arwāḥ’s body and soul by this darkness.

⁸⁰ This resembles Bakhtin’s delineation of the Rabelaisian chronotope, whose primary aim is to “destroy and rebuild the entire false picture of the world, to sunder the false hierarchal links between objects and ideas, to abolish the divisive ideational strata.” Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 169.

link between Arabic and the religious elite since the Arabic of the Quran is mobilized by the text *against* Bu al-Arwah.”⁸¹

The legacy of social transformation in post-revolutionary Algeria, and its troubled relationship with teleological understandings of time is further reflected in *al-Zilzāl*'s representation of Bū al-Arwāḥ's violent relations with women. Symptomatic of his frustration with his own sterility, the victimization of women in Waṭṭār's novel is represented as trans-generational and incestual. Bū al-Arwāḥ's first marriage is to a child-bride named 'A'ishah when she is nine and he fifteen. On their wedding night they are unable to consummate the marriage until Bū al-Arwāḥ's father forces them to sleep together. The father later attempts to rape 'A'ishah and strangles her to death when she refuses him. The cycle of sexual violence continues with Bū al-Arwāḥ who becomes sexually involved with his father's sixteen-year-old wife Ḥanīfah whom he eventually strangles to death. Bū al-Arwāḥ then kidnaps the wife and nine-year old daughter of a sharecropper, both of whom he rapes and murders.

Waṭṭār's choice of the name 'A'ishah for Bū al-Arwāḥ's first wife, and the synchronicity of her age with that of the Prophet Muḥammad's third wife 'A'ishah bint Abī Bakr at the time of their marriage, is crucial to understanding the broader implications of how gender is represented in the novel.⁸² Often considered the Prophet Muḥammad's most beloved wife, 'A'ishah remained married to him until his death when she was eighteen years of age. She spent the last fifty years of her life as a powerful political, social and religious figure in her community as well as in early

⁸¹ Cox, "Command," 103.

⁸² While there are some discrepancies, most historians and scholars of Islam believe that the Prophet Muḥammad was betrothed to 'A'ishah when she was six and he around fifty-three, though the marriage was not consummated until she was nine.

Islamic history.⁸³ One of the better-known *muḥadithāt* or female transmitters of hadith, ‘A’isha was also a trusted exegete of the Qur’an: “‘A’ishah, as Moḥammad’s favorite wife, received the state’s highest pension: acknowledged as having special knowledge of his ways, sayings and character, she was consulted on the Prophet’s *sunna*, or practice, and gave decisions on sacred law or custom.”⁸⁴ Upon the murder of the third Caliph ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān – a notable supporter of a woman’s right to practice her faith publically – it was ‘A’ishah who led an army into battle against Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib to avenge his death.⁸⁵

As the symbol of a parallel Islamic genealogy, one that actively includes women as political, social and religious agents in early Islamic history, Waṭṭār’s inclusion of ‘A’ishah in *al-Zilzāl* is significant. Referred to as *Umm al-Mu`minīn* [Mother of the Believers], ‘A’ishah represents the possibility of a coeval female Islamic tradition. The attempted rape and murder of ‘A’ishah’s character in Waṭṭār’s novel reflects the occlusion and silencing of this very history.⁸⁶

⁸³ It is worth noting that the Prophet Muḥammad’s first wife Khadijah, who was nearly twenty years his senior, was his first convert to Islam and used her social status and financial resources to help him promote the new religion. Furthermore, Muḥammad’s closest companions, the four Caliphs that followed him, were all bound to the Prophet through marriages – Abū Bakr and ‘Umar were his fathers-in-law, while his daughters married ‘Ali and ‘Uthman. This demonstrates the significance of marital bonds in early Islamic history for the propagation of Islam.

⁸⁴ Leila Ahmed, “Women and the Advent of Islam,” *Signs* Vol.11 No.4 (Summer 1986): 665-691, 689. Based on the biography of ‘A’ishah by Nadia Abbott: *Aishah, the Beloved of Mohammed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942) 3. Some accounts of the Prophet Muḥammad’s life claim that he told his followers to take half of their religion from ‘A’ishah, though this is discredited by orthodox Muslim exegetical schools. For more detailed discussions of the life of ‘A’ishah and her place within various discursive, exegetical and historiographical traditions, also refer to: miriam cooke’s “Women” and Hoda Elsadda’s “Discourses on Women’s Biographies and Cultural Identity: Twentieth-Century Representations of the Life of ‘A’ishah Bint Abi Bakr,” *Feminist Studies* Vol. 27 No. 1 (Spring, 2001): 37-64.

⁸⁵ Ahmed, 689-690. As the daughter of the Prophet’s companion Abū Bakr and an opponent of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib’s claim to the Caliphate, ‘A’ishah is rather critically represented in much Shi’a religious scholarship. The above-cited sources elaborate on this issue.

⁸⁶ In this regard, Waṭṭār’s novel bears comparison to the works of the Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi and the Algerian novelist Assia Djebar who I discuss at length in Chapter Two. Their texts actively seek to read female agency back into hegemonic historical narratives, particularly with respects to early Islamic history, the colonial encounter and anti-imperial revolutionary activities. See: Fatima Mernissi’s *Women’s Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London: Zed Books, 1996) and *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); as well as Assia Djebar’s *Loins de Medine* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991) and *L’Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattes, 1985).

Furthermore, Bū al-Arwāḥ's mirroring of the Prophet's life in taking a nine-year old bride demonstrates the dangers of transposing cultural practices from seventh-century Arabia onto twentieth century Algeria. More crucially, it undermines the Salafi principle that Islamic practices during the time of the Prophet can be recovered in any trans-historical sense. While this is certainly germane to discussions of socio-sexual politics in Islam, it also has broader implications for the manner in which Islam is recorded, transmitted, interpreted and practiced. Through his satirization of Bū al-Arwāḥ, Wattār yet again demonstrates the diverse hermeneutical possibilities of Islam. He also seems to be suggesting that Islam be contextualized and adaptive; or, to borrow the words of Leila Ahmed, that we question "whether the religion is to be allowed to remain permanently locked into replicating the outer forms of the specific society into which it was revealed, or whether the true pursuit and fulfillment of the Islamic message entails, on the contrary, the gradual abandonment of laws necessary in its first age."⁸⁷

Unable to locate any suitable heirs who are not martyrs, government officials or communists, Bū al-Arwāḥ abandons his mission. As he crosses his sixth bridge, *Jisr al-Shayāṭīn* [Demons' Bridge], he finds himself part of a carnivalesque procession of faceless people. Overpowered by the viscous fluid, he runs towards *Jisr al-Hawa'* [the Bridge of the Abyss] where he sees scores of children that he imagines to be the impossible progeny of his barren marriages. Bū al-Arwāḥ is forced to reconcile with the women of his past as they appear to him one by one and mock his sterility before he throws each of them into the ravine. It is then that the apocalypse begins: tanks explode, flesh sizzles, and the earth begins to buckle. Bū al-Arwāḥ's final appeal before he attempts to hurl himself off the bridge is to the daughter of 'Uqbah bin Nāfi' (622–683), an Arab

⁸⁷ Ahmed, 677.

general of the Umayyad dynasty that led the Islamic invasion of the Maghreb and eventually died in battle in Algeria. Bū al-Arwāḥ's appeal to the daughter of 'Uqbah Bin Nafa' speaks to his attempt to trace a lineage, and notably a feminine one, with the original invaders responsible for Algeria's Arabicization and Islamicization. He further reconciles with his own lack of progeny, for it is precisely before his attempted martyrdom that Bū al-Arwāḥ asks her to mourn for him in lieu of a daughter:

أيتها البسكرية ، يا ابنة عقبة بن نافع ، أغيريني صرعا . خذي عني صرعا . ابكيني قبل أن أقذف
بنفسي من أعلى الجسر . ابكي كل آل بو الأرواح .

You, daughter of 'Uqbah bin Nāfi' from Biskra, exchange trances with me, yours against mine. Cry for me before I jump off this bridge. Cry for all us Bū al-Arwāḥs.⁸⁸

The inclusion of a female Islamic lineage, embodied in the figures of 'A'ishah bint Abī Bakr and the daughter of 'Uqbah bin Nāfi', realizes the novel's eschatological vision by generating a non-filiative Islamic history. In so doing, Wattār also ruptures a progressivist model of Algerian national history.

At the Threshold of the Abyss

Through its mapping of eschatology onto Algeria, *al-Zilzāl* creates an eerily fragmented temporality of Algerian national history.⁸⁹ The apocalypse unfolds in its narrative recounting of the physical chaos of the city of Constantine, the moral corruption of its inhabitants, but most crucially in Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ's own psyche. However, *al-Zilzāl* is unique in that it does more than simply demonstrate a site of postcolonial rupture through the fractured consciousness of its narrator. Rather, it transforms the traditional form of allegory, whereby the personal

⁸⁸ Wattar, *al-Zilzāl*, 197; *The Earthquake*, 178.

⁸⁹ The temporal and spatial ruination that marks the city of Constantine resonates with Ann Laura Stoler's theorization of the unique historicity of imperial formations. See Ann Laura Stoler, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 23, No. 2 (May 2008): 191-219.

narrative serves to explicate a larger political and often national agenda. Waṭṭār presents the national narrative – the postcolonial destruction of Algeria – as symptomatic of the personal narrative – Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ’s psychotic breakdown – while also demonstrating their mutual imbrication.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the novel’s constant shifts in time, speakers, and states of consciousness deliberately disrupt the concepts of linear narrative form, temporal and spatial continuity, linguistic purity and subjective coherence. *Al-Zilzāl* thus restructures the very temporality of ‘postcolonial history’ and the notion of a ‘pure’ nationalist discourse – be it linguistic, literary, religious or identitarian.

Al-Zilzāl explores the complex cultural and political histories of Islamism and Arabism in Algeria. Specifically, it is through the novel’s engagement with Qur’anic eschatology that Waṭṭār resignifies the genealogies of these traditions, positioning them within a more expansive view of ‘Algerian national identity.’ *Al-Zilzāl* reveals the disjuncture between Arabism’s appropriation by state ideologies and Salafi schools of Islam, and its ability to function as a rich medium of cultural expression and resistance. For as McDougall argues:

[T]he significance of Arabism has largely lain precisely in its ability to evoke a ‘dream’ or promise; it has been double-edged, nourishing aspirations, providing a powerful idiom of self-expression and political action, as well as serving to frustrate aspirations, attempting to enclose its own promised possibilities in the limiting power of the national state.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ Allegory then functions in the words of Gil Hochberg as a: “form of representation that contains a representational crisis: it connects the ‘personal story’ with the ‘public (national) story’ but at the same time it shows the link between the two stories to be a type of illusionary link, one that is ‘too much of a link.’” Gil Hochberg, “National Allegories and the Emergence of Female Voice in Moufida Tlatli’s *Les silences du palais*,” *Third Text* Vol. 14 No. 50 (Spring 2000): 33-44, 39. Hochberg’s analysis offers a productive reworking of the debate between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad over the question of national allegory. See: Fredric Jameson, “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* No. 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65-88, and Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory,” *Social Text* No. 17 (Autumn, 1987): 3-25.

⁹¹ James McDougall, “Dream of Exile,” 253. Similar arguments have been made regarding Islam, which Jean-Claude Vatin argues was ideologically bifurcated in Algeria, largely due to its need to fight French imperialism. He claims that during the post-revolutionary period Islam emerged as “the language both of the state apparatus (and of those who control it) and social and political protest groups.” Vatin, 228.

It is precisely within this complex political, social and cultural matrix that I situate *al-Zilzāl*'s engagement with Arabism and Islamism. For the novel, like much of Waṭṭār's literary oeuvre, touches on the fundamentally radical potential of Arabic and Islamic discursive traditions, as well as the dangers of binding them within exclusionary state or religious politics.

Due to the novel's rhizomatic and polyphonic narrative structure, *al-Zilzāl* avoids replicating the progressivist tendencies of either orientalist or nationalist readings of 'postcolonial' subjectivity. While the orientalist model situates colonial subjectivity in an alternate time and space outside of or behind that of western modernity, the nationalist one is predicated on a teleological model of historical time with colonialism as its point of departure and independence as its ultimate telos. By engaging with structures of discursive authority in relation to other hegemonic orders – national, sexual, religious and familial – al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār stages a reconfiguration of these very relationships. *Al-Zilzāl* shifts attention to the question of representation as a means of interrogating authorized narratives and structures of power. Working with eschatological manipulations of time and space, *al-Zilzāl* adopts authorized national narratives, only to then implode them both structurally and literally.

Heterodoxies of History

Algerian National Identity in Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*⁹²

L'Afrique du Nord, du temps de l'Empire français, — comme le reste de l'Afrique de la part de ses coloniaux anglais, portugais ou belges — a subi, un siècle et demi durant, dépossession de ses richesses naturelles, déstructuration de ses assises sociales, et, pour l'Algérie, exclusion dans l'enseignement de ses deux langues identitaires, le berbère séculaire, et la langue arabe dont la qualité poétique ne pouvait alors, pour moi, être perçue que dans les versets coraniques qui me restent chers (...) En ce sens, le monolinguisme français, institué en Algérie coloniale, tendant à dévaluer nos langues maternelles, nous poussa encore davantage à la quête des origines.

At the time of the French Empire, North Africa – like the rest of Africa on behalf of colonial England, Portugal or Belgium – suffered for a century and a half the dispossession of its natural resources, the breakdown of its social foundations, and for Algeria, the exclusion within education of its two national languages: age-old Berber and the Arabic language – with its poetic quality, which for me cannot be perceived outside the Qur'anic verses that I hold dear (...) In this sense, the French monolingualism established in colonial Algeria managed to devalue our mother tongues, driving us even further in the quest for origins.

Assia Djébar, June 22, 2006.⁹³

In her 2006 address to the *Académie française* upon her induction as one of the forty *immortels* [immortals] represented in its illustrious ranks, Assia Djébar touched on the complex history of her status as a French – and not merely Francophone – writer.⁹⁴ Her unprecedented election to

⁹² All English citations from *L'Amour, la fantasia* reference the published Dorothy S. Blair English edition. Where indicated, however, I have made modifications to her translation to preserve certain nuances in the French. Footnotes indicate the French edition, followed by the Blair translation. I have used the following editions: Assia Djébar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Édition Albin Michel, 1995) and *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade*, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993). Unless otherwise indicated, all other translations from French or Arabic are my own.

⁹³ Assia Djébar, *Discours de réception*, Prononcé dans la séance publique, Paris Palais de l'Institut, June 22, 2006. French transcript available online at:

http://www.academie-francaise.fr/immortels/discours_reception/djébar.html.

⁹⁴ The oldest of the five *académies* of the *Institut de France*, the *Académie française* is the governing body in France on all issues pertaining to the French language. The description of the 722 elected *immortels* highlights the sacred position of the French language: "L'Académie française (...) rassemble des poètes, des romanciers, des hommes de théâtre, des philosophes, des médecins, des hommes de science, des ethnologues, des critiques d'art, des militaires, des hommes d'État, des hommes d'Église, qui ont tous illustré particulièrement la langue française. Par sa composition variée, elle offre une image fidèle du talent, de l'intelligence, de la culture, de l'imagination littéraire et scientifique qui fondent le génie de la France (...) Leur autorité morale en matière de langage s'enracine dans des

the *Académie française* – as the first writer from one of France’s former North African colonies – inscribes Djébar institutionally within French literary, linguistic and cultural *patrimoine*. Her speech situates Algeria’s violent colonial history within the broader politics of nineteenth century European imperialism, while simultaneously marking the country’s exceptional status as a 130-year settler colony. It is particularly with respect to the question of language that Djébar distinguishes Algeria’s colonial past from the shared social, economic and political “dépossession” endured across Africa. Her emphasis on the institutionalized linguistic and cultural erosion of national identity highlights the particularities of French colonial policy in Algeria. Djébar’s depiction of Algeria’s diglossia emphasizes “ses deux langues identitaires” of Berber and Arabic. While she designates Berber as the foundational “séculaire” language of Algeria, Arabic is aesthetically – and as we will come to see also ideologically – linked to the Qur’an. This sense of the language’s immutable religious heritage is reflected, in part, in Djébar’s own inability to *write* literature in Arabic. Of her adoption of French as her literary language of choice, she states: “le français donc est lieu de creusement de mon travail, espace de ma méditation ou de ma rêverie, cible de mon utopie...” [French then is the place where I excavate my work, the space of my meditations or reverie, the target of my utopia].⁹⁵ Despite the imperial context of its introduction, French functions for Djébar as a site for the very imagining

usages, des traditions, un faste (...) L’élection à l’Académie française est souvent considérée par l’opinion comme une consécration suprême...”

“The *Académie française* (...) brings together poets, novelists, men of the theater, philosophers, doctors, scientists, anthropologists, art critics, soldiers, statesmen and men of the Church – all of whom have particularly highlighted the French language. In its diverse constitution, it offers an accurate image of the talent, intelligence, culture, imagination, literature and science underlying the genius of France (...) Their moral authority with respects to language is rooted in customs, traditions and splendor (...) The election to the French Academy is often viewed by the public as a supreme consecration...” From their official website: <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/immortels/>. Translation mine.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

of a future. By contrast, Arabic is mired in the past and haunted by a “religious shadow” that erects “internal barriers.”⁹⁶

As her address continues, Djébar recounts an intellectual history of Algeria that actively looks beyond its Arabo-Islamic past. She begins with the literary greats of her “terre ancestrale” [ancestral land] – such as Apuleius, Tertullianus and St. Augustine – that wrote “une littérature écrite de haute, de langue latine” [an elevated written literature in Latin].⁹⁷ Djébar’s invocation of these figures in part “echoes French colonial and Berber cultural postulations of shared ‘Latinity’ between French and pre-Islamic Amazigh cultures.”⁹⁸ These intellectuals, she notes, “font partie de notre patrimoine. Ils devraient être étudiés dans les lycées du Maghreb...” [are part of our heritage. They should be taught in schools in the Maghreb]. Djébar thus touches on the critical relationship between institutionalized forms of knowledge, pedagogy and national identity. Even her account of Ibn Baṭūṭa, Ibn Rūshd and al-Ghazālī emphasizes the imperial context of their use of the Arabic language.⁹⁹ Of their work she says:

La langue arabe était alors véhicule également du savoir scientifique (médecine, astronomie, mathématiques etc.) Ainsi, c’est de nouveau, dans la langue de l’Autre (les Bédouins d’Arabie islamisant les Berbères pour conquérir avec eux l’Espagne) que mes ancêtres africains vont écrire, inventer.

⁹⁶ See Djébar’s dialogue with Lyone Trouillot at the 2005 *PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature*. A translated transcript is available online at: dwww.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/1415/prmID/1550.

⁹⁷ Apuleius, or *Apulée* in French, (125–180) was a Latin novelist, writer and public speaker of *Amazigh* descent from present-day Algeria. A prominent figure of Latin Christianity and western theology, Tertullianus, or *Tertullien* in French, (160–225) was a prolific writer from Roman Carthage. Similarly, St. Augustine, or *Augustin* in French (358–430) was a theologian and philosopher born in Roman Africa (present-day Algeria). Speculated to be of *Amazigh* descent, St. Augustine converted to Christianity – the religion of his mother.

⁹⁸ Shaden M. Tageldin, “Which *Qalam* for Algeria? Colonialism, Liberation, and Language in Djébar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghānīmī’s *Dhākirat al-Jasad*,” *Comparative Literature Studies* Vol. 46 No. 3 (2009): 467–497, 472.

⁹⁹ Ibn Baṭūṭa (1304–1368) was a renowned explorer of *Amazigh* descent who documented his 30 years of travel across the world. Ibn Rūshd (1126–1198) was a Muslim polymath from Andalusia whose work spanned theology, philosophy, Islamic jurisprudence, logic, psychology, politics, music, science, astronomy, geography, mathematics, physics and law. Finally, al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) was a Muslim theologian, jurist, philosopher and mystic born in Persia.

The Arabic language then was also a vehicle of scientific knowledge (medicine, astronomy, mathematics etc...) Thus, it is again, in the language of the Other (the Bedouins of Arabia islamicized the Berbers to conquer Spain with them) that my African ancestors wrote and invented.¹⁰⁰

Not only does Djébar call attention to the otherness of Arabic for these writers, but more crucially, she highlights its role in cultivating the *secular* sciences of medicine, astronomy and mathematics. While Ibn Baṭūṭa, Ibn Rūshd and al-Ghazālī were certainly prolific in their writing, as intellectuals they were equally known for their vast contributions in Islamic philosophy, science and jurisprudence.

As a Francophone writer of Amazigh descent, Assia Djébar (b. 1936 as Fatma Zohra Imalayen) certainly has an ambivalent relationship to both Arabic and French.¹⁰¹ Her exposure to French began when she studied at a primary school where her father taught. In 1955 Djébar moved to Paris where she was the first Algerian woman to be accepted into the elite *École Normale Supérieure*. Djébar's prolific literary career began with the publication of her first novel *La soif* [The thirst] in 1957 followed by three more novels over the coming decade. She then took a nearly ten-year hiatus from writing fiction, in order to reevaluate her literary use of the French language, at which time she studied classical Arabic while teaching film, literature and history at the University of Algiers. Following her hiatus, Djébar returned to Francophone fiction with the publication of her renowned novel *L'Amour la fantasia* [translated as *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade*, 1985]. Written between 1982 and 1984, *L'Amour la fantasia* is the first of an 'Algerian Quartet' that also includes: *Ombre sultane* [A Sister to Scheherazade, 1987], *Vaste est la prison* [So Vast the Prison, 1995] and *Nulle Part dans la maison de mon père* [No Part In My Father's House, 2008]. The project is primarily concerned with the social, cultural and political

¹⁰⁰ Djébar, *Discours de réception*.

¹⁰¹ Djébar's family originates from the Berkani tribe of Dahr.

position of women in Algeria. All four works explore the relationship between gender and Islam, with a particular emphasis on the practices of veiling and cloistering. Moreover, the novels all blend autobiographical aspects of Djébar's life with various narratives by and about women.

Structurally, *L'Amour, la fantasia* reflects Djébar's experimentation with genre and modes of representation, ambitiously combining autobiography, memoir, historiography and oral history. The book is composed of three parts: *La prise de la ville ou L'amour s'écrit* [The Capture of the City or Love-letters], *Les cris de la fantasia* [The Cries of the *Fantasia*] and *Les voix ensevelies* [Voices from the Past]. Each section consists of alternating chapters – some titled and others merely enumerated – that recount various narratives of Algeria's national history. The novel weaves together 'official' archival as well as personal accounts: Djébar's memoirs, reports and eye-witness accounts from those participating in or observing the occupation of Algeria during the 1830s, in addition to oral histories of women involved in the war of independence from 1954 through 1962.¹⁰² Capitalizing on Djébar's early training as a historian, *L'Amour, la fantasia* is the product of years of research into the French colonial archives and the recording of oral histories by women who participated in the battle for independence. Structurally, the novel unsettles authoritative or linear accounts of Algeria's violent colonial history by moving frenetically between narratives, voices, political affiliations, geographical locations and historical contexts. This polyphony of voices is further disrupted by Djébar's commentary, speculation and most importantly, a self-conscious attention to her role as a Francophone author. The novel served a cathartic function as Djébar's reconciliation with the cultural and linguistic legacy of

¹⁰² The interviews were conducted in Djébar's native region of Cherchell during the 1970s.

French colonial ideology: “En écrivant *L’Amour, la fantasia*, j’ai définitivement réglé mes comptes avec la langue française...” [In writing *Fantasia*, I settled my accounts, once and for all, with the French language.]¹⁰³

While the majority of literary criticism on *L’Amour, la fantasia* approaches the novel through feminist politics (Donadey, Gafaiti, Gauch, Murdoch, Orlando, Ringrose and Steadman), questions of selfhood and identity (Mortimer, Murray and Zimra), or the relationship between language, postcoloniality and exile (Bensmaïa, Calle-Gruber, Gracki, Hiddleston, Hochberg, Lionnet, Rahman, Siassi, Tageldin, Thiel, Walker and Zimra), few have examined the novel’s representation of Islam (Erickson and Wehr).¹⁰⁴ This chapter investigates the manner in which

¹⁰³ Cited in Clarissa Zimra, “Disorienting the Subject in Djébar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia*,” *Yale French Studies* No. 87 *Another Look, Another Woman: Retranslations of French Feminism* (1995): 149-179, 151.

¹⁰⁴ For feminist readings see: Anne Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001); Hafid Gafaiti, “The Blood of Writing: Assia Djébar’s Unveiling of Women and History,” *World Literature Today* Vol. 70, No. 4 (Autumn 1996): 813-822; Suzanne Gauch, *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 81-102; H. Adlai Murdoch, “Woman, Postcoloniality, Otherness: Djébar’s Discourses of *Histoire* and *Algérianité*,” *L’Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 15-33; Valerie Orlando, *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999) 111-152; Priscilla Ringrose, *Assia Djébar: In Dialogue with Feminisms* (Amsterdam-New York: Editions Rodopi, 1994) and Jennifer Bernhardt Steadman, “A Global Feminist Travels: Assia Djébar and *Fantasia*,” *meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* Vol. 4 No. 1 (2003): 173-199. On selfhood and identity see: Mildred Mortimer, “Assia Djébar’s *Algerian Quartet*: A Study in Fragmented Autobiography,” *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 28 No. 2 (Summer 1997): 102-117; Jenny Murray, *Remembering the (Post)Colonial Self: Memory and Identity in the Novels of Assia Djébar* (Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2008) and Clarissa Zimra, “Disorienting the Subject in Djébar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia*,” *Yale French Studies* No. 87 (1995): 149-170. Finally, on language, postcoloniality and exile see: Réda Bensmaïa, *Experimental Nations: Or, the invention of the Maghreb* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Mireille Calle-Gruber, “Écrire de main morte ou l’art de la césure chez Assia Djébar,” *L’Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 5-14; Katherine Gracki, “Writing Violence and the Violence of Writing in Assia Djébar’s *Algerian Quartet*,” *World Literature Today* Vol. 70, No. 4 (Autumn 1996): 835-843; Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006); Gil Z. Hochberg, ‘Colonial Hospitality’: False Hosts and Ill-Mannered Guests in Assia Djébar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia*,” *Nottingham French Studies* Vol. 40 No. 2 (Autumn 2001): 84-95; Françoise Lionnet, “Ces voix au fil de soi(e): le détour du poétique,” in *Assia Djébar: Littérature et transmission: Colloque de Cerisy* Wolfgang, Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber, and Dominique Combe, Eds., (Paris: Presses Sorbonne nouvelle, 2008) 23-36; Najat Rahman, *Literary Disinheritance: The Writing of Home in the Work of Mahmoud Darwish and Assia Djébar* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008) 69-84; Guilan Siassi, “Itineraries of Desire and the Excesses of Home: Assia Djébar’s Cohabitation with “la langue adverse,” *L’Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 56-68; Shaden M. Tageldin, “Which *Qalam* for Algeria?”; Veronika Thiel, “La Querelle des discours: Techniques formelles de la réécriture de l’histoire dans *L’Amour, la fantasia*,” *L’Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 34-46; Muriel Walker, “Femme d’écriture française: la francographie

L'Amour, la fantasia attempts to unsettle religious, linguistic and ethnic genealogies underwriting discourses of Algerian national identity. The novel embarks on this project through the lens of gender, but in the process Djébar touches on the interrelationship of these various narratives. As with Wattar, she contests how dominant visions of Algerian national identity rely on the legitimization and institutionalization of particular historical narratives often premised on myths of origin. More specifically, I argue that Djébar's attempt to expose the heteroglossic nature of discourse – in both its literary and historical articulations – must be read in conjunction with her anti-clericalism and views on the Islamic concept of *ijtihad*, or individual reasoning independent of precedent. While Djébar's skepticism towards the politics of transmission in Islamic Thought and jurisprudence is most explicitly explored in *Loin de Médine: filles d'Ismaël* [Far From Medina: The Daughters of Ishmael, 1991], I believe that *L'Amour, la fantasia* offers a productive foray into her broader intellectual, literary and ethical project.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, these concerns are reflected not only in the content of *L'Amour, la fantasia*, but also in the very structure of the novel. The text's fragmentary and polyphonic style undermines the authority of historical narratives by placing official French colonial records in dialogue with personal as well as oral narratives by Djébar and other Algerian women.

Like *L'Amour, la fantasia*, *Loin de Médine: filles d'Ismaël* is a polyphonic text that integrates a variety of archival as well as fictional sources. The experimental novel explores the lives of various influential female figures during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Notably, Djébar

djébarienne," *L'Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 47-55 and Clarissa Zimra, "Mapping Memory: Architectural Metaphors in Djébar's Unfinished Quartet," *L'Esprit Créateur* Vol. 43 No. 1 (Spring 2003): 58-58. On Islam see: John Erickson, *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 37-65 and Donald Wehrs, *Islam, Ethics, Revolt: Politics and Piety in Francophone West African and Maghreb Narrative* (United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2008) 185-218.

¹⁰⁵ Assia Djébar, *Loin de Médine: filles d'Ismaël* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel S.A., 1991). *Far from Medina: Daughters of Ishmael* Dorothy S. Blair, Trans. (London: Quartet Books, 1994).

engages with a number of esteemed Islamic exegetes, particularly the canonical Persian scholar al-Ṭabarī (838–923), in reevaluating the legitimization of hadith through *isnād* – the chain of transmission that verifies the validity of hadith according to the consensus of religious scholars. As with *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Djébar embarks on a revisionist project that brings to the forefront previously occluded sources, while also casting doubt on those commonly accepted. Invoking *ijtihād* – in terms of her own right as a Muslim to engage critically and intellectually with Islamic sources, as well as with respects to the revolutionary spirit of key female figures in the early history of Islam – Djébar uses the novel to instigate a reevaluation of the place of women in both early and modern Islamic history. The title invokes a generation of women that existed beyond the holy city of Medina as a symbolic site of power. They lived “en dehors, géographiquement ou symboliquement, d’un lieu de pouvoir temporel qui s’écarte irréversiblement de sa lumière originelle.” [...outside, geographically and symbolically, a place of temporal power that irreversibly breaks away from the original light.]¹⁰⁶

In exploring the complex representation of Islam in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, I will need to address the text’s ambivalent relationship to both the Arabo-Islamic heritage of Algeria, as well as the practices of veiling and cloistering. A close reading of the novel – like Chraïbi’s *Le passé simple* to which I devote Chapter Three – reveals alternating impulses to critique and redeem various Islamic practices. Djébar’s politics are circumscribed within both her choice to write in French and her glowing reception by French intellectuals. Djébar employs the trope of veiling to describe the repeated elision of women from the master narratives of History – with respects to the occupation and liberation of Algeria in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, and in relation to early Islamic

¹⁰⁶ Djébar, *Loin de Médine*, 7.

history in *Loin de Médine*. The extravagant use of veiling imagery – which for example appears in *L'Amour, la fantasia* over forty times – coupled with Djébar's open criticism of veiling and cloistering across her literary oeuvre, bears exploration.¹⁰⁷ This is exacerbated by the implicit orientalism in the novel's collective representation of veiled women living in the harem. As with Chraïbi, it is important to productively examine this ambivalence in relation to Djébar's overall literary project, particularly since the novel is often heralded for exposing the literal and epistemological violence of French imperialism and Arabo-Islamic patriarchy. My analysis is thus in dialogue with the very conditions of the work's production, circulation and critical success in western academia. Djébar's exceptional election to the *Académie française* further signals her institutional induction into French cultural hegemony. Moreover, *L'Amour, la fantasia* was written on the coattails of Djébar's aborted attempt to enter the authoritative world of Arabic literary discourse. During her ten-year hiatus, she had studied classical Arabic in an attempt to switch from French, but failed to master the language. The novel thus renders legible various ideological, linguistic, and cultural entanglements underwriting Djébar's overall literary project.

The Struggle for Islamic Piety

It is necessary to frame my analysis of the representation of Islam in *L'Amour, la fantasia* within the limited body of critical work on the subject.¹⁰⁸ Theorist Shaden M. Tageldin argues that

¹⁰⁷ In the second installation of the quartet, *Ombre sultane* [*A Sister to Sheherazade*, 1987], for example Djébar contrasts the gendered subjectivity of two Algerian women – the liberated Isma and the cloistered Hajila – by employing alternating first and second person narratives. Eventually, Isma facilitates Hajila's escape from the prison-like Harem and her journey towards 'freedom.' See Assia Djébar, *Ombre sultane* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987).

¹⁰⁸ In addition to those discussed above, John Erickson has a chapter in *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* entitled "Women's voices and women's space in Assia Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*." Although Erickson engages with local feminist writings by such figures as Fatima Mernissi, the argument inevitably approaches the politics of gender in Islam through the lens of western feminism. A similar reading can be found in Meryem Ouedghiri's "Writing

Djebar's engagement with hadith and the politics of transmission manifests in the novel's conscious alignment with a masculine French literary and historical genealogy rather than an Arabo-Islamic one. She posits that Djebar "forge[s] a new chain of textual (and sexual?) transmission between (post)colonial Algerian women and French men and (...) substitute[s] that chain for one rooted in the Arab-Islamic literary tradition."¹⁰⁹ While I agree that Djebar's text reexamines an exclusively Arabo-Islamic ethnic, religious and even literary heritage, I believe there is more at stake. I posit that the novel's proliferation of narrative sources and resignification of authoritative discourses calls attention to the very impossibility of a narrative of origins. Djebar's inclusion of French authors signals not only the incorporation of these literary father figures "into her tribe" as Tageldin suggests. Rather, it generates a rhizomatic family tree of Algerian national identity that undermines individual claims to legitimacy by moving beyond a colonizer/colonized binary.

On the other end of the spectrum, Donald Wehrs' ambitious book: *Islam, Ethics, Revolt: Politics and Piety in Francophone West African and Maghreb Narrative* includes a chapter exploring the representation of Islam in Djebar's *Loin de Médine* and *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Employing the work of philosopher and Talmudic commentator Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) as his critical framework, Wehrs addresses the relationship between ethics and politics in the author's oeuvre. While he offers an astute analysis of Djebar's literary project that moves away from the epistemological and ideological trappings of postcolonial criticism, at times, his reading of Djebar seems over-determined and somewhat anachronistic. Specifically, Wehrs posits that

Women's Bodies on the Palimpsest of Islamic History: Fatima Mernissi and Assia Djebar," *Cultural Dynamics* 14.41 (2002): 41-64. Djebar's most prolific critic, Clarissa Zimra, offers a more nuanced discussion of feminism and Islam in *Loin de Médine*. See: Clarissa Zimra, "Not So Far From Medina: Assia Djebar Charts Islam's 'Insupportable Feminist Revolution,'" *World Literature Today* Vol. 70, No. 4 (Autumn, 1996): 823-834.

¹⁰⁹ Tageldin, 477.

Djebar's radical iconoclasm emerges from a critique of militant Islam as "renewed paganism" or "apostasy masquerading as reform."¹¹⁰ In part this reflects a retroactive reading of *L'Amour, la fantasia* from the perspective of Islamist militancy of the 1990s and Djebar's two literary meditations on it: *Loin de Médine* and *Le Blanc de l'Algerie*. Moreover, the very distinction between paganism or idolatry and more 'rational' forms of Islam is itself historically contentious and highly politically charged. My argument, however, does expand on Wehrs' understanding of the dialogic nature of Qur'anic and novelistic discourse in Djebar's work, as well as her project to "generate an iconoclastic discourse whose formal heterogeneity and fragmentation and insistent self-interrogation" challenges both colonialist historiography and the hegemony of institutionalized schools of clerical thought.¹¹¹

While the role of *ijtihād* in Djebar's literary oeuvre has been addressed predominantly in relation to *Loin de Médine*, I argue that it also bears relevance to *L'Amour, la fantasia*.¹¹² In her prologue to *Loin de Médine*, Djebar defines the term as follows: "*Ijtihad*: effort intellectuel pour la recherche de la vérité – venant de *Djihad*, lutte intérieure, recommandée à tout croyant" [*Ijtihad*: intellectual effort in the search for truth – coming from *Jihad* – internal struggle recommended for all believers].¹¹³ She describes *ijtihād* as the driving force behind the ethical project of the novel, as well as her understanding of Islamic piety. Moreover, by emphasizing the etymological relationship to jihad, Djebar highlights the intellectual, political and ethical dimensions of how Islam is practiced on both an individual and communal level. In the context

¹¹⁰ Wehrs, 4-5.

¹¹¹ Wehrs, 19.

¹¹² See George Lang, "Jihad, Ijtihad, and Other Dialogical Wars in *La Mère du printemps*, *Le Harem politique*, and *Loin de Médine*," in *The Marabout and the Muse: New Approaches to Islam in African Literature* Kenneth W. Harrow, ed. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996) and Wehrs, 185-218.

¹¹³ Djebar, *Loin de Médine*, 8fn.

of *Loin de Médine*, George Lang posits that Djébar's understanding of *ijtihād* deviates from more traditional interpretations in Sunni thought:

Classical Sunni *ijtihād* was a ratiocinative procedure whose aim was to establish consensus among scholars alone (...) For her part, Assia Djébar so closely ties the question of *isnad* to alternative lines of narrative development that her *ijtihād* falls beyond ratiocination. In the first place, by speaking of her personal will, she connects renewal of interpretation with inner struggle, a notion by no means alien to Islamic thought but suspect from the view of the *uluma* (...) Furthermore, by constructing a montage of substitute fictional episodes that various *isnād* generate, Djébar undermines the procedural rationality that was the premise of both classical *ijtihād* and modernist revisionism dating from the colonial period.¹¹⁴

Djébar's anti-clerical tone is reflected in her understanding of *ijtihād* as an inherently heteroglossic practice. However, what I contend is so radical about her literary project in *Loin de Médine* and *L'Amour, la fantasia* is her application of the concept to both theological and narrative forms of discourse. By approaching the Qur'an as a textual object, hadith as narrative, and early Islamic history as ideologically constructed, Djébar initiates a literary intervention into Islamic exegesis and jurisprudence. The relationship between theology and literature is dialogic in so far as there is "a certain affinity between the way the *Hādith* proliferates different narrations around the same event and Djébar's polyphonic style of writing."¹¹⁵

Similarly, in *L'Amour, la fantasia* Djébar reads the radicalization of Islam in Algeria as symptomatic of the literal interpretation of Islam as primarily an act of submission without reflection.¹¹⁶ She critiques this exegetical impulse as follows:

Dans la transmission islamique, une érosion a fait agir son acide: entrer par soumission, semble décider la Tradition, et non par amour. L'amour qu'allumerait la plus simple des mises en scène apparaît dangereux.

¹¹⁴ George Lang, "Jihad, Ijtihad," 8.

¹¹⁵ Rahman, 23.

¹¹⁶ The word Islam derives from the Arabic root *s-l-m* whose diverse meanings range from: to surrender, submit, be safe, rescue, protect from harm, salute, accept or commit. See the entry in *al-Mawrid* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-'Ilm li-al-Malāyīn, 2007) 641.

In the transmission of Islam, an acid erosion has been at work: Tradition would seem to decree that entry is by submission, not by love. Love, which the most simple of settings might inflame, appears dangerous.¹¹⁷

Djebar attributes the adherence to a philosophy of submission as motivated by “la Tradition” rather than any inherent doctrine within Islam. Moreover, she describes this process as a gradual “érosion” that has transformed the original message of Islam during the course of its transmission. By contrast, she proposes an Islamic ethos founded on love rather than submission. This is most apparent in a passage in the novel in which Djebar discusses the Prophet Muḥammad’s relationship to his first wife Khadija. She recounts a story her aunt would tell her about the Prophet’s doubt during his early revelations. Her aunt describes Khadija sitting the Prophet on her lap and comforting him, suggesting that:

[L]a première des musulmanes et des musulmans était une femme, peut-être avant le Prophète lui-même, qu’Allah l’ait en sa sauvegarde! Une femme avait adhéré à la foi islamique, historiquement la première, ‘par amour conjugal.’

[T]he very first Muslim, perhaps even before the Prophet himself, may Allah preserve him! was a woman. A woman was historically the first to adhere to the Islamic faith, ‘out of conjugal love’.¹¹⁸

It is precisely this vision of practicing Islam “comme en amour” [as in love] that invokes in Djebar “un désir d’Islam” [a desire for Islam].¹¹⁹ While in the case of the Prophet Muḥammad and Khadija it is romantic love that ignites faith, elsewhere in the novel it is filial love. In particular, it is the story of Abraham and his son Ishmael’s profound faith that first instills in Djebar “une sensibilité islamique” [an Islamic sensibility].¹²⁰ Her description of the parable, however, demonstrates that even submission may emerge from love: “L’émotion me saisissait aussi devant la soumission du fils; sa vénération, sa délicatesse dans le poids de la peine” [I was

¹¹⁷ Djebar, *Fantasia*, 239/169 (Translation Modified). I have removed Blair’s addition of “through its strait gate” since it does not appear in the French.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 243/172 (Translation Modified). I have made minor punctuation changes per the French.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 243/172 (Translation Modified). I changed the translation from Blaire’s “as on a love affair.”

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 241/170 (Translation Modified). I have changed the translation from Blaire’s “my feeling for Islam.”

deeply moved also by the son's submission: his veneration, the delicacy with which he bore his sentence].¹²¹

Decolonizing Arabic

As Djébar's self-described reconciliation with the French language, *L'Amour, la fantasia* is perhaps most revealing of the author's ambivalent relationship to Arabic and its role in discourses of Algerian national identity. The novel exposes Algeria's complex linguistic landscape and the ideological and imperial underpinnings of the introduction of both Arabic and French into the region. In particular, it addresses the hegemonic history of Arabization in Algeria during the Islamic occupation of the seventh century, as well as upon independence in 1962.¹²² The first part of *L'Amour, la fantasia* – which introduces the occupation of Algiers in 1830 as well as Djébar's induction into French education – concludes with a brief section titled *Biffure* [Deletions] that reflects on the resonances between Arabic and French as imperial languages. It reads:

La prise de l'Imprenable ... Images érodées, délitées de la roche du Temps. Des lettres de mots français se profilent, allongées ou élargies dans leur étrangeté, contre les parois des cavernes, dans l'aura des flammes d'incendies successifs, tatouant les visages disparus de diaprures rougeoyantes... Et l'inscription du texte étranger se renverse dans le miroir de la souffrance, me proposant son double évanescent en lettres arabes, de droite à gauche redévidées; elles se délavent ensuite en dessins d'un Hoggar préhistorique... Pour lire cet écrit, il me faut renverser mon corps, plonger ma face dans l'ombre, scruter la voûte de rocailles ou de craie, laisser les chuchotements immémoriaux remonter, géologie sanguinolente. Quel magma de sons pourrit là, quelle odeur de putréfaction s'en échappe? Je tâtonne, mon odorat troublé, mes oreilles ouvertes en huîtres, dans la crue de la douleur ancienne. Seule dépouillée, sans voile, je

¹²¹ Ibid., 242/171 (Translation Modified). I have replaced Blaire's "his respect for his father, the reticence with which he bore the burden of his grief" with "his veneration, the delicacy with which he bore his sentence."

¹²² As Djébar was writing *L'Amour, la fantasia*, tensions surrounding the linguistic, ethnic and religious homogenization of Algeria were percolating but had not quite escalated to the violence that plagued the 1990s. She examines this subject in depth in her later novel *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*. An experimental memoir, the book is a tribute and testimony to the violence that took the lives of hundreds of Berberophone and Francophone intellectuals in the 1990s, largely by the FIS. Assia Djébar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris: Éditions Albert Michel S.A., 1995).

fais face aux images du noir... Hors de puits des siècles d'hier, comment affronter les sons du passé?... Quel amour se cherche, quel avenir s'esquisse malgré l'appel des morts, et mon corps tintinnabule de long éboulement des générations-aïeules.

The conquest of the Unconquerable... Faint images flake off from the rock of Time. The flickering flames of successive fires form letters of French words curiously elongated or expanded, against cave walls, tattooing vanished faces with a lurid mottling... The mirror-image of the foreign inscription is reflected in Arabic letters, writ from right to left in the mirror of suffering; then the letters fade into pictures of the prehistoric Hoggar... To read this writing, I must lean over backwards, plunge my face into the shadows, closely examine the vaulted roof of rock or chalk, lend an ear to rising immemorial whispers, blood-stained geology. What magma of sounds lies rotting there? What stench of purification seeps out? I grope about, my sense of smell aroused, my ears alert in this rising tide of ancient pain. Alone, stripped bare, unveiled, I face these images of darkness... How are the sounds of the past to be met as they emerge from the well of bygone centuries?... What love must be sought, what future must be planned despite the call of the dead? And my body reverberates with sounds from the endless landslide of generations of my lineage.¹²³

Djebar subtly weaves together the invasion of Algeria by French forces in the 1830s with the Arabo-Islamic occupation of the Maghreb in the seventh century. She begins with a notably gendered description of Algiers based on the adage *la Ville Imprenable* [the Impregnable City] in reference to the city's infamous fortifications. The image also resonates with the novel's frequent metaphorization of Algeria as a woman, and its colonial occupation as a sexual act.¹²⁴ The passage viscerally describes the inscription of the French language on the topography of the country as well as the very flesh of its inhabitants. Like the florid narratives by French officials chronicling the violent invasion of Algiers that Djebar integrates throughout the novel, the extravagance of the French language conceals its colonial past. This history, embodied in the "*diaprures rougeoyantes*" of French letters, is reflected and refracted in the parallel "*miroir de la*

¹²³ Djebar, *Fantasia*, 69/46 (Translation Modified). I have removed "And for a fleeting moment I glimpse" which is not in the French original. I have also replaced "mountainous Hoggar of prehistoric times" with "prehistoric Hoggar;" "the whispers that rise up from time out of mind" with "immemorial whispers" and "study this geology stained red with blood" with "blood-stained geology."

¹²⁴ This point is explored in much of the criticism on *L'Amour, la Fantasia*, the majority of which is informed by feminist theory. See Lindsey Moore, *Arab Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) 66-68.

souffrance” of the Arabic language. Of this history, Djébar highlights the Ahaggar (referred to in the text as Hoggar): a highland region in the central Sahara of southern Algeria almost exclusively occupied by the *Tuareg*.¹²⁵ She employs the metaphor of the palimpsest to describe the images of the prehistoric Ahaggar buried beneath “*lettres arabes*.” Further, the section’s title alludes to the deleted history of the indigenous pre-Islamic and pre-Arab populations of Algeria to whom Djébar expresses an ancestral and ethnic affiliation – describing them as “*des générations-aïeules*.” Djébar bears witness to their “*douleur ancienne*” using decidedly grotesque and synesthetic imagery. This reflects the cultural hegemony of the Arabo-Islamic and French occupations, as well as the privileging of writing over orality in both imperial contexts.

As with Waṭṭār’s *al-Zilzāl*, the tension surrounding Algeria’s Arab occupation manifests in the figure of the 14th century North African historiographer and philosopher Ibn Khaldūn. Djébar includes a quote from the polymath’s autobiography in *L’Amour, la fantasia* describing his role in the forced integration of Algeria’s indigenous tribes. He writes:

«*Je dus moi-même diriger une expédition chez les tribus berbères des régions montagneuses de Béjaïa, qui refusaient depuis plusieurs années de payer l’impôt... Après avoir pénétré dans leur pays et vaincu leur résistance, je pris des otages en gage d’obéissance...* »

I myself had to lead an expedition into the mountainous region of Béjaïa, where the Berber tribes had been refusing to pay taxes for some years... After I had penetrated into

¹²⁵ The *Tuareg* are a pastoral and nomadic Berberophone population inhabiting the North Africa Sahara of Niger, Mali, Libya, Algeria and Burkina Faso. While little is known of their prehistory, they are referenced in early Greek history by such figures as Herodotus during the fifth century. After the Arabo-Islamic occupation of the region, they adopted Islam and blended it with pre-Islamic rituals of Animism. As the French occupation of the Maghreb extended into the central Sahara there were a number of violent clashes with the *Tuareg*, particularly those in Ahaggar, resulting in the gradual annexing of their territories. The *Tuareg* are commonly known for the blue ‘veils’ worn over the entire face (except the eyes) by men once they reach puberty; women on the other hand only cover their hair. Given the pervasive motif of veiling in *L’Amour, la fantasia*, the veiling of *Tuareg* men and their matriarchal social structure may serve as an intentional counter reference to the Islamic practices of Arab populations. Djébar’s reference to herself in the passage as “*sans voile*” further corroborates this reading. On the *Tuareg* see James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 186-188.

their country and overcame their resistance, I took hostages to ensure their obedience...
Ibn Khaldun *Ta'arif* – (Autobiography)¹²⁶

In this selection from *Ta'arif*, Ibn Khaldūn brazenly recounts his conquest of Amazigh tribes in Béjaia using the sexualized language of penetration. Djébar's fascination with Ibn Khaldūn continues when she discusses the politics of Arabization in relation to both the Berberophone tribes and the author's choice to write his autobiography in Arabic. A contentious figure in many ways, Ibn Khaldūn was born in Tunis to an upper class Andalusian family. In his autobiography he traces his lineage to the Prophet Muḥammad through an Arab tribe in Yemen, though biographers have contested whether this is merely an attempt to affiliate with Arab rather than Amazigh origins.¹²⁷ Moreover, scholars have also demonstrated the appropriation of Ibn Khaldūn in Orientalist historiography.¹²⁸ It is, however, with respects to the intersection of history, fiction and autobiography – embodied in the French distinction between *histoire* or story and *Histoire* as the discipline of History – that Djébar seems drawn to this figure. Further, she questions his choice to compose his autobiography in the 'colonial' language of Arabic:

Cortège d'autres invasions, d'autres occupations... Peu après le tournant fatal que représente la saignée à blanc de la dévastation hilalienne, Ibn Khaldoun de la même stature qu'Augustin, termine une vie d'aventures et de méditation par la rédaction de son autobiographie. Il l'intitule «Ta'arif», c'est à dire 'Identité'.
Comme Augustin, peu lui importe qu'il écrive, lui, l'auteur novateur de 'L'Histoire des Berbères', une langue installée sur la terre ancestrale dans des effusions de sang! Langue imposée dans le viol autant que dans l'amour...

Hosts of procession of new invasions, new occupations... Shortly after the fatal turn that bleeds the country white from the devastation of the Banu Hilal, Ibn Khaldun, as great a figure as Augustine, rounds off a life of adventure and meditation by composing his autobiography. He calls it *Ta'arif*, that is to say, 'Identity.' Like Augustine, it matters little to him, the innovative author of *The History of the Berbers*, that he writes in a

¹²⁶ Djébar, *Fantasia*, 71/47.

¹²⁷ Mohammad Enan, A., *Ibn Khaldun: His life and Works* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1941).

¹²⁸ Abdelmajid Hannoum for example offers a structuralist reading of the translation and transmission of Ibn Khaldūn's work in relation to French imperial policy and ideology in the Maghreb in the 19th century. See Abdelmajid Hannoum, "Translation and the Colonial Imaginary: Ibn Khaldūn Orientalist," *History and Theory* Vol. 42, No. 1 (Feb., 2003) 61-81.

language introduced to his homeland through bloodshed! A language imposed by rape as much as love...¹²⁹

Comparing him to Augustine of Hippo – who was born in Roman Algeria and famously converted to Christianity – Djébar takes issue with Ibn Khaldūn’s adoption of Arabic for his autobiography. Not surprisingly, the passage introducing *Ta’arif* follows a description of the violent introduction of Arabic into the Maghreb through the tribes of the Banū Hilāl. Described in Ibn Khaldūn’s work, the Banū Hilāl were sent to various Berbophone tribes of the Maghreb on behalf of the Fatimids to enforce Shi‘a Islam and Arabic during 11th century.

Djébar’s description of Ibn Khaldūn’s *l’Histoire des Berbères* as “novateur” in part relates to the selective cropping of his larger manuscript on Universal History titled *Kitab al-‘Abr wa Dīwān al-Mubtada’ wa al-Khabr fī Tarikh al-‘Arab wa al-‘Ajm wa al-Barbar* [*Book of Lessons, Record of Beginnings and Events in the History of the Arabs, Foreigners and Berbers*] from which it was derived. As Abdelmajid Hannoum argues, the French translation of *L’Histoire des Berbères* by William de Slane was perhaps “the greatest textual event in the history of French Orientalism (...) [It] formed the foundation of French historical knowledge of North Africa (...) [and] was central in French colonial historiography.”¹³⁰ It seems hardly coincidental then that Djébar would highlight a figure known not only for blending history with autobiography, but also for writing in a language introduced by conquest. As a writer in the colonial language of French herself, Djébar’s contention with Ibn Khaldūn stems from his identitarian claims to Arabness

¹²⁹ Djébar, *Fantasia*, 301/216 (Translation Modified). I have retranslated much of this passage from Blaire’s version, which reads: “Repeated raids by the Banu Hilal tribesmen finally bleed the country white. Soon after this fatal turning point, the historian Ibn Khaldun, the innovatory author of *The History of the Berbers*, as great a figure as Augustine, rounds off a life of adventure and meditation by composing his autobiography in Arabic. He calls it *Ta’arif*, that is to say, ‘Identity’. As with Augustine, it matters little to him that he writes in a language introduced into the land of his fathers by conquest and accompanied by bloodshed! A language imposed by rape as much as love...”

¹³⁰ Hannoum, 62.

embodied in the title of his autobiography, as well as his affiliation with Muslims of Arab descent.

Similarly, Djébar contests the misrepresentation of Arabic as the first written language in the region. Citing the pre-Islamic alphabets of the indigenous occupants of the Maghreb, she intervenes into revisionist historiography that promotes an exclusively Arabo-Islamic heritage:

Car il s'agit bien d'un 'retour' à la langue écrite... la culture arabe repose sur l'enseignement (et donc l'écriture lue et recopiée) du Livre; alors qu'au Maghreb, il y a une des plus anciennes cultures écrites, avec avec les femmes comes détentrices privilégiées de l'écriture, l'alphabet tamazigh des Touaregs.

It is a question of a 'return' to a written language... Arabic culture rests on the teaching (and thus the writing read and recopied) of the Book; whereas in the Maghreb, there is one of the oldest written cultures, with the women as privileged holders of the writing, the alphabet Tamazigh of the Touareg.¹³¹

Djébar bifurcates Algerian history according to *authentic* indigenous Berberophone culture and imperial Arabic as the language of Islam. Moreover, this division is also along gendered lines as the *Tamazigh* alphabet of the *Touareg* follows a matrilineal line of descent – suggesting that by contrast Arabic is masculinist in nature. Further, Arab ethnic and linguistic identity is inextricably linked not only to Islam, but more crucially to the Qur'an as an authoritative text, or *le livre*. Djébar suggests that the language, like the text, is pedagogically stagnant – “l'écriture lue et recopiée” – in its reliance on rote-recitation.

Reading, Writing & Revelation

Djébar's invocation of *ijtihād* references not only Qur'anic exegesis, but more crucially, the very acts of reading and writing. When questioned as to why her daughter is not veiled, Djébar's

¹³¹ Cited with translation in Rahman, 37. Originally cited in Jeanne-Marie Clerc, *Assia Djébar. Écrire, transgresser, résister* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997) 65.

mother responds with the phrase “Elle lit” [she reads]. In her reflections on this telling remark, Djébar connects the physical liberties afforded her by a French education to the commandment by Gabriel to the Prophet Muḥammad to read. According to the Qur’an, when the Prophet was meditating in a cave Gabriel appeared and asked him to read despite his illiteracy:

أَقْرَأْ بِأَسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth¹³²

As the opening to *Al-‘Alaq* [The Clot], the first Qur’anic surah to be revealed to Muḥammad, *Iqra’* – which can also be translated as ‘recite’ – was the first word the Prophet read. Building on this account, Djébar comments on her mother’s reply:

«Elle lit», c’est à dire, en langue arabe, «elle étudie». Maintenant je me dis que ce verbe «lire» ne fut pas par hasard l’ordre lancé par l’archange Gabriel, dans la grotte, pour la révélation coranique... «Elle lit», autant dire que l’écriture à lire, y compris celle des mécréants, est toujours source de révélation: de la mobilité du corps dans mon cas et donc de ma future liberté.

‘She reads’, that is to say in Arabic, ‘she studies.’ I think now that verb ‘to read’ was not just causally included in the Qur’anic revelations made by the Angel Gabriel in the cave... ‘She reads’ is tantamount to saying that writing to be read, including that of the unbelievers, is always a source of revelation: in my case of the mobility of my body, and so of my future freedom.¹³³

Djébar reverses the gendering of the parable by substituting her mother for Gabriel, who passes the gifts of revelation and reading to the Prophet Muḥammad. She further removes the commandment from its Islamic context, suggesting that secular writing, even among “des mécréants,” is inherently revelatory. Her particular revelation, however, is gender related. By virtue of reading – and specifically learning to read in French – Djébar is granted mobility, and by extension, freedom. Djébar thus appropriates one of the foundational narratives of Islam in order to generate a feminist genealogy.

¹³² *Al-‘Alaq* [The Clot] Qur’an 96:1. Pickthall translation.

¹³³ Djébar, *Fantasia*, 254/180 (Translation Modified). I have replaced “command” with “verb” and corrected the transliteration of “Qur’anic.”

Similarly, this surah is invoked when Djébar revisits the story of an unnamed victim of Algeria's occupation in the 19th century. Earlier in the novel, she recounts the story of a young woman who had been killed during the violent siege of Algiers. The account is based on the diaries of Eugène Fromentin, the official painter of the conquest, who describes coming across the severed hand of a woman that was amputated for the sake of golden bracelets. Disturbed by the image, Fromentin is unable to paint the hand and instead documents the story in writing. Djébar ends *L'Amour, la fantasia* by returning to this unsettling image:

J'interviens pour saluer le peintre qui, au long de mon vagabondage, m'a accompagnée en seconde silhouette paternelle. Eugène Fromentin me tend une main inattendue, celle d'une inconnue qu'il n'a jamais pu dessiner (...) Plus tard, je me saisis de cette main vivante, main de la mutilation et du souvenir et je tente de lui faire porter le «qalam».

I intervene to greet the painter who has accompanied me throughout my wanderings like a second father figure. Eugène Fromentin offers me an unexpected hand – the hand of an unknown woman he was never able to draw (...) Later, I seize on this living hand, hand of mutilation and of memory and I attempt to bring it the *qalam*.¹³⁴

Djébar's *intervention* is literary, historical, as well as genealogical. She attempts to reclaim the ineffable history of this anonymous woman by granting her both a narrative and a voice.

Moreover, by describing Fromentin as “en seconde silhouette paternelle” she inscribes herself within a new genealogy, taking on his legacy by attempting to represent the unrepresentable.

Further, the gesture of offering this woman a *qalam* harkens to the earlier surah *Al-'Alaq* [The Clot], which continues as follows:



Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who teacheth by the pen¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Ibid., 313/ 226.

¹³⁵ Qur'an 96:3-4. Pickthall translation.

By returning to the first Qur'anic surah revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, one based on the relationship between reading, writing and revelation, Djébar actively positions both herself and the unnamed woman within an Islamic genealogy. Like Gabriel with Muḥammad, Djébar initiates this woman into the world of literacy. She inserts her “prosthetic hand that bespeaks colonial amputation and gendered violence” within not only Algeria’s colonial history, but more crucially, within Islamic history.¹³⁶ Moreover, the use of the definite article “le” for *qalam* indicates that these are authoritative histories. By proffering the severed hand an instrument that signals the intellectual tradition within Islam, one arguably historically less accessible to women, this act further intervenes into the masculinist nature of historiography – both colonial and Islamic.

The story of Muḥammad’s miraculous introduction to literacy through the revelation of the Qur’an also appears in Djébar’s account of her childhood experience at a madrasa. She describes the physicality of the practice of rote-recitation often employed at traditional Qur’anic schools:

Effacer la tablette, c’était comme si, après coup, l’on ingérait une portion du texte coranique. L’écrit ne pouvait continuer à se dévider devant nous, lui-même copie d’un écrit censé immuable, qu’en s’étayant, pause après pause, sur cette absorption (...) Cette langue que j’apprends nécessite un corps en posture, une mémoire qui y prend appui. La main enfantine, comme dans un entraînement sportif, se met, par volonté quasi adulte, à inscrire. «Lis!» Les doigts œuvrant sur la planche renvoient les signes au corps, à la fois lecteur et serviteur.

The act of cleaning the tablet seemed like ingesting a portion of the Quranic text. The writing – itself a copy of writing which is considered immutable – could only continue to unfold before us if it relied, clause by clause, on this osmosis (...) This language which I learn demands the correct posture for the body, on which the memory rests for its support. The childish hand, spurred on – as in training for some sport – by willpower worthy of an adult, begins to write. ‘Read!’ The fingers laboring on the tablet send back the signs to the body, which is simultaneously reader and servant.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Tageldin, 480.

¹³⁷ Djébar, *Fantasia*, 260/184 (Translation Modified). I have changed the spelling of “labouring.”

Djebar's reference to the erasure of the tablet as an act of ingestion signals the visceral nature of this learning technique. More crucially, however, it reveals her ambivalence towards Islamic education as a process that entails the mere incorporation of an "immuable" object. Djebar posits that the learning process is primarily physical rather than intellectual. It signals an embodied form of piety that harkens back to the Prophet Muhammad's first revelation. Moreover, she links rote-recitation to the dominant interpretation of Islam as an act of surrender, by referring to the body as both "lecteur et serviteur." By critiquing the Qur'an's literal inscription on the body, Djebar favors a more individual and intellectually driven approach to the study and practice of Islam.

Despite her criticism of the dogmatism of Qur'anic schools, Djebar still finds those of her generation preferable to their later incarnation. She describes the difference as such:

Je compris plus tard que j'avais, au village, participé à la fin d'un enseignement séculaire, populaire. A la ville, grâce à un mouvement nationaliste de «musulmans modernistes», se forgeait une jeunesse nouvelle, de culture arabe. Ces medersas ont pullulé depuis. Si j'avais fréquenté l'une d'elles (...) j'aurais trouvé naturel ensuite d'enturbanner ma tête, de cacher ma chevelure, de couvrir mes bras et mes mollets, bref de mouvoir mon corps au-dehors comme une nonne musulmane!

I understood later that in the village I had participated in the last of an age-old, popular style of instruction. In the city, thanks to the Nationalist movement of 'Modernist Muslims,' a new generation of Arab culture was being forged. Since then these *medresas* have sprung up everywhere. If I had attended one of them (...) I would have found it quite natural to swathe my head in a turban to hide my hair, to cover my arms and calves, in a word to move about out of doors like a Muslim nun!¹³⁸

While rigorous in their instruction, the schools of Djebar's childhood embodied a populist pedagogy. Those that emerged during the battle of independence, however, were infused with identitarian politics particular to the nationalist movement. The "musulmans modernistes"

¹³⁸ Ibid, 258/182-183 (Translation Modified). I have replaced "secular" with "age-old" since that seems to be the implication of the passage based on context.

references Algeria's Islamic reformers, such as Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥāmid Bin Bādīs who I discuss extensively in Chapter One.¹³⁹ These reformers, whose rhetoric was informed by both Salafism and the Islamic Modernist movement emerging out of the Mashreq, were prominent in the reformation of the Algerian educational system leading up to and following independence.¹⁴⁰ In addition to their schools promoting an Arab and Muslim Algerian national identity, they vehemently fought against populist religious practices that were seen as *bid'ah* or heretical innovation. Djébar thus touches on the exclusionary Arabo-Islamic politics of the Algerian nationalist movement. Notably, her critique is couched in its own form of orientalism as she employs mixed ethnic and religious imagery – such as “enturbanner” and “nonne musulmane” – to discuss veiling, a contentious subject in all of Djébar's work.

Parsing Patriarchy: Language and the Politics of Gender

L'Amour, la fantasia's engagement with Islam is predominantly through the filter of gender relations and particularly the practices of veiling and cloistering, which Djébar examines across her literary and cinematic oeuvre. She defines the harem as “l'interdit, qu'il soit d'habitation ou de symbole” [the taboo, whether it be a place of habitation or as a symbol] rendering it as both a physical space, as well as a site of social and psychological exclusion.¹⁴¹ The novel's exploration of the colonial history of Algeria provides the symbolic language through which Djébar critiques these practices, describing fathers, husbands and brothers as “geôlier[s]” [jailors], cloistered women as “prisonnières” [prisoners] or as the walking dead: “fantômes blancs, forms ensevelies à la verticale” [white ghosts, figures buried upright] whose very existence is

¹³⁹ See Chapter 1, pg. 20-22.

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter One, footnotes 42 through 45.

¹⁴¹ Djébar, *Fantasia*, 183/128.

“tragique” [tragic].¹⁴² The text employs the imagery of death to depict the entombment of women within the harem, implying that these cultural practices are ossified and archaic. Djébar’s representation of Algerian women, however, seems to inscribe them within a collective identity where they lack either voice or agency: “Comment dire «je», puisque ce serait dédaigner les formules-couvertures qui maintiennent le trajet individuel dans la résignation collective?” [How could she say ‘I,’ since that would be to scorn the blanket-formulae which ensure that each individual journeys through life in a collective resignation?] ¹⁴³ Djébar thus demonstrates the manner in which language reflects social and cultural hierarchies, most notably surrounding gender.

Similarly, Djébar extends the artistic imagery she employs to critique the over-aestheticization of French accounts of the occupation of Algiers to describe the cloistering of women. She defines Algerian women almost exclusively according to their lack of public mobility, characterizing them as both anonymous and invisible:

Face à elles, qui ont mission, leur vie entière, de préserver leur image, de considérer ce devoir comme le legs le plus sacré, face à elles toutes, mes tantes, mes cousines, mes semblables, l’étranger, en s’arrêtant, en les dévisageant, les voit-il lorsqu’il croit les surprendre? Non, il s’imagine les voir...

Facing these women, whose mission, whose entire life, is to preserve their image, a duty regarded as their most sacred inheritance, facing them all – my aunts, my cousins, my equals – the stranger, does he see them when he stops and stares, thinking he’s taken them by surprise? No, he imagines he sees them...¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Ibid, 11/3; 67/45; 164/115 (Translation Modified). I have changed Blair’s translation from “shrouded figures buried upright.”

¹⁴³ Ibid, 223/156.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 179-180/125 (Translation Modified). I have retranslated Blaire’s version from: “When the stranger is faced with all these women, whose life’s mission, whose duty, whose most sacred inheritance is to preserve their image – when he’s faced with all these women, my aunts, my cousins, my equals, does he really see them, when he pauses, stares at them, thinking he’s taken them by surprise? No, he imagines he sees them...”

Emphasizing the preservation of the “image” of women, Djébar reads cloistering as a practice that resembles the ban on figurative representation in Islam. Further, in describing the practice as “le legs le plus sacré” she traces a lineage, albeit a troubled one, between cloistering and early Islam. By representing veiling and the harem as anachronistic practices, Djébar may be contesting the Salafist inclinations of the Algerian reformist movement, and their call for a return to ‘pure’ Islam as it was practiced during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and his immediate followers.

Djébar’s critique of the exclusionary politics of Algerian nationalism stems from its suppression of the country’s inherent heteroglossia. In addressing the issue of language diversity through the lens of gender, she accounts for four languages available to Algerian women:

[T]andis que l’homme continue à avoir droit à quatre épouses légitimes, nous disposons de quatre langues pour exprimer notre désir. Avant d’ahaner: le français pour l’écriture secrète, l’arabe pour nos soupirs vers Dieu étouffés, le libyco-berbère quand nous imaginons retrouver les plus anciennes de nos idoles mères. La quatrième langue, pour toutes, jeune ou vieilles, cloîtrées ou à demi émancipées, demeure celle du corps...

[W]hile the man still has the right to four legitimate wives, we have at our command four languages to express our desire, panting: French for secret missives; Arabic for our sighs before a stifled God; Lybico-Berber which transports us to our oldest mother-idols. The fourth language, for all females, young or old, cloistered or half-emancipated, remains that of the body...¹⁴⁵

By equating the four wives permissible in Islam to the four languages “pour exprimer notre désir,” Djébar resignifies polygamy from a feminist perspective. French functions as the language of subversion, while Arabic bears the suffocating burden of an Islamic legacy “nos

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 254/180 (Translation Modified). I have retranslated this passage as Blair’s translation includes a number of qualifiers not present in the French original. For example, I have removed “girls, big and little” and “before all that is left for us is sighs and moans” in addition to replacing “Arabic for our stifled aspirations towards God-the-Father, the God of the religions of the Book” with “Arabic for our sighs before a stifled God,” and “Lybico-Berber which takes us back to the pagan idols – mother-gods – of pre-Islamic Mecca” with “Lybico-Berber which transports us to our oldest mother-idols.” Beyond poetic license, Blair’s adlib translation is telling in itself. For while some additions add context (Pre-Islamic Mecca), others reveal certain ideological biases (God-the-Father, the God of the religions of the Book).

soupirs vers Dieu étouffés.” By contrast, Berber represents not only pre-Islamic pagan culture, but also a matrilineal world of “idoles mères.” The unifying language for all women, however, is that of the body – existing outside the ideological, political and religious orders underwriting the languages of French, Arabic and Berber.

Djebar’s ambivalence with respects to Arabic appears most prominently in the novel’s reflections on her own use of the language. Educated in the French school system, her exposure to Arabic was limited to her time at a madrasa where she studied the Qur’an and learned Arabic “seulement pour les paroles sacrées” [only to write the sacred words].¹⁴⁶ Djebar’s sense of estrangement from Arabic seems to derive in part from the diglossic division between classical and dialectical Arabic. While she over-aestheticizes the Arabic of the Qur’an – it is “en pelure d’innocence, en lacs murmurants” [cloaked in innocence and whispering arabesques] – Djebar describes oral Arabic as “ma langue mère disparue” [my long-lost mother-tongue].¹⁴⁷ This distinction is further underscored by her association of written Arabic with the Qur’an, and specifically with a particular interpretation of the practice of Islam such that the language is “Sous le poids des tabous que je port en moi comme héritage” [Under the weight of taboos that I bear like a heritage].¹⁴⁸ Even Djebar’s description of this ethical burden draws upon genealogical imagery, to suggest that the Islamic “taboos” – presumably with respects to women – have been sustained across generations and remained as unchanged as the language. She further expresses skepticism over literary Arabic, faulting its extravagance as disingenuous: “La luxuriance de cette langue me paraît un foisonnement presque suspect, en somme une consolation verbale...”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 256/181.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 256/181 and 298/213.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 298/213 (Translation Modified). I changed the translation from “Burdened by my inherited taboos.”

[The lushness of this language seems to me suspiciously profuse, in short, a verbal consolation...].¹⁴⁹

By contrast, Djébar's relationship to French and her "langue maternelle" are mediated by the colonial context of her education. She describes her ambivalence towards the two languages as caught between aesthetics and politics. Employing the motifs of music and warfare that run throughout the novel, she states:

Après plus d'un siècle d'occupation française – qui finit, il y a peu, par un écharnement – , un territoire de langue subsiste entre deux peuples, entre deux mémoires; la langue française, corps et voix, s'installé en moi comme un orgueilleux préside, tandis que la langue maternelle, toute en oralité, en hardes dépenaillées, résiste et attaque, entre deux essoufflements. Le rythme du «rebato» en moi s'éperonnant, je suis à la fois l'assiégé étranger et l'autochtone partant à la mort par bravade, illusoire effervescence du dire et de l'écrit.

After more than a century of French occupation – which ended not long ago in such butchery – a no-man's-land still exists between two people, two memories: the French language, all body and voice, has established a proud *presidio* within me, while the mother-tongue, all oral tradition, all rags and tatters, resists and attacks between two breathing spaces. In time to the rhythm of the *rebato*, I am alternatively the besieged foreigner and the native swaggering off to die, illusory turmoil between the spoken and written word.¹⁵⁰

Djébar depicts the linguistic landscape of Algeria after independence using spatial imagery as "un territoire de langue" that divides people and memories. She projects her own sense of the liberating nature of French by attributing to the language "corps et voix." Throughout *L'Amour, la fantasia* Djébar associates the practices of veiling and cloistering with the Arabo-Islamic heritage of Algeria, one she often disassociates from. French, she claims, enables her as a Muslim Algerian woman to express herself corporally as well as discursively. However, it also

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 298/213 (Translation Modified). I have changed the translation from Blaire's "The prodigality of this language seems to me somewhat suspect, consoling with empty words."

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 299-300/214 (Translation Modified). I have removed "similar," and replaced "between the French and the indigenous languages, between two national memories" with "between two people, two memories," "tongue" with "language," "with" with "all," and "so there is seemingly endless strife" with "illusory turmoil."

instills within her an “orgueilleux préside” – a technical term to describe military garrisons under colonial rule, particularly in the context of the Spanish empires in Mexico and Morocco. Her mother tongue on the other hand, is the dilapidated language of resistance, “en hardes dépenaillées,” that challenges the hegemony of the French language. While Djébar situates herself in limbo between writing and orality, between “l’assiégé étranger et l’autochtone partant à la mort par bravade,” her literary choices ultimately render legible a reluctant affiliation with French as the privileged language of literature.

A small number of critics have echoed the gendered assumptions underlying Djébar’s philosophy of language. Tageldin, for example, reminds us that “Djébar writes in French partly by historical compulsion, because French is the only written language she truly commands, and partly by political choice, because she imagines ‘free’ French to afford a space of expression for women that ‘patriarchal’ Arabic supposedly cannot.”¹⁵¹ This sentiment is reflected across *L’Amour, la fantasia* where Djébar suggests that patriarchy is inscribed within the very textuality of Arabic as the official language of Islam. To quote one such passage:

Ma mère, comme toutes les femmes de sa ville, ne désignait jamais mon père autrement que par le pronom personnel arabe correspondant à «lui». Ainsi, chacune de ses phrases, où le verbe, conjugué à la troisième personne du masculin singulier, ne comportait pas de sujet nommé désigné, se rapportait-elle naturellement à l’époux. Ce discours caractérisait toute femme mariée de quinze à soixante ans, encore que sur le tard mari, s’il était allé en pèlerinage à La Mecque, pouvait être évoqué par le vocable de «Hadj».

Whenever my mother spoke of my father, she, in common with all the women in her town, simply used the personal pronoun in Arabic corresponding to ‘him.’ Thus, every time she used a verb in the masculine third person singular, which didn’t have a noun subject, she was naturally referring to her husband. This form of speech was characteristic of every married woman, from fifteen to sixty, with the proviso that in later

¹⁵¹ Tageldin, 470. She also makes the astute observation that though Arabic is depicted as an inherently patriarchal language, it is Djébar’s father who introduced her to French as a language of love as well its very prohibition. Tageldin, 475.

years, if the husband had undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca, he could be given the title of ‘Hajj.’¹⁵²

The authority embodied by the word ‘him’ – ironically transcribed in the text as ‘lui’ rather than the Arabic *howwa* – emerges from its singularity, a singularity not without religious connotation. According to Djébar, for any married women there can only be one ‘he,’ and to use a proper name would imply equality in the very act of naming. Moreover, she posits that this practice is common to all married women, whose linguistic world is ordered by the patriarchal structure of marriage. Notably, the term is only trumped by the coveted title of *Hajj* used to designate Muslim men that have performed the pilgrimage.

L’Amour, la fantasia challenges the gender politics of various religious, linguistic and ethnic genealogies invoked in Algerian nationalist discourses. In the process of deconstructing these narratives, the novel generates new and unlikely affiliations. To borrow the words of Tageldin: “Djébar constructs her narrative around a tacit affinity and an equally tacit antipathy: the affinity of French with Algeria’s occluded languages and the antipathy of those Algerian tongues (always gendered female) to the force imagined responsible for their occlusion – literary Arabic, always aligned with ‘official’ Islam.”¹⁵³ As this chapter has demonstrated, however, these new genealogies are themselves fraught, for the novel also troubles the very idea of originary narratives. While Djébar’s ambivalence towards Islam at times borders on orientalism, I believe *L’Amour, la fantasia* offers more than simply these moments. Djébar’s literary intervention into Islamic Thought is visible in the correspondence between the text’s polyphonic structure and the politics of transmission and interpretation in hadith and the Qur’an. Moreover, as with Maḥmūd al-Mas’adī’s *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, the novel reveals not only the heteroglossic nature of both

¹⁵² Djébar, *Fantasia*, 54/35 (Translation Modified). I added the word “masculine.”

¹⁵³ Tageldin, 476.

theological and literary discourse, but also the fundamentally intellectual and creative potentiality of Islam as a practice.

The Thin Line of Imperialism:

Parsing Islam in Chraïbi's *Le passé simple*¹⁵⁴

S'il n'y avait eu que le Protectorat et le colonialisme, tout eût été simple. C'est du coup que mon passé, notre passé eût été simple.
Non, monsieur Sartre, l'enfer ce n'est pas les autres. Il est aussi en nous-mêmes.

Had there only been the Protectorate and colonialism, everything would have been simple. Indeed, my past, our past, would have been simple.
No, Mr. Sartre, hell is not others. It is also within us.

Driss Chraïbi (*Souffles* 5, 1967)

Writing back to Jean-Paul Sartre, Driss Chraïbi's remarks demonstrate the complexity of Morocco's colonial history. His response to the famous line from Sartre's 1944 existentialist play *Huis clos* – "L'enfer, c'est les autres" [Hell is other people] – frames imperialism as an inherently dialectical encounter.¹⁵⁵ According to Chraïbi, the social and political problems facing post-independence Morocco stem not only from the French Protectorate and its policies, but also from domestic issues exacerbated by colonialism. Moreover, he tellingly conflates his personal past, *mon passé*, with the history of Morocco, *notre passé*. The statement, published in a 1967 special issue of the Marxist-Leninist literary journal *Souffles* [Breaths] dedicated to Chraïbi, attempts to rethink the colonial encounter outside of a binary of colonizer and colonized or

¹⁵⁴ All English citations from *Le passé simple* reference the published Hugh A. Harter English edition, though, where indicated, I have made modifications to his translations to preserve certain nuances in the French. Footnotes indicate the French edition, followed by the Harter translation. I have used the following editions: Driss Chraïbi, *Le passé simple* (Paris: Denoël, 1954) and *The Simple Past*, trans. Hugh A. Harter (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990). Unless otherwise indicated, all other translations are my own.

¹⁵⁵ Most commonly translated into English as *No Exit*, the title references the legal notion of *In Camera* – a behind-doors hearing or trial. The play recounts the story of three tortured souls who are forced to spend the afterlife in a room together for eternity.

oppressor and oppressed.¹⁵⁶ Chraïbi demonstrates the complicit forces in the country's nearly fifty-year status as a French Protectorate from 1912 through 1956. Further, by addressing his statement to "Monsieur Sartre," Chraïbi simultaneously invokes and undermines the very authority of French literary discourse.¹⁵⁷

Driss Chraïbi's first novel *Le passé simple* was published by the French press Denoël in October 1954 – a mere two years before Morocco's official independence from France. Often cited as the paradigmatic novel of the "1952 Generation" of Maghrebi writers, it tells the story of a young Moroccan man growing up in a patriarchal family in Casablanca.¹⁵⁸ The novel traces the rebellion of nineteen-year-old French-educated Driss Ferdi against his father Haj Ferdi – a wealthy tea merchant and landowner. While French critics applauded *Le passé simple*, the works' reputedly derogatory representation of Morocco incited a government ban that lasted until 1977. Specifically, it was the novel's portrayal of the hypocrisy and corruption of the religious elite that provoked Moroccan officials and intellectuals in a decades long controversy

¹⁵⁶ The Moroccan cultural journal *Souffles-Anfas* (1966-1971) was run by Abdellatif Laâbi and a small collective of Marxist-Leninist intellectuals spread throughout Paris and Morocco. Published in corresponding French and Arabic editions, *Souffles-Anfas* [Breaths] sought to bring national issues of secular reform, postcolonial language politics and cultural production into dialogue with broader debates on humanism, globalization and diaspora. Due to its incendiary political content, Laâbi was arrested, tortured and sentenced to a ten-year prison term. He was then exiled to France for 'crimes of opinion' where he continues to reside.

¹⁵⁷ Chraïbi's address to Sartre – the self-proclaimed voice of the colonized – is hardly incidental. When this comment was published in 1967, five years after Algerian independence, Sartre was still deeply entrenched in anti-colonial activities in North and West Africa, Indochina and even Cuba. His position as the director of the literary journal *Les temps modernes* beginning in 1949 further reflects Sartre's continued investment in North Africa. Moreover, as I will discuss in more depth in Chapter Four, Sartre was also emblematic of the (French) leftist intellectual discourse of *engagement* or commitment. Chraïbi's tone might in fact reflect some ambivalence with respects to the very project of *engagement*.

¹⁵⁸ The "1952 Generation" references a group of Francophone writers from the Maghreb publishing in the 1950s. Many of these authors, particularly Chraïbi, were criticized for their alleged neglect of nationalist and anti-colonialist concerns. Other works of this generation include: Mouloud Feraoun's *Le fils de pauvre* (Algeria, 1950), Mohammed Dib's *La grande maison* (Algeria, 1952), Mouloud Mammeri's *La colline oubliée* (Algeria, 1952), Albert Memmi's *La statue de sel* (Tunisia, 1953), Ahmed Sefrioui's *La boîte à merveilles* (1954, Morocco), Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* (Algeria, 1956) and Malek Haddad's *Je t'offrirai une gazelle* (Algeria, 1959).

known as *l'affaire Chraïbi*.¹⁵⁹ As I will explore in detail, critical scholarship on *Le passé simple* tends to emphasize its sympathetic portrayal of French imperialism or its hostile aggression towards Islam. I believe, however, it is precisely *Le passé simple*'s exposure of the intertwined imperial and religious politics under the French Protectorate that makes critics and readers alike uncomfortable. This chapter intervenes into the corpus of Chraïbi scholarship by attempting to read the palpable violence of the text as symptomatic of the very confluence of these ideologies.

Complex in its construction on both a thematic and semantic level, the novel employs the grammatical tense of the *passé simple* as a metaphor for critiquing a teleological model of history. Defined as “le temps privilégié du récit, le seul apte à construire une chronologie événementielle” [the privileged tense of narrative, the only one capable of constructing a chronology of events], the *passé simple* or preterit is the literary tense par excellence and is rarely used in the first person or for direct speech.¹⁶⁰ Unlike the *passé composé* or compound past – which is connected to the present temporally and spatially through its use of an auxiliary verb (either *avoir* or *être*) – the *passé simple* indicates an action, event or situation that has a definitive beginning and end. The tense therefore implies temporal detachment and distance from the present moment. Moreover, as it is also the preferred tense for historical writing, the *passé simple* bears a certain discursive authority. By inscribing his novel within the preeminent tense of French literary and historical writing, Chraïbi demonstrates his mastery of the ‘colonial’ language of French in a highly subversive fashion. As a metaphor, the tense serves the ironic function of contesting the very idea that the past can be simple or that history may be represented as a chronology of events fixed in time and divorced from either the present or future. The text’s

¹⁵⁹ On the reception of the novel, see: “Réception critique de *Passé simple*,” in Houaria Kadra-Hadjadji, *Contestation et révolte dans l'oeuvre de Driss Chraïbi* (Alger: E.N.A.L., 1986) 53-64.

¹⁶⁰ See: <http://www.etudes-litteraires.com/indicatif-passe-simple.php>.

disruption of historical temporality is targeted not only at the French colonial occupation of Morocco, but also at Islamic institutions.

In light of the controversy surrounding *Le passé simple*, this chapter investigates various conflicting narratives of and claims to Moroccan history. Specifically, it explores different modes of historical inscription that the novel disrupts. Chraïbi's nuanced portrait of the French Protectorate demonstrates the mutual imbrication – political, ideological as well as discursive – of French imperialism and Islamic patriarchy.¹⁶¹ The novel subverts a French discourse of modernity embodied in the revolutionary motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, in addition to its institutionalization in the colonial *mission civilisatrice*.¹⁶² It further demonstrates the ways in which a patriarchal model of ancestral authority is used to legitimize and sustain familial, socio-economic, religious and political power. In bringing these two narratives together, Chraïbi upends historical authority – namely, who has the claim to narrate history. Moreover, *Le passé simple* unsettles the hierarchal structures of French imperialism and Islamic patriarchy by disrupting their mutual reliance on either teleological or genealogical narratives of pure origins. I argue that the text's thematic use of the *passé simple* similarly troubles French and Islamic claims to authority. However, Chraïbi offers an alternative model of conceptualizing history in the recurring image of *la ligne mince* or the Thin Line. A hallucinatory apparition that appears throughout the novel, *la ligne mince* envisions history and language as epistemological sites of slippage and disruption.

¹⁶¹ This is certainly not to say that patriarchy is endemic to Islam, but rather that *Le passé simple* is concerned with patriarchal structures and their relationship to Islamic history and practice in twentieth century Morocco. As I will demonstrate, this is specific to the novel's critique of institutional and individual forms of hegemony that are legitimized through distinctly patriarchal structures.

¹⁶² The driving ideological foundation of 19th and 20th century French and Portuguese imperialism, the *mission civilisatrice* signified the desire to bring Western civilization to the 'uncivilized' world for the purposes of assimilation.

Before I delve further into my analysis of *Le passé simple* and the politics of its reception, I shall briefly outline the text's narrative structure and plot. The first chapter, *Les éléments de base* [Base Elements], introduces the Ferdi family as they wait for Haj Ferdi's permission to break fast during a Ramadan *iftar*.¹⁶³ Employing theatrical language and images, the chapter literally sets the stage for the Ferdi family drama and Driss' rebellion against his father. We encounter each family member playing a role as they participate in "les gestes, la fable" [the gestures, the fable].¹⁶⁴ Haj Ferdi, known as *le Seigneur*, is a wealthy tea merchant and landowner who rules his family with fear. Driss' mother hides in the kitchen reciting her prayers to "saints des Grecs et des Russes," because, as she states: "j'ai invoqué nos saints, ils ne m'ont pas exaucée, ils sont dévoués à mon seigneur et maître" [I have invoked our saints but they have not heard my prayers. They are devoted to my lord and master].¹⁶⁵ Driss fantasizes about patricide as his eldest brother Camel is out drinking, and his remaining five brothers sit obediently still. In chapter two, *Période de transition* [Transitional Period], Driss escorts his mother to her native city of Fès during *Laylat al-Qadr* [The Night of Power]. In Fès, he clashes with a Sheikh named Si Kettani who leads a prominent Sufi *ṭarīqah*, and the chapter marks the beginning of Driss' spiritual rebellion.¹⁶⁶

The third chapter, *Le réactif* [The Reagent], centers around Driss' discovery that his nine-year-old brother Hamid was murdered by his father after he was caught stealing money for the

¹⁶³ *Iftar* is the term for breaking fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

¹⁶⁴ Chraïbi, 21/5

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 26-7/9

¹⁶⁶ A *ṭarīqah* is a school of Sufism led by a spiritual guide or *murshid* who oversees members that are referred to as either *murīds* (those desiring God's knowledge) or *faqīrs* (those in need of God's knowledge from the root *f-q-r* or poverty).

journey to Fès. This provokes Driss to rally his brothers in the attempted murder of their father. After his failed patricide, Driss is expelled from the Ferdi household and disowned by his father. In the fourth chapter, *Le catalyseur* [The Catalyst], Driss wanders the city of Casablanca seeking refuge – with his *lycée* friends, in a church and at school – only to discover all doors foreclosed due to his father’s far-reaching power. During his exile, Driss passes the exam for his baccalaureate by writing on “La théocratie musulmane” [Muslim Theocracy] instead of the assigned topic of “*liberté, égalité, fraternité.*” He returns home only to learn that his mother has committed suicide. In the final chapter, *Les éléments de synthèse* [Elements of Synthesis], Driss and his father settle accounts on the family farm. Haj Ferdi then takes him to receive benediction from the Sultan Muḥammad V – the future king of Morocco – before Driss leaves for France, determined to return and complete his revolt.

L’Affair Chraïbi

In order to explore the political and ethical debates initiated by *Le passé simple*, it is necessary to contextualize my reading within the diverse critical literature on and reactions to the novel.

While French critics across the political spectrum hailed *Le passé simple* for its literary integrity and innovative style, reactions by conservatives were particularly pointed. Following the publication of the novel for example, the right-wing French periodical *Bulletin de Paris* published an anonymous laudatory article. It read:

From this novel (...) it seems that the real conflict is not between Morocco and France but between two different generations of Moroccans, or rather between a small minority who have been won over to Western civilization, and the bulk of the population (and their leaders) whose beliefs and traditions are still Islamic. (...) We can only hope that the French read the book (...) and understand the secret appeal that it makes.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Anon, “La Révolte d’un jeune homme ou le Maroc mis à nu,” *Bulletin de Paris* 65 (7 January 1955) 9-10. Cited and translated in: Nicholas Harrison, “Representativity (with reference to Chraïbi)” *Paragraph* Vol. 24 No. 3

Conflating French imperialism with modernity, the article validates the French imperial *mission civilisatrice*. Rather than interpreting *Le passé simple* as a narrative about ideological or epistemological incommensurability, the author interpolates it trans-generationally by arguing that it reveals a *secret appeal* for Western civilization on behalf of Morocco's youth. Notably, the article collapses Morocco with the signifier 'Islamic,' suggesting that Western civilization is in opposition to Islamic "beliefs and traditions," rather than Moroccan civilization. It not only reifies the ideological premise of the *mission civilisatrice* as a project of modernization, but it further casts Morocco's civilizational 'lag' as a symptom of Islam. It therefore presupposes that modernity is an inherently secular concept.

The warm reception of *Le passé simple* by French intellectuals on the right only fueled the political flames in Morocco. It underscored dominant readings of the novel as a self-indulgent narrative propagating an orientalist vision of Morocco as backward and Islam as authoritarian. Arab critics argued that the book justified France's colonial presence during a crucial period in the country's battle for independence. *Démocratie*, the primary periodical of the nationalist *Parti Démocratique d'Indépendance* (P.D.I), published an anonymous article denouncing the writer. The piece, entitled "Driss Chraïbi, assassin de l'espérance" [Driss Chraïbi, Assassin of Hope], claimed:

...Non content d'avoir d'un trait de plume insulté son père et sa mère, craché sur toutes les traditions nationales, y compris la religion dont il se réclame aujourd'hui, M. Chraïbi s'attaque maintenant au problème marocain. Au nom d'un Islam qu'il a bafoué, au nom d'un intérêt soudain pour une cause qui n'a jamais été la sienne... Ce judas de la pensée marocaine n'éprouve jamais le besoin de parler des valeurs de son peuple. Dénigreur passionné, il préfère s'accrocher aux valeurs des autres qui pourtant ne sont valables pour nous que dans la mesure où nous respectons et aimons les nôtres.

(November 2001): 30-43, 31. Similar views were expressed in a number of right-wing French publications such as *Rivarol* (17 February 1955).

Not content to have insulted his father and mother with the stroke of a pen, spit upon all national traditions, including the religion that he now claims to practice, Mr. Chraïbi is now addressing the Moroccan problem. In the name of an Islam he ridiculed, in the name of a sudden interest in a cause that had never been his ... This Judas of Moroccan thought never felt the need to talk about the values of his people. Passionate denigrator, he prefers to cling to the values of others, though they are not valid for us, insofar as we respect and love our own.¹⁶⁸

The article casts Chraïbi as a Judas-figure – a notably French idiom influenced by the Christian tradition – betraying first his family and then his nation. Focusing in particular on Chraïbi’s representation of Islam, it conflates the familial with the national and the ethical with the political. It further suggests that Chraïbi’s lack of participation in the nationalist fight for independence delegitimizes his ability to speak on behalf of his country. Published three years after *Le passé simple*, the article reignited the controversy to such an extent that Chraïbi responded by publicly repudiating the novel in a letter to the editor.¹⁶⁹ He later came to regret this act and after the intervention of Abdellatif Laâbi, a prominent Marxist public intellectual and the director of the literary journal *Souffles*, Chraïbi retracted it. It was in fact Laâbi who offered one of the timeliest analyses of the novel. He argued:

Il n’a pas fait un bilan sociologique de l’ordre colonial, par contre, il a peut-être démontré les causes tangibles qui approfondissaient et nourrissaient la colonisation. En ce sens, il est vraisemblablement le seul écrivain maghrébin qui ait eu le courage de mettre tout un peuple devant ses lâchetés, qui lui ait étalé son immobilisme, les ressorts de son hypocrisie, de cette auto-colonisation et oppression exercée les uns sur les autres, le féodal sur l’ouvrier agricole, le père sur ses enfants. Le mari sur son épouse-objet, le patron libidineux sur son apprenti.

[The novel] was not [meant to be] a sociological assessment of the colonial system. On the contrary, it may have demonstrated the tangible causes that deepened and nourished colonization. In this sense, he is probably the only writer from the Maghreb that had the courage to expose an entire nation’s cowardice, reveal its stagnation, and the origins of its hypocrisy, this self-colonization and oppression exerted over each other: the feudal lord

¹⁶⁸ *Démocratie* (January 14, 1957). Cited in Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Roman maghrébin* (Paris: François Maspero, 1968) 26. The PDI was created in the 1940s under the name *Hizb al-Istiqlāl* [Independence Party].

¹⁶⁹ Driss Chraïbi, “Je renie ‘Le Passé simple,’” *Démocratie* (February 4, 1957) 10.

over the agricultural laborer, the father over his children, the husband over his spouse-object, the libidinous patron over his apprentice.¹⁷⁰

Laâbi makes two crucial points in response to the arguments lodged against Chraïbi: that one cannot reduce a literary work to an ethnographic or sociological project, and that the novel offers an honest portrait of the various factors that helped facilitate and sustain French imperialism. Laâbi offers a distinctly Marxist analysis of the interwoven social and economic dynamics underwriting *Le passé simple*. He frames these forces as inherently dialectical and hegemonic, highlighting the feudal (lord-laborer), familial (father-children), sexual (husband-wife) and economic (patron-apprentice) dimensions of social injustice.

Even in contemporary scholarship, criticism on *Le passé simple* has been shadowed by a telling slippage between the individual and the national. In the words of Nicholas Harrison: “In making Chraïbi a spokesperson and his text an act of testimony, his critics appeared to oversimplify the relation between the literary and the political, confusing or slipping between, radically different orders of representation.”¹⁷¹ A number of scholars such as Charles Bonn, Laïla Ibnlfassi and Hédi Abdel-Jaouad have favored psychoanalytic readings that highlight the autobiographical overtones of the novel as well as the Oedipal nature of Driss’ relationship with his father and mother.¹⁷² Ellen McLarney, however, argues that the psychoanalytic framework “has resulted in

¹⁷⁰ Laâbi, “Défense du ‘Passé Simple,’ *Souffles* No. 5 (May 1967) 20.

¹⁷¹ Harrison, 32. Much of the critical literature on *Le passé simple* is delimited by an overemphasis on the autobiographical elements of the novel. Examples of secondary literature that analyze the novel as paradigmatic of Maghrebi autofiction include: Isaac Yetiv, *La theme de l’aliénation dans le roman maghrébin d’expression française: 1952-1956* (Sherbrooke: CELEF, 1972) and Abdallah Bonnfour’s “Autobiographie, genres et croisement des cultures: Le cas de la littérature francophone au Maghreb,” Vol. 1 of *Littératures maghrébines: Colloque Jacqueline Arnaud* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1990) 85-90.

¹⁷² Laïla Ibnlfassi for example employs a Lacanian framework to analyze the novel, arguing that the father, mother and brother Hamid all function as psychic placeholders for the character and author Driss. Hédi Abdel-Jaouad on the other hand, posits that patricidal fantasies and the desire to emancipate the mother in Maghrebi fiction “is founded essentially on the ruins of castrating Maghrebian patriarchy.” He further argues that by consecrating the mother in written form, these “son-writers” privilege orality or *parole* over the written word or *langue*. An

a near complete elision of [the novel's...] political implications," and reads *Le passé simple* as a political allegory for Moroccan nationalism modeled after the French revolution and the genre of family romance novels.¹⁷³ She contends that the various factions vying for power in the years leading up to independence – the Sultanate, *Imazighen* chieftains or *Caiïds*, the Sufi *ṭarīqahs*, as well as the emergent classes of merchants and French-educated intellectuals – are allegorically represented in the family dynamics of the novel. McLarney maintains that though the novel is a national allegory, it is one that critiques the very 'feudal' structures – social, political and economic – out of which both the nation and the novel have developed.

Although I agree that a strictly psychoanalytic reading of *Le passé simple* occludes certain political realities, I contend that the exclusive lens of nationalism poses similar problems. Chraïbi seems to consciously frame his narrative on the threshold of personal and national concerns. Rather than family dynamics merely standing in for national politics – as in Jameson's argument that national allegory is the only real political work of third-world literature – I argue that the novel demonstrates the ideological as well as structural complicity of private and public interests.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, it illustrates how the shifting demarcation between private and public is

exception in this regard is Jarrod Hayes who offers a queer reading that addresses the novel's often-neglected references to homosexuality in relation to broader questions of national politics. See: Charles Bonn and Yves Baumstimler's collection *Psychanalyse et texte littéraire au Maghreb* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991); Laïla Ibnlfassi, "Chraïbi's *Le Passé simple* and a Theory of Doubles," in *African Francophone Writing: A Critical Introduction* Laïla Ibnlfassi and Nicki Hitchcott eds., (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1996) 59-67; Hédi Abdel-Jaouad "'Too Much in the Sun': Sons, Mothers, and Impossible Alliances in Francophone Maghrebian Writing" *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 27 No. 3 (Autumn 1996) 15-33, 15; Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 81-2, 263-4 and "Rachid O. and the Return of the Homopast: The Autobiographical as Allegory in Childhood Narratives by Maghrebian Men," *The Journal of Twentieth-Century / Contemporary French Studies Revue d'études français* Vol. 1 Issue. 2 (1997): 497-526.

¹⁷³ McLarney posits that the Oedipal overtones of the novel function "symbolically to portray political tensions within the 'family' of the Moroccan nation, with the 'father' as king" and that Driss' patricidal fantasies serve as a call to regicide against the Moroccan monarchy. Ellen McLarney, "Politics of *Le passé simple*," *Journal of North African Literature* Vol. 8 No. 2 (Summer 2003): 1-18, 2.

¹⁷⁴ Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text: Theory/Culture/Ideology* 15 (Autumn, 1986) 65-88.

tioned to colonial as well as Islamic institutions. The novel's protagonist subverts political and discursive boundaries emerging from the various centers of power in Morocco – the colonial administration, the Sultanate, the religious elite, feudal systems and the emergent class of merchants. But as I will elaborate, each of these orders is itself intimately bound within the text's representation of familial, sexual and feudal structures. Moreover, by situating this intervention in a Francophone novel that undermines the French language and literary traditions, Chraïbi also “implodes conventional and traditional markers of Euro-centric rational-critical and bourgeois discursive participation.”¹⁷⁵

The troubled relationship between private and public spheres plays out most clearly in *Le passé simple's* representation of Islamic patriarchy – the most controversial yet least examined dimension of the novel – which I will discuss at length.¹⁷⁶ Arguably one of the most complex figures in the text, the protagonist's father Haj Ferdi is a patriarch par excellence. His ‘empire’ traverses a number of social orders: he is the head of the Ferdi family, a feudal lord with extensive land holdings, a Haj, the owner of a successful tea company that dominates the market, as well as a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad. Haj Ferdi's power over his family as well as community is legitimized and sustained by two critical factors: his collusion with the French protectorate and the invocation of his *Sherifian* heritage.¹⁷⁷ Genealogical descent from the

¹⁷⁵ Said Graïouid analyzes Driss' intervention into the world of discourse as a *scorched earth politics* of violence and the carnivalesque. Said Graïouid, “We have not buried the simple past: the public sphere and post-colonial literature in Morocco,” *The Journal of African Cultural Studies* Vol. 20 No. 2 (December 2008) 145-158, 151.

¹⁷⁶ While a number of critics in the 1950s focused more broadly on *Le passé simple's* ‘negative’ representation of Islam, recent scholarship has paid little attention to this question. Two notable exceptions are Carine Bourget's *Coran et Tradition islamique dans la littérature maghrébine* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2002) 123-163 and Houaria Kadra-Hadjadji's *Contestation et révolte dans l'oeuvre de Driss Chraïbi*, 217-253. Both texts deal predominantly with the broader politics of Islam in Chraïbi's oeuvre rather than his thematic and textual engagement with the Qur'an and Hadith.

¹⁷⁷ From the Arabic *shurafa'* the term denotes descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad. The first *Sherifian* dynasty in Morocco was established by Idris Ibn 'Abdallah (788-793) followed by his son Idris II (793-828). Responsible

Prophet Muḥammad is a crucial component of Morocco's political and religious institutions of power, in so far as it is used to legitimize both the monarchy and heads of the Sufi *ṭarīqahs*. In the case of *Le passé simple*, however, it serves a somewhat subversive political function. Haj Ferdi descends from the Idrisī rather than the 'Alawī line represented by the Sultan Muḥammad V (1909-1961). Muḥammad V took control of Morocco upon independence and had a rather contentious relationship with the Protectorate. At the time of *Le passé simple*'s publication, the Sultan was in exile and French authorities, as well as a number of Moroccan nationalist and religious groups, were questioning his claim to the throne – a history alluded to in the plot of the novel.¹⁷⁸ Chraïbi's subtle incorporation of this narrative signals the complex history of the Moroccan monarchy and its self-legitimization through filiative ties to the Prophet. *Le passé simple* parallels Haj Ferdi's authority with that of the Moroccan monarchy, while undermining their respective ancestral claims to power.

Genealogies of Patriarchy

The representation of Islam in Chraïbi's broad literary oeuvre certainly extends beyond his first novel *Le passé simple*. In his later trilogy comprised of *Une Enquête au pays* [Flutes of Death, 1981], *La Mère du printemps (L'Oum-er-Bia)* [Mother Spring, 1982] and *Naissance à l'aube* [Birth at Dawn, 1986], Chraïbi investigates the complex history of the Arabo-Islamic conquest of North Africa. Exploring the perspective of the indigenous *Amazigh* communities, the works debunk originary narratives of Moroccan national identity. In the words of Danielle Marx-

for the Arabization of Northern Morocco, the dynasty ruled the Western Maghreb until 985. Their power was legitimized by the lineage of Idris I, who claimed descendancy from the Prophet through 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his wife Fatima. See: C.R. Pennell, *Morocco since 1830: A History* (London: Hurst & Company, 1988) 9-11; Mohamed El Mansour, "The Sanctuary in Precolonial Morocco," and Rahma Bourqia's "The Cultural Legacy of Power in Morocco," both in *In the Shadow of the Sultan*, Rahma Bourqia and Susan Gilson Miller eds., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 49-73 and 243-258.

¹⁷⁸ Chraïbi, 267 and 271.

Scouras: “By writing about the origins of Islam in the Maghreb, Chraïbi provides a genealogical perspective that restores the complexity of struggles and competing interests to the images of a reality from which oversimplified myths of origin spring.”¹⁷⁹ In *L’Homme du livre* [The Man of the Book, 1994] Chraïbi offers a literary biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. He controversially speculates on the Prophet’s inner thoughts and revelations outside of canonical representations in the Qur’an and hadith. Like *Le passé simple*, these works are concerned with disrupting authoritative narratives on the origins of Islam, particularly in relation to Morocco’s national history.

Le passé simple opens with an invocation of Abraham’s youngest son Ishmael: “A l’heure où un descendant d’Ishmaël ne pourra plus distinguer un fil noir d’un fil blanc...” [At the hour when a descendant of Ishmael can no longer distinguish a black thread from a white one...] ¹⁸⁰ The line is a rewriting of a Qur’anic passage on the guidelines of fasting during the month of Ramadan from the surah *al-Baqrah* [The Cow], which reads:

اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ۖ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ
 الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ۖ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى الْيَلِّ ۚ وَلَا تَبْشِرُوا هُنَّ ۚ وَأَنْتُمْ

And eat and drink, until the white thread of dawn
 Appears to you distinct from its black thread;
 Then complete your fast ‘til the night appears.¹⁸¹

Chraïbi inverts the Qur’anic image to designate a liminal zone whereby the black thread and white thread are indistinguishable. In this scene, Haj Ferdi has forbidden the family from

¹⁷⁹ Danielle Marx-Scouras, “A Literature of Departure: The Cross-Cultural Writing of Driss Chraïbi,” *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 23 No. 2 *North African Literature* (Summer, 1992): 131-144, 141. For a more thorough analysis of the trilogy, see Jacqueline Kaye and Abdelhamid Zoubir’s *The Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature and National Identity in Algeria and Morocco* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁸⁰ Chraïbi, 13/1

¹⁸¹ Qur’an 2:187-188. Yusuf Ali translation, 1983 (Translation Modified). I have replaced ‘till’ with ‘til.

breaking fast even though it is after sunset – a violation of even the most stringent interpretations of the Qur'an. Chraïbi's invocation of the surah highlights his father's authoritarianism and its relationship to the overlapping circles of familial and religious life. Moreover, the use of the word *fil* harkens not only to the repeated image of *la ligne mince*, but also to lines of descent due to its resemblance to the term *fil*s or son. The passage thus invokes Driss' descent from his father and by extension the Prophet Muḥammad, in addition to the shared lineage of the Abrahamic faiths – Abraham's son Ishmael marking the lineage of Muḥammad, and Isaac that of Jesus and Moses. Notably, Driss expresses a proclivity for the Christian and Jewish faiths throughout the novel. He seeks asylum in a Catholic church where he considers conversion, and repeatedly refers to his socio-economic affinity with Moroccan Jews. The opening line thus sets the stage for a number of the novel's prominent motifs: the parable of Abraham, Manichean dualism – in relation to both colonial policy as well as biblical and Islamic imagery – and the politics of Islamic descendancy in religious as well as political institutions in Morocco.

Described in the Qur'an as a paradigm of piety and selfless faith, Abraham fulfilled all of Gods' trials.¹⁸² Most notably, he was willing to sacrifice his first-born son Ishmael at the command of God.¹⁸³ Abraham not only represents absolute submission to God's will even at the expense of his own progeny, but also patriarchy par excellence.¹⁸⁴ By framing Driss as the son unwilling to be sacrificed at Gods' altar, the parable of Abraham forms the thematic backdrop of *Le passé*

¹⁸² Surat al-Nahl or "The Bee" (Qur'an 16:120-121) reads:

شَاكِرًا لِّأَنْعَمِهِ أَحْسَنًا وَهَدَاهُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ خَفِيًّا وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

"Abraham was indeed a model, devoutly obedient to God, (and) true in faith, and he joined not gods with God: He showed his gratitude for the favors of God, who chose him, and guided him to a Straight Way." Yusuf Ali translation, 1983.

¹⁸³ It was not until Abraham was on the brink of the act that God declared that he had demonstrated his true faith and he was rewarded with a sacrificial sheep.

¹⁸⁴ The Qur'an lists the following figures as Abraham's progeny: David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Elijah, Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah and Lot (Qur'an 6:83-87).

simple in addition to being integrated into the narrative plot. The murder of his youngest brother Hamid at the hand of Haj Ferdi provides the catalyst for Driss' revolt and serves as a realization of the parable of Abraham. He interprets Hamid's death in lieu of his own as a sacrifice to Haj Ferdi's theocracy. Driss even mockingly refers to himself as an Abrahamic figure enslaved by Islam: "Il y a certes l'offrande, une sorte d'holocauste, je suis une espèce d'Abraham, un tatoué de l'Islam, or traduisez: Orient, parabole orientale." [There is of course the offering, a sort of holocaust, for I am a kind of Abraham, tattooed by Islam, or to translate: Orient, and oriental parable.]¹⁸⁵ Despite dismissing the story as a didactic "parabole orientale," Driss identifies with the figure of Abraham. He describes his literal inscription within Islam – "Je suis (...) un tatoué de l'Islam" – and specifically within a patriarchal order.

Similarly, Driss satirizes his father's reliance on the corpus of hadith: "'Le fils d'Adam Untel raconte qu'Untel avait ouï dire qu'Untel entendit un jour qu'il se rappelait qu'Untel...' etc.... etc.... ici un dogme suivi du mode d'emploi: à ne pas comprendre, à ne pas juger, à croire, c'est tout ce qu'on vous demande. Amen!" ['The son of Adam So-and-So tells us that one So-and-So had heard it said that one So-and-So heard someone tell So-and-So that he remembered that one So-and-So ...' etc...etc... Here a dogma followed by its usage: not to comprehend, not to judge, to believe; that is all that is asked of you. Amen!]¹⁸⁶ Driss specifically parodies the genealogical structure of hadith. The chain of transmission signals an Islamic lineage traced through Adam and not through the Prophet Muḥammad, as is traditionally the case. Chraïbi simultaneously critiques and reorients the chain of transmission from Muḥammad – as the scriptural origin of Islam – to Adam – as the origin of humankind. In the process, however, he also troubles the very

¹⁸⁵ Chraïbi, 270/156.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 58/27.

narrative of origins. Moreover, Driss' skepticism is also against the institutionalization of hadith as "dogme" that cannot be questioned or contested, but must simply be accepted.

Referred to as *le Seigneur*, Haj Ferdi embodies a patriarchal order mired within a complex network of Moroccan politics, Islamic rhetoric and French imperialism. His designation as *le Seigneur* signals the novel's constant blurring of the line between the sacred and the secular, the political and the personal, the private and the public. In the context of the *ancien régime* – a major framing device of the novel – the name refers to a noble or feudal lord.¹⁸⁷ It may also connote a master, divine being or God. Critics have further suggested that it is a translation of the colloquial Moroccan title *m'sid* meaning sir or *Saiyid* referencing a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁸⁸ *Le passé simple* employs the term to highlight the intersecting hegemonic forces within the Protectorate – the French administration, the religious elite, feudal lords as well as the Sultanate – while simultaneously exposing the ideological similarities with the *Ancien régime*. As Driss states: "Le Seigneur m'attend. Sa loi est indiscutable (...) je suis redevenu un simple piéton du Chemin Droit, chemin des élus de Dieu et par où ne passent jamais ceux qu'Il a maudits (...) (Le) Seigneur, cristallisation de l'Islam." [The Lord awaits me. His law is indisputable (...) I become once more a simple pedestrian on the Straight Path, the path of the Chosen of God over which those He has damned never shall pass (...) The Lord, the embodiment of Islam.]¹⁸⁹ This passage illustrates the overlapping significations of the term *Seigneur* as feudal, religious and colonial. Further, as McLarney observes, it "puns on the notion of *droit de Seigneur*."¹⁹⁰ The medieval concept references the unspoken right of a feudal Lord to

¹⁸⁷ McLarney addresses the novel's references to the *Ancien régime* in "Politics of *Le passé simple*," 12-14.

¹⁸⁸ See Kadra-Hadjadji, 48.

¹⁸⁹ Chraïbi, 14/1-2

¹⁹⁰ McLarney, 12.

bed his serfs' virgin daughters. The word play highlights the manner in which economic and social power also provides sexual and gendered privilege – a notable dimension of Haj Ferdi's own patriarchy that I will return to.

Chraïbi's attempt to parallel the history of France's *ancien régime* with the Moroccan Protectorate does more than simply shed light on the logic of French imperialism in North Africa. It also demonstrates the structural affinities of revolutionary France with the emerging social structures of the Protectorate that will come to shape local politics following independence in 1956. These similarities are most pronounced in the hierarchies embedded within feudal and religious orders. Driss' attempt to incite a populist *coup d'état* with his brothers and his appeal to the revolutionary ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* further weaves the two histories together: “Et si à l’instant même, le Seigneur m’allait dire: ‘Il y a quelque chose en toi que nous ne comprenons pas et qui nous effraie, tu n’es plus de notre monde, parle, exprime ton désir, nous te l’accorderons’, je répondrais: ‘La liberté’ - et je la refuserais.” [And if, at the same time, the Lord had said to me ‘There is something in you that we do not understand and that frightens us, you are no longer a part of our world. Speak, explain your wishes. We grant you that.’ I would reply: ‘Liberty’ and refuse it.]¹⁹¹ By expressing a desire for “liberté” but also refusing it, Driss subverts both the feudal order of *le Seigneur*, as well as the French revolutionary ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

Similarly, although *le Seigneur's* authority is spiritually ‘sanctioned’ by his *Sherifian* lineage and title of *Haj*, it is enforced economically. This is demonstrated in his control over land, resources

¹⁹¹ Chraïbi, 49/22 (Translation Modified). I have replaced Harter's ‘the wish’ with ‘it’ in the final sentence.

and material goods – in the context of both his family and the Protectorate. Haj Ferdi represents a new social class fostered by the centralized and capitalist state structure on which the colonial order rested. For example, his thriving tea business in Casablanca relies on manipulating import and export regulations determined by the Protectorate and the US involvement in World War Two. Moreover, Haj Ferdi’s public gestures of piety are contradicted by his private indulgence in alcohol, drugs and sex. To quote Driss:

Vous faites vos cinq prières par jour et votre chapelet pèse un kilogramme. Tout le monde vous respecte. Vous avez une barbe de patriarche. Vous êtes un homme de Dieu (...) Vous êtes saint. Descendant direct du Prophète (...) Bien dissimulés dans ce carré de feutre pieux, *il y a cent grammes de kif*. Le spirituel et le temporel en memes temps, n’est pas? C’est la vie. Dieu est grand!

You perform your five prayers a day, and your prayer beads weigh a kilo. Everybody respects you. You have the beard of a patriarch. You are a man of Allah (...) You are a saint. A direct descendant of the Prophet (...) Well hidden inside that pious felt bag *there are a hundred grams of kif*. The spiritual and the temporal at the same time, isn’t that right? That’s life. Allah is great!¹⁹²

Driss satirizes his father’s *tartufferie*, aptly exposing the intermingling of “Le spirituel et le temporel” in his father’s empire. Moreover, he demonstrates the hypocritical manner in which Haj Ferdi’s piety serves as a mask for his worldly indulgences, even going so far as to reveal the fully stocked bar of premium *French* liqueurs and wines that hide behind his collection of religious manuscripts and scrolls.¹⁹³ Ferdi’s material indulgence and collusion with the French is figuratively and literally veiled by his ostentatious displays of religiosity – signified by the patriarch’s beard and prayer beads.

Driss’ ambivalent relationship with Islam is mediated not only through his father, but also through Islamic institutions. Prior to enrolling in the elite Lycée Lyautey, Driss was educated in

¹⁹² Ibid., 165/90 (Translation Modified). I have substituted ‘say’ with ‘perform’ and ‘one and the same time’ with ‘the same time.’

¹⁹³ Ibid., 168-169.

a Qur'anic school. He describes his experience as such: “Les écoles coraniques m’ont enseigné la Loi, dogmes, limites des dogmes, hadiths. Pendant quatre ans. A coups de bâton sur mon crâne et sur la plante des pieds- si magistralement que, jusqu’au jour du Jugement dernier, je n’aurai garde de l’oublier.” [Over the course of four years, the Qur’anic schools taught me Law, dogma, the limits of dogma, hadiths, with cudgel blows to the head and on the soles of my feet – administered with such mastery that, even until the Day of Judgment, I will never forget them.]¹⁹⁴ Chraïbi employs the same rhetoric – *loi, dogma, Jugement* – to discuss the methods employed in Qur’anic school as well as the domestic rule of *le Seigneur*.¹⁹⁵ This further highlights the significance of Driss’ participation in a new symbolic order exemplified by the elite educational institutions of the French Protectorate. However, it is an entry sanctioned and even facilitated by *le Seigneur*. Haj Ferdi’s decision to enroll Driss in a French school is motivated by his nationalistic desire to cultivate a new generation to lead Morocco after independence:

Notre rôle de père est un rôle de guide. Apprends tout ce que tu peux et le mieux possible, afin que tout ce que tu auras appris te soit une arme utile pour tes examens d’abord et pour la compréhension du monde occidental ensuite. Car nous avons besoin d’une jeunesse capable d’être entre notre léthargie orientale et l’insomnie occidentale, capable aussi d’assimiler la science actuelle et de l’enseigner à nos futures générations. Mais ne te laisse jamais tenter par ce que tu auras appris, par ces mirages dont jusqu’ici tu n’as jamais entendu parler et qui te paraîtraient suffisants pour les considérer comme dogmes. N’oublie pas en effet que toute la civilisation actuelle repose sur des postulats.

Our role as father is the role of guide. Learn everything you can and as well as you can, so that all you have learned will serve you as a useful weapon, first of all for your examinations and secondly for the comprehension of the Occidental world. We are in need of young people capable of navigating between our oriental lethargy and the Occident’s insomnia, and capable of assimilating today’s science and of teaching it to our future generations. Don’t ever let yourself be tempted by what you have learned, by

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 16/3 (Translation Modified). I have substituted Harter’s ‘During’ with ‘Over the course’ and changed his transliteration of ‘Koranic.’ The Lycée Lyautey in Casablanca that Driss Ferdi attends in the novel is the same school where Chraïbi studied. Founded by Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey (1854-1934), the *lycée* was the most elite educational institution under the Moroccan protectorate. A French Army general and the first Resident-General in Morocco (1912-1925), Lyautey was concerned with the cultivation of an indigenous elite. In fact, Chraïbi was one of three Muslim Moroccan students to attend the school at the time. See Harrison, 35 and McLarney, 7.

¹⁹⁵ For references to *le Seigneur*’s dogma, see Chraïbi, 17 and 22.

these mirages that until now you had never heard of and which you seem content to treat as if they were dogma. Don't forget that all existing civilizations are based on postulates.¹⁹⁶

Haj Ferdi's prophetic words explain not only his interest in Driss *arming* himself with the weapons of science and knowledge – implying that they were part of the very weaponry of French imperialism – but also the fear that his son becomes enchanted by this world of mirages. Haj Ferdi's acknowledgement that all civilizations are founded on postulates demonstrates the danger in transforming ideology into institutional dogma.

Haj Ferdi's hegemonic patriarchy reflects not only his self-interested appropriation of Islamic rhetoric, but also the centralization of power that occurred under the French protectorate. If, as McLarney suggests, the father symbolizes the king and his *grenier* [storeroom] denotes the *Makhzen* or centralized infrastructure of the Moroccan government, then I would like to take her argument further.¹⁹⁷ While *Le passé simple* represents the different factions that constituted the Moroccan political scene, the figure of Haj Ferdi signals the vast consolidation of power and bureaucracy under the nationalist banner of Arabo-Islamism that was facilitated by the centralization of the colonial administration. In Driss, and his father we witness two emerging forms of power cultivated by French imperialism. As the old guard, Ferdi signifies the feudal

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 23/7. (Translation Modified). Modifications include: substitution of 'generation of young people' with 'young people,' 'finding their way' with 'navigating,' 'today's' with 'existing,' 'that could seem to you sufficient to be considered dogmas' with 'which you seem content to treat as if they were dogma' and other minor changes in grammar and punctuation.

¹⁹⁷ McLarney, 5. The *Makhzen* is a rather complex term with highly specific resonances in Moroccan history. In the simplest of terms, it refers to the centralized power of the Sultanate or state. Etymologically, the Arabic word means a warehouse or storeroom – hence McLarney's apt comparison to the *grenier* in *Le passé simple*. The term's use in Morocco predates the Protectorate and has become synonymous with both the abstract and hegemonic power of the state, as well as the material resources that it provides its citizens. For a discussion of the politics of the term *Makhzen* in relation to the concepts of *Dar al-Mulk* and *Dawla* respectively, see: Abdellah Hammoudi's "The Reinvention of *Dar al-Mulk*: The Moroccan Political System and its Legitimation," 129-175 and Rahma Bourqia's "The Cultural Legacy of Power in Morocco," 243-258; both in *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power and Politics in Morocco*.

structures supported by the Protectorate, but also the emergent class of merchants capitalizing on French economic policies and class divisions. Driss on the other hand, is representative of the French-educated (and also France-bound) class of the intelligentsia fostered to harbor skepticism for Islam. Invariably, however, these two generations violently clash in the novel – suggesting they reflect the divide and conquer policies of the Protectorate.

As with Haj Ferdi, the novel's representation of the figure of Si Kettani is similarly complex. In this regard, *Le passé simple* seems to be referencing a prominent historical figure in the years leading up to Moroccan independence. Si Abd el-Ḥay Kittanī was the President of the Federation of Religious Brotherhoods. Along with the Pasha of Marakesh Thami al-Glawī, Abd el-Hay Kittanī formed the Movement for Opposition and Reform that attempted to usurp the throne of Sultan Muḥammad V – allegedly in collusion with the French.¹⁹⁸ Driss encounters the Sheikh at his uncle's home in Fès where he is accompanying his mother to visit the shrine of her father, a saintly *marabout* whom Driss describes as “un saint, matricule 2740 du catalogue” [a saint, number 2740 in the catalogue].¹⁹⁹ His mocking of the prolific saints in Morocco signals the institutionalization of spiritual authority. Moreover, in line with the novel's depiction of Haj Ferdi's hypocrisy and the “pédérastie appliquée” [applied pederasty] of the Qur'anic schools, Driss emphasizes Si Kettani's religious hypocrisy and exploitation of his authority.²⁰⁰ He also

¹⁹⁸ Thami al-Glawī and Abd el-Hay Kittanī created a petition in March 1953 with over 300 signatories that “demanded the abdication of the Sultan for ‘unorthodox religious practices.’” Al-Glawī appears a number of times in *Le passé simple* under the spelling ‘Glaoui’ (Chraïbi, 30 and 73). See Egya N. Sangmuah, “Sultan Ben Youssef's American Strategy and the Diplomacy of North African Liberation, 1943-61,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan., 1992): 129-148, 138; Amal Vinogradov and John Waterbury, “Situations of Contested Legitimacy in Morocco: An Alternative Framework,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 13 No. 1 (January 1971): 232-59, 53 and Jamil M. Abun-Nasr *A History of the Maghreb in the Muslim Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 391-2.

¹⁹⁹ Chraïbi, 91/47.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 39/16.

comments extensively on the Sheikh's sexuality, particularly his well-known predilection for young boys.

The relationship between religion and sexuality is a recurring preoccupation throughout *Le passé simple*. During a pivotal scene later in the novel for example, Driss seeks a Catholic priest for confession and conversion. He soon finds himself envisioning the priest as a young woman to whom he feels sexually attracted. During this dream-like sequence the priest – signifying the interplay of western imperialism and Christianity – is simultaneously eroticized and feminized. Driss' 'rape' of this symbol of Christianity “destiné uniquement à la satisfaction des corps” [destined uniquely for the satisfactions of the body] is a rescripting of the missionizing role of Christianity in colonial Morocco with Driss as the active agent.²⁰¹ As Jarrod Hayes argues, sex, and specifically being in an *active* sexual position, is equated with power throughout the novel.²⁰² This is evident in Driss' disdain for his mother whom he sees as a “coffre à grossesses” [container for pregnancies], a mere repository for *le Seigneur's* children, and in his rejection of Si Kettani's sexual proposition on the grounds that it requires him to be sexually passive.²⁰³ Similarly, his former French lover Roche – representative of the French ruling class within the Protectorate “qui prennant le Maroc pour une vaste Gomorrhe” [who see Morocco as one vast Gomorrah] – cuts off sexual relations because Driss wishes to switch from the passive to active position.²⁰⁴ The relationship between social or material power and sexual prowess (often coded in the text as aggression) is most apparent, however, in the figure of Haj Ferdi. His authority – both in his role as a father and as a landowner – is imbricated in a distinctly sexual economy.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 193/108

²⁰² See Hayes, “Homopast,” 507-8.

²⁰³ Driss declares “je suis actif” in response to Si Kettani's sexual proposal. Chraïbi, 95.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 273/157.

This is represented in his marital life that affirms his position as a patriarch, as well as in his sexual relationship with a young woman named Aisha who resides on his estate and with whom he has fathered two illegitimate children.²⁰⁵

In addition to outing Si Kettani for his sexual proclivities, Driss exposes the manipulations that facilitated the Sheikh's professional and material success:

Un matin vous vous êtes togé dans un drap presque blanc et vous êtes allé de porte en porte, de carrefour en carrefour, du mosquée en mosquée, hurlant que vous aviez vu en songe le Prophète discuter de la situation mondiale avec Franklin Delano Roosevelt. On vous a donné une zaouïa où vous vous retiré précipitamment et une pension substantielle que vous avez acceptée avec le dédain des vanités de ce monde. Par la suite, vous avez eu d'autres rêves que l'on s'empessa de bénir par autant de dons concrets, notamment une charge de jurisconsulte et une Cadillac. Le Résidence vous nomma conseiller général du Makhzen et le Tout-Fès voulut vous avoir pour hôte.

One morning you wrapped yourself in an almost white sheet and went from door to door, from one street corner to another, from one mosque to another, shouting that you had seen the Prophet discuss the world situation with Franklin Delano Roosevelt in a dream. You were given a *zaouïa* where you suddenly retired and a substantial pension that you accepted with disdain for the vanities of this world. You subsequently had other dreams that were quickly blessed by specific donations, notably the office of jurisconsult and a Cadillac. The Resident named you counselor general of the Makhzen and everybody in Fez society wanted you as a guest.²⁰⁶

Driss itemizes the various material gifts and honors bestowed on Si Kettani for his allegedly holy visions: Imam of the *Sharifian* schools, head of a *Zaouïa*, the office of jurisconsult and Counselor General of the *Makhzen*.²⁰⁷ As with Haj Ferdi, Driss satirizes Si Kettani's feigned disdain for the material world despite his substantial wealth. Moreover, his vision of the Prophet

²⁰⁵ This harkens to the "Droit de Seigneur" discussed earlier in this chapter.

²⁰⁶ Chraïbi, 87/45 (Translation Modified). I have replaced "then" with "subsequently" in addition to minor modifications in grammar.

²⁰⁷ A *Zaouïa* is a Sufi lodge or school of instruction.

Muhammad discussing world politics with President Roosevelt and his newly acquired Cadillac signal the structural parallels of capitalism and religious institutions.²⁰⁸

Technologies of Inscription & Authorial Interventions

While *Le passé simple* is critical of the institutionalization of Islam, particularly in Qur'anic schools, Driss reflects a more ambivalent relationship to French pedagogy. Though he acknowledges the skepticism French schooling has cultivated in him towards Islam, Driss also views it as an escape from the symbolic order of his father. As he declares to Si Kettani: "Disons qu'un bachelier (...) aura le même pouvoir et la même considération qu'un fqih (...) l'élite de demain ne se composera que de bacheliers. Les temps ont changé, monsieur." [Let's say that a high school graduate (...) will have the same power and consideration as a *fqih* (...) the elite of the future will all be people with a baccalaureate. (...) Times have changed Monsieur.]²⁰⁹

Addressing Si Kettani as Monsieur according to French rather than Moroccan rules of etiquette, Driss suggests that the religious elite will soon be replaced by a *modernizing* intellectual elite. What he fails to acknowledge of course is that his very access to the privileged Lycée Lyautey was only possible because of his father's religious stature and material wealth. This tension between the material and the spiritual is most clearly exhibited in the recurring image of *la ligne mince*.

An enigmatic motif throughout the novel, *la ligne mince* is a spectral vision that appears to Driss in two key scenes: following a failed revolt against his father and when he is at the mosque on

²⁰⁸ The passage seems to reference the political and economic ties of the United States with the French Protectorate. There are also references to the US presence in Morocco during World War Two and the capitalist manipulation of the economy through the dumping of confiscated tea on the market. See Chraïbi, 53.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 82-83/42-43 (Translation Modified). I have replaced 'diploma' with 'a high school graduate.'

Laylat al-Qadr. While little to no critical attention has been given to the complex image of *la ligne mince* – except as “le symbole de la frontière entre deux mondes, comme la ligne de démarcation entre l’Orient et l’Occident” [a symbol of the frontier between two worlds, like the line of demarcation between the Orient and Occident] – I believe it is essential to understanding the overall political project of *Le passé simple*.²¹⁰ A notable exception is anthropologist Stefania Pandolfo who argues that *la ligne mince* builds upon the Islamic concept of the *barzakh* – the liminal space between spiritual worlds. She posits that the line represents “the classificatory boundary between East and West, black and white, tradition and modernity” as a traumatic encounter that “materializes the fracture at the core of Driss’s identity” in the image of a wound or cut.²¹¹ While I agree that *la ligne mince* embodies an epistemological, psychological and spiritual rupture, the textual imagery indicates another purpose. I posit that the image functions as an intervention into the French language and historical discourse, one that confronts the violent inscription of the technologies of modernity. Driss initially experiences *la ligne mince* after an aggressive encounter with his father in the first chapter. Haj Ferdi finds Driss contemplating patricide and humiliates him for his inability to act. Trapped in this hateful state of inertia, Driss beckons for *la ligne mince*:

Ligne Mince, Ligne Mince, je t’appelle comme un enfant insomniaque appellerait une berceuse maternelle (...) Et c’est la Ligne Mince par quoi j’échappe. Elle est tombée dans cette chambre comme un flash. Seigneur, regardez votre pantin. Derrière mes paupières closes désespérément dans ma tension de trouver le sommeil, c’est d’abord comme un fil de toile d’araignée, un fil si mince, si impalpable qu’il en est irréel. Ce fil est une lettre, un chiffre ou une ligne brisée. Il ne bouge pas, mais je le vois grossir, oh! Si lentement, si doucement, si imperceptiblement au début. Et, en se précisant, en

²¹⁰ Kadra-Hadjadji, 43.

²¹¹ Pandolfo reads *la ligne mince* as “... a Quranic concept. It is the image of the *barzakh*- a partition, isthmus, limit or barrier- which establishes a difference and which it is forbidden to pass (*Qur’an* 23:99-100). In its Sufi interpretation and in the thought of Ibn ‘Arabi in particular, the *barzakh* is a pivotal concept: a theory of the Intermediate World of absence-presence, region of the boundary and domain of the Imagination in which contraries come together, bodies are spiritualized, and spirits become manifest in corporeal forms. Both a limit and an *entre-deux*, the *entre-deux* of the limit, the *barzakh* is a thin line.” “The Thin Line of Modernity,” in *Questions of Modernity*, Timothy Mitchell, eds., (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 115-147, 120-1.

grossissant, lettre, ligne brisée ou chiffre devient matériel et bouge, pendule, dans de plus en plus vite. Et la *Ligne Mince* devient aussi épaisse que le doigt, plus grosse que le bras, prend l'allure d'un piston de moteur, d'une hélice d'avion, d'une trajectoire de fusée, devient aussi énorme qu'une montagne, toujours avec sa forme de chiffre, de lettre ou de ligne brisée. Et à mesure que la vitesse et la grosseur de la *Ligne* atteignent le paroxysme, sa matérialité devenue visible et palpable acquiert une sorte de son, d'abord sourd, puis de plus en plus net, puis pareil à un sifflement de bale, puis aussi précis, fort, violent, cataclysme que le bruit d'une roue d'auto sur une route goudronnée, sur un chemin pavé, sur une route rocailleuse, pour être en fin de compte une gigantesque clameur d'un train en marche. Et tout cela est derrière mes paupières closes désespérément dans ma tension de trouver le sommeil, dedans mes yeux injectés d'épouvante, dans mon cerveau tout entier assourdi par ce tintamarre, écrasé par ce poids, haché par cette vitesse. Puis la gamme des bruits descend d'un ton, puis d'un autre, d'un autre encore; la vitesse diminue; la montagne devient bloc, le bloc poutre, lettre ou chiffre, derrière mes paupières closes désespérément dans ma tension de trouver le sommeil, n'est plus qu'une *Ligne Mince* sans sonorité ni mouvement, pareille à un fil de toile d'araignée, un fil si mince, si impalpable qu'il en est irréel.

Thin Line, Thin Line, I call out to you like a sleepless child would call out for a maternal lullaby (...) And it is through the *Thin Line* that I escape. It descends on this room like a flash. Lord, look at your puppet. Behind my eyes so desperately closed in my tension to find sleep, it is first like the thread of a spider's web, a thread so thin, so impalpable that it is unreal. This thread is a letter, a number or a broken line. It does not move, but I see it growing, oh so slowly, so softly, so imperceptibly at first. And as it becomes more precise, as it grows, letter, broken line or number are transformed into matter and move, pendulum-like, dancing faster and faster. The *Thin Line* becomes as thick as a finger, bigger than an arm, takes the form of a motor-valve, an airplane propeller, the trajectory of a rocket, becomes as enormous as a mountain, but keeping its form of number, letter or broken line. And as the speed and size of the *Line* attain paroxysm, its materiality becomes visible, palpable, acquiring a kind of sound, muffled at first, then growing clearer and clearer, then like the whistling of a bullet, as precise, as strong, as violent, as thundering as the sound of a car wheel on a tar road, on a paved highway, on a rocky road, to finally become the gigantic clamor of a moving train. And all of that is behind my eyes so desperately closed in my tension to go to sleep, inside my eyes injected with fear, in my brain completely deafened by this din, crushed by this weight, minced by this speed. Then the gamut of sound generates a tone, then another, then even another. The speed diminishes, the mountain becomes a block, the block a beam, letter or number, behind my eyes so desperately closed in my tension to find sleep, is nothing more than a *Thin Line* without sonority or movement, like the thread of a spider's web, a thread so thin, so impalpable that it is unreal.²¹²

²¹² Chraïbi, 63-5/30-31 (Translation Modified). I have replaced 'fell on' with 'descends on,' 'at the beginning' with 'at first,' 'swing back and forth' with 'pendulum-like,' 'takes on the look' with 'takes the form of,' 'shape' with 'form,' 'attain its climax' with 'attain paroxysm,' 'auto's wheel' with 'car wheel,' 'to end up' with 'to finally become,' 'train going at full speed' with 'moving train,' 'congested' with 'injected,' 'overwhelmed' with 'crushed,' 'chopped to pieces' with 'minced,' 'descends' with 'generate,' 'one more' with 'another,' 'seems unreal' with 'is unreal,' as well as minor changes with respects to word order, grammar and punctuation.

In this first encounter, Driss not only likens himself to a child, but he also summons the line “comme une berceuse maternelle.” His invocation of *la ligne mince* as a maternal figure is contrasted by the shifting imagery of the passage. Its appearance is sudden and visceral, “comme un flash,” but the line is also elusive, otherworldly and “irreal.” Initially Driss describes it as “une lettre, un chiffre ou une ligne brisée.” The discontinuity of the broken line seems to represent the Latin script, in contrast to Arabic script where the letters are interlinked and more closely resemble a continuous line. In this regard, the passage suggests that *la ligne mince* signifies the French language. Delicate and innocuous at first, *la ligne mince* metamorphoses as it gradually acquires size, speed and sound. A phantasmagoric vision, the line defies all rules of logic – transforming from the delicacy of a spider web into the enormity of a mountain, in addition to vacillating between stasis and movement, the impalpable and the material, silence and sound. However, it manages to maintain its form as a mode of inscription: “toujours avec sa forme de chiffre, de lettre ou de ligne brisée.” In addition to visually evoking the French language, *la ligne mince* also represents the very machinery of French discourses of modernity. The French language – arguably for both Driss and Chraïbi – signifies the various technologies employed to disseminate French imperial ideology; hence the analogies to cars, trains, planes, rockets, paved roads and highways. Although he initially beckons the line to comfort him, it soon becomes overwhelming and Driss is “assourdi par ce tintamarre, écrasé par ce poids, haché par cette vitesse.” Therefore while *la ligne mince* is the very medium of Driss’ escape – “par quoi j’échappe” – it is also violent and traps him “comme un fil de toile d’araignée.” As I will discuss at length, however, Driss recuperates this mode of inscription as an instrument of subversion.

In this passage, *la ligne mince* begins faintly and then grows in size, movement, and finally sound, only to shrink back to its original form. The shape-shifting quality of the line gestures towards a rhizomatic model of subjectivity. Chraïbi does not seem to be privileging a romantic notion of hybrid identity, however, as the space of *la ligne mince* is clearly not a painless one. It is in this state of being located between sleep and consciousness, reality and imagination, that Chraïbi seems to posit a site of agency and subversion. Throughout the novel, Driss' imagination functions as means of both evasion and creation: "Je vous échappe. Par mon imagination. Elle est vaste, vous-même l'avez reconnu" [I escape you, through my imagination, which is vast, as you yourself have recognized].²¹³

Driss next encounters *la ligne mince* at a mosque in Fès on *Laylat al-Qadr* [The Night of Power of Destiny]. One of the most sacred days in Islam, *Laylat al-Qadr* commemorates the descent of the Qur'an and entails a night of reflection and prayer. Possessed by *la ligne mince* on this holy night, Driss confronts "mon état d'âme" [the state of my soul] as he listens to Si Kettani's recitation of *Ayat al-Kursī* [the verse of The Throne] from the surah *al-Baqra* [The Cow].²¹⁴ During his recitation of this celebrated passage on the omnipotence and omniscience of God, Si Kettani transforms before Driss' eyes: "il n'était plus laid, il n'était plus bestial" [He was no longer ugly, he was no longer bestial].²¹⁵ Driss is then taken hold of by *la ligne mince* and it addresses him in accusation:

²¹³ Ibid., 50/23.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 105/55.

²¹⁵ Ibid. 105/55. The verse reads:

Elle me dit: tu es un nègre. Tu es un nègre depuis des générations croisé de blanc. Tu es en passe *de franchir la ligne*. De perdre ta dernière goutte de sang authentiquement nègre. Ton angle facial s'est ouvert et tu n'es plus crépu, plus lippu. Tu as été issu de l'Orient et, de par ton passé douloureux, tes imaginations, ton instruction, tu vas triompher de l'Orient. Tu n'as jamais cru en Allah, tu sais disséquer les légendes, tu penses en français, tu es lecteur de Voltaire et admirateur de Kant. Seulement le monde occidental pour lequel tu es destiné te paraît semé de bêtises et de laideurs, à peu de chose près les mêmes laideurs et les mêmes bêtises que tu fuis. De plus, tu le pressens hostile, il ne va pas t'accepter d'emblée. Et... tu as des reculs. Voilà pourquoi je t'apparais. Depuis le premier jour où je te suis apparue, tu n'es rien d'autre qu'une plaie.

It said to me: You are a black. You are a black from the generations that crossed with white. You are about to *cross over the line*, to lose your last drop of authentic black blood. Your facial angle opened up, and you are no longer woolly-haired or thick-lipped. You were issued from the Orient, and through your painful past, your imagination and your education, you are going to triumph over the Orient. You have never believed in Allah. You know how to dissect legends, you think in French, you are a reader of Voltaire and an admirer of Kant. Only the occidental world for which you are destined appears to you to be strewn with nonsense and ugliness, almost exactly the same ugliness and nonsense from which you are fleeing. Moreover, you feel that it is a hostile world, that it is not going to accept you right away, and... you have some setbacks. That is why I appear to you. Since the very first day I appeared to you, you have been nothing but an open wound.²¹⁶

La ligne mince confronts Driss with the implications of his French acculturation. The line casts his transformation as both visceral and intellectual – reflected in the shape of his face, the texture of his hair and the size of his lips, as well as his thoughts, ideals and beliefs. Employing

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي
السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ
مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا
شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ
الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

“Allah! There is no deity save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.” Pickthall translation.

²¹⁶ Chraïbi, 105-6/56 (Translation Modified). I have replaced ‘You are a black from generations back, crossed with white’ with ‘You are a black from the generations that crossed with white,’ ‘imaginings’ with ‘imagination’ and made other changes in grammar and punctuation.

decidedly racialized tropes of blackness, *la ligne mince* describes Driss' transformation as a literal whitewashing, and cautions him that he is on the brink "de perdre ta dernière goutte de sang authentiquement nègre." The use of charged racial phenotypes such as "crépu" and "lippu" signals the power discrepancy between Driss and the line, suggesting that it represents the very authority of the French language.

La ligne mince tells Driss that he will *triumph* over the Orient precisely through his French education, imagination as well as his "passé douloureux." Tellingly, the passage situates faith in the *passé composé* – "tu n'as jamais cru en Allah" – relegating Islam to an inaccessible and distant past. In contrast with this orientalist cliché, his French acculturation is cast in the present tense – "tu sais disséquer les legends, tu penses en français, tu es lecteur de Voltaire at admirateur de Kant." *La ligne mince* suggests that it is precisely because of rational Enlightenment thought – represented by the figures of Voltaire and Kant – that Driss is able to dissect the mythology of Islam. An influential intellectual figure of the French revolution, Voltaire was a known advocate for social reform whose satirical works took aim at religious institutions and dogma. Similarly, Kant's work highlighted the importance of reason in filtering our experience of the world, and he was also highly critical of the institutionalization of ritual and hierarchy in religious doctrine. In this regard, *la ligne mince* warns Driss that the western world he aspires to join is riddled with "les mêmes laideurs et les mêmes bêtises" as the Orient. The text thus draws a connection between the anti-clericalism of the Enlightenment and Driss' own ambivalent relationship to Islamic institutions and religious elitism.

Driss' encounter with *la ligne mince* signifies his cultural and linguistic schizophrenia, transforming him into "rien d'autre qu'une plaie." His rejection by the authorial voice of empire, however, inspires a spiritual transformation. While under the spell of the *la ligne mince* on *Laylat al-Qadr*, Driss is mesmerized by Si Kettani's recitation of the Qur'an. He interrupts the Sheikh so that he may continue the recitation, during which he begins to rewrite the Qur'an. Si Kettani is reciting "l'ouverture du chapitre H dur M" [The overture to the Chapter Hard *H M*].²¹⁷ Chraïbi's attempt to represent the Arabic letters of *Ḥa* and *Mīm* as "H dur M" renders legible the incommensurability of certain modes of inscription, but also a desire to bridge this gap. Each beginning with the incantation *Ḥa Mīm* (H M), this series of seven surahs from the late Meccan period includes: *al-Mu'min* [The Believer], *Ḥā' Mīm*, *al-Shūrā* [The Consolation], *al-Zukhruf* [The Ornaments of Gold], *al-Dukhān* [The Smoke], *al-Jāthiya* [The Kneeling] and *al-Aḥqāf* [The Sandhills]. Speculation on the meaning of the Arabic letters *Ḥa Mīm* that adorn this series is rather divided in Qur'anic exegesis.²¹⁸ As Yūsif 'Alī explains, "The general theme of the whole series is the relation of Faith to unfaith, Revelation to Rejection, Goodness to Falsehood."²¹⁹ One interpretation suggests that the letter *Mīm* connotes the Day of Judgment while the letter *Ḥa* implies that "the Beginning is only for the End, the Present for the Future," emphasizing "the eschatological element in Faith."²²⁰ Driss' intervention into these eschatological surahs, coupled with the novel's metaphor of the *passé simple*, ruptures a teleological model of historical time.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 106/56 (Translation Modified). Hughes translates the letters incorrectly as "*H hard M.*"

²¹⁸ There are different combinations of letters known as *Muqatta'āt* – meaning shortened or abbreviated – that open 28 different surahs in the Qur'an. The main theories on their meaning are that the letters are an abbreviation for entire sentences, symbols for God or the Prophet Muḥammad, a means of calling attention to the Prophet during his revelations and more controversially, that they indicate the initials of various scribes who transcribed the Qur'an under the supervision of the Prophet.

²¹⁹ Yūsif 'Alī, 1260.

²²⁰ Ibid., 1260.

Driss interrupts Si Kettani's recitation of the surah and begins his own that is both a reading and a rewriting. This night – signifying renewal, reflection and rebirth in Islam – becomes a creative and subversive space for Driss, who while possessed by *la ligne mince* is finally able to confront God:

Mon Dieu oui, vous parlez juste. Voyez, je vous accepte encore (...) et, même lorsque vous tonnez vos malédictions ou nous détaillez les châtements du Jugement dernier, vous vous exprimez par rythmes incantatoires. Voyez, mon Dieu: Haj Fatmi Ferdi m'a appris à vous aimer – dans la peur du corps et la désolation de l'âme. Il a appliqué votre loi, une femme qu'il a torturée, si bien torturée, grave, ponctuel, digne, que, cette torture en moins, elle tomberait en poussière; des fils qu'il lie, ligote, taille, écrase, le devoir et l'honneur dit-il... je vous aime encore pourtant. Alors – quoique de vous à moi, de vous qui déterminez à moi le déterminé, une prière soit inutile – faites que je vous aime encore longtemps. Ces versets que je psalmodie dans votre maison et dans les oreilles de vos fidèles, je les dis (...) parce que vous devez être chose autre que l'Allah des m'sids et des entraves. Je vous répète que je suis entravé.

Yes, my God, You speak truth. You see I still accept You (...) and even when You thunder out Your maledictions or detail for us the punishments of the Last Judgment, You explain Yourself in incantatory rhythms. You see my God, Haj Ferdi Fahmi taught me to love You, in fear for the body and the desolation of the soul. He applied Your law, to a woman whom he has tortured, tortured so thoroughly, severe, punctual, worthy, that, without this torture, she would fall into dust. To sons that he tied up and bound, cut up, and crushed, duty and honor he says (...) I still love You. And so, although from You to me, from You who determine for me what is determined, a prayer would be useless, grant that I may love You for a long time still. These verses I chant in Your house and in the ears of Your faithful, I say them (...) because You ought to be something other than the Allah of the Qur'anic schools and shackles. I repeat to You that I am shackled.²²¹

Driss' recitation demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the Qur'an and this series of surahs.

Chraïbi thus works from within Qur'anic discourse in order to undermine its appropriation and misuse by the religious elite. Driss contests a discourse of faith that relies on fear and hierarchy, such as that enforced by Haj Ferdi, Si Kettani and Qur'anic schools. He suggests that it is his father's selective interpretation of the Qur'an that has transformed him into an abusive husband and father. Notably, while each of the surahs in the series addresses questions of disbelief, sin,

²²¹ Chraïbi 107/56 (Translation Modified). I have replaced 'Allah' with 'God' per the French, 'serious' with 'severe,' 'cause me to love' with 'grant that I may love,' 'else' with 'other,' in addition to other minor modifications in spelling and grammar.

punishment and the Day of Judgment, they are also about forgiveness [*al-Mu'min*]; God's goodness [*Hā' Mīm*]; mercy [*al-Shūrā*]; truth [*al-Zukhruf*]; humility [*al-Dukhān*]; justice [*al-Jāthiya*] and patience [*al-Aḥqāf*]. Just as the first passage on *la ligne mince* depicts the authorial voice of French as a mode of inscription used to narrate colonial modernity, the second passage demonstrates its relationship to hegemonic Islamic institutions. Through the line Driss intervenes into the discursive authority of French imperialism as well as the patriarchal order of his father. He attempts to generate a new genealogy between himself and God – a god he cannot entirely believe in, but one he loves all the same.

The tension between faith and an Enlightenment discourse of technological modernity is perhaps most visible in the construction of *Le passé simple* as a text. Structured around the theme of Alchemy, each of the novel's five chapters traces the gradual transformation of base metals into gold: *Les Éléments de Base*, *Période de Transition*, *Le Réactif*, *Le Catalyseur* and *Les Éléments de Synthèse*. They further signify the novel's paroxysmal structure, as Driss attempts to reconcile his French education with his Moroccan and Islamic upbringing, only to realize in the end that: "Ma vie, je l'ai conduite en alchimiste. Me sont réservées, sans doute, quelques années, vingt, soixante. Que je conduirai en chimiste." [I have lived my life like an alchemist. No doubt I have a few years ahead of me, twenty or sixty that I will lead like a chemist.]²²² Chraïbi thus suggests that rather than attempting to blend or transform 'base elements,' the emerging intelligentsia must create anew. Moreover, the dichotomy between Chemistry – as a traditionally 'rational' science – and Alchemy as a reputedly 'mystical' science – is a fascinating inversion. Driss' conclusion at the end of the novel to be an alchemist rather than a chemist indicates a willingness

²²² Ibid., 273/157 (Translation Modified). I have replaced Harter's "thirty" with "sixty" per the French.

to explore other forms of knowledge than the traditional technologies associated with French pedagogy and discourses of modernity.

Tense Eruptions:

In the opening to his novel *L'Ane* published in France in 1956, Chraïbi revisits some of the criticisms surrounding *Le passé simple* around the question of Islam. He also addresses the autobiographical readings that dominate critical literature on the novel. Driss writes in his brief prologue:

Le héros du *Passé simple* s'appelle Driss Ferdi. C'est peut-être moi. En tout cas, son désespoir est le mien. Désespoir d'une foi. Cet Islam en quoi il croyait, qui parlait d'égalité des règnes, de la part de Dieu en chaque individu de la création, de tolérance, de liberté et d'amour, il le voyait adolescent ardent formé dans les écoles françaises, réduit au pharisaïsme, système social et arme de propagande. A tout prendre, il s'embarquait pour la France : il avait besoin de croire, d'aimer, de respecter quelqu'un ou quelque chose (...) Choisir? J'ai déjà choisi mais je voudrais tellement n'avoir plus à le faire. Car, si j'ai choisi vivre en France – et peut-être d'y mourir, mais cela dépend pas de moi – je continue à participer à ce monde de mon enfance et à cet Islam en lequel je crois de plus en plus.

The hero of *Le passé simple* is named Driss Ferdi. Perhaps it is me. In any event, his despair is mine; despair in faith. This Islam in which he believed – that speaks of the equality of kingdoms, of God's part in every individual creation, of tolerance, of liberty and of love – he saw it [as] a fiery teenager trained in French schools, reduced to a pharisaism, a social system armed with propaganda. All things considered, he embarked for France: he needed to believe, to love, to respect someone or something (...) Choose? I have already chosen, but I genuinely wish to have nothing more to do with it. For if I chose to live in France – and perhaps to die there – that does not rest on me. I continue to participate in this world of my childhood as well as this Islam that I believe in more and more.²²³

Chraïbi responds to accusations lodged against him that *Le passé simple* reflects the views of a native informant against Islam. He frames his literary intervention into Moroccan social and ethical issues as both personal and political. Chraïbi critiques the self-righteous

²²³ Driss Chraïbi, *L'Ane* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1956) 13-14.

institutionalization of Islam as a propoganda-laden “système social.” He acknowledges, however, that this awareness emerged in part from his French education. One could even note a structural parallelism between the Islamic values he lists and the tripartite motto of the French revolution: *tolérance/égalité, liberté/liberté* and *l’amour/fraternité*. While Chraïbi’s tone evokes a sense of resignation, I argue that the novel suggests other modes of critique and subversion.

Le passé simple’s critique of Islamic patriarchy and French hegemony culminates in Driss’ baccalaureate essay on the subject of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*. The essay very consciously performs the troubled “symbiose de mon rejet de l’Orient et du scepticisme que fait naître en moi l’Occident” [symbiosis of my rejection of the Orient and of the skepticism that the Occident generated in me.]²²⁴ In it, Driss describes himself as an “Arabe habillé en Français” [Arab dressed as a Frenchman] crafting an orientalist “bon roman genre vieille école: le Maroc, pays d’avenir, le soleil, le couscous (...) des bidonvilles, des pachas, des usines, les dates, les muezzins, le thé à la menthe, les fantasias...” [good novel of the old-school genre: Morocco, land of the future, of sun, couscous (...) the slums, pashas, factories, dates, mueddins, mint tea, fantasies ...]²²⁵ But even in his parody Driss reveals the tools of his performance, telling the French examiners that he will write about the topic “en tant qu’arabe. Sans plan, sans technique, gauche, tofu...” [as an Arab. Without a plan, without technique, gauche, belabored...].²²⁶ More revealing than Driss’ performance of Orientalism, however, is the manner in which he exposes the similarities of these two narrative worlds:

Le sujet est ‘Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.’ Je ne suis pas pleinement qualifié pour en parler. Par contre, je puis aisément lui substituer un sujet de remplacement et qui m’est

²²⁴ Chraïbi, 205/115.

²²⁵ Ibid., 208/117 and 206/116 (Translation Modified). I have substituted ‘is creating’ with ‘generated,’ ‘old type’ with ‘old-school genre,’ ‘shantytowns’ with ‘slums’ and ‘fantasias’ with ‘fantasies.’

²²⁶ Ibid., 207-8/117.

autrement familier: ‘La théocratie musulmane.’ Usant de tel théorème des triangles semblables, je présume que le résultat sera le même, à peu de chose près.

The subject is ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.’ I am not fully qualified to speak on the subject. On the other hand, I can easily substitute another subject to replace it, one with which I am familiar: ‘Muslim Theocracy.’ Using such a theorem of similar triangles, I presume that the result will be the same or at least very similar.²²⁷

Chraïbi parallels the French revolutionary ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* with “La théocratie musulmane,” claiming that one could easily be substituted with the other. The two are linked by their mutual reliance on foundational myths of origin. The motto represents a progressivist model of modernity used to legitimize the *mission civilisatrice* in the Maghreb. Similarly, Haj Ferdi’s ‘Muslim theocracy’ relies on his religious and material authority, both of which are legitimized through his *Sherifian* lineage.

Chraïbi’s use of the *passé simple* as a metaphor challenges the authority of French literary and historical discourse. Moreover, as with Waṭṭār’s *al-Zilzāl* and Djébar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia*, the novel’s heteroglossic engagement with a variety of discursive traditions comes together in a Bakhtinian upending of social hierarchies. *Le passé simple* critiques the institutionalization of Islam by undermining the use of lineage to legitimize familial, socio-economic, religious and political authority. This is performed in the text’s satirization of the collusion between the religious elite and the French Protectorate, the appeal to *Sherifian* descent, the corpus of hadith as a chain of transmission, the parable of Abraham and the attempted *coup d’état* against Haj Ferdi. Similarly, the novel disrupts French discourses of modernity by resignifying the revolutionary rhetoric of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and the technologies of the *mission civilisatrice*. Chraïbi offers an alternative, however, in the recurring image of *la ligne mince*,

²²⁷ Ibid., 208/117.

which embodies a temporal and epistemological site of rupture. This temporal dissonance is most clearly performed in Maḥmūd al-Mas‘adī’s *Mawlid al-Nisyān* to which I will now turn my attention.

The Poetic Landscape of Islamic Thought:

Creation and Existence in al-Mas‘adī’s *Mawlid al-Nisyān*

«نحن نُساقُ بالطبيعة إلى الموت ونُساقُ بالعقل إلى الحياة»

ابو حيان التوحيدي

We are led by nature towards death, and we lead ourselves with reason towards life.

Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī²²⁸

The opening quote to Maḥmūd al-Mas‘adī’s *Mawlid al-Nisyān* [The Genesis of Forgetfulness] by the 10th century thinker Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī captures the creative power of individual thought. Al-Mas‘adī’s 1940s novella further infuses al-Tawhīdī’s aphorism with a spiritual valence, as the story explores the individual and social potentiality of critical thinking as an Islamic mode of existence. Writing as Tunisia began the arduous process of seeking independence from French imperialism; al-Mas‘adī’s fiction invokes a series of critical questions on the future of political, cultural as well as literary innovation in Tunisia.

Perhaps the most renowned public intellectual of Tunisia, Maḥmūd al-Mas‘adī (1911-2004) was a writer, trade unionist, educator, editor and government official. In addition to being an active member of the Neo-Dustūr party, al-Mas‘adī was the Minister of Cultural Affairs (1973-1976), Speaker of Parliament (1981-1986), as well as the architect of Tunisia’s educational policy (1958-1968) following independence in 1956.²²⁹ Moreover, he was the Editor in Chief of the

²²⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Arabic and French are my own.

²²⁹ *Al-Ḥizb al-Ḥurr al-Dustūrī al-Jadīd* or the New Constitutional Liberal Party was formed under the French Protectorate in 1934 following the split *al-Ḥizb al-Ḥurr al-Dustūrī*. Instrumental in Tunisia’s battle for independence, the nationalist party was largely populist and socialist in orientation. Despite undergoing a series of name changes – including *al-Ḥizb al-Ishtirākī al-Dustūrī* or the *Parti socialiste destourien* and later *al-Tajammu‘*

literary journal *al-Mabāḥith* [Investigations], which he ran between 1944 and 1947. An avant-garde periodical bringing together the country's preeminent writers, critics and public intellectuals, *al-Mabāḥith* was a “forum for a collective academic project to construct a national culture in Tunisia.”²³⁰ Not only was it the medium through which al-Mas‘adī serialized and published his earlier stories and novels, but it also embodied the creative zeitgeist percolating in 1940s Tunisia.

The majority of al-Mas‘adī’s fictional works were written during a creative burst between 1938 and 1941, though many were not published until the 1970s. He was educated at the most prestigious institutions of both French and Islamic thought – studying at the Lycée Carnot and the Sorbonne, as well as al-Madrassa al-Ṣādiqiyya and the Islamic Zaytūna University. Writing during the peak of France’s imperial stronghold in the Maghreb, al-Mas‘adī remains a highly controversial figure in the Tunisian literary heritage. At the time, Arab intellectuals across North Africa and the Middle East were actively attempting to define the role of the committed intellectual in relation to a growing anti-imperialist nationalist discourse. Al-Mas‘adī, however, was adamant in distinguishing his role as a public intellectual and policy maker from his aesthetic theory of literature. In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate how these two dimensions are actually intimately connected in his literary oeuvre.

In order to contextualize al-Mas‘adī’s literary project, I will begin by situating his work within the broader Tunisian and Arab literary scene. In particular, I wish to frame his writing in relation

al-Dustūrī al-Dīmuqrāḥī, or the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* – the party remained in power until the toppling of President Ben Ali in 2011 during the Arab Spring.

²³⁰ Mohamed-Salah Omri *Nationalism, Islam and World Literature: Sites of Confluence in the Writing of Maḥmūd al-Mas‘adī* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 6.

to debates in both the Maghreb and Mashriq surrounding literary commitment or *Iltizam*. I then provide an overview of his philosophical story *Mawlid al-Nisyān* [The Genesis of Forgetfulness] written in the early 1940s. Finally, I analyze the story's engagement with Islamic Thought – and specifically the mystical and anti-clerical elements of Sufi teachings. Al-Mas'adī's literary project enacts what I call an *Islamic Poiesis* – namely, an aesthetic engagement with Islamic Thought that conceptualizes artistic representation as a mode of creation. I demonstrate how the resonances between Sufism and existentialist philosophy on the one hand, as well as Islamic Thought and Arabic literature on the other, serve to complicate the boundary between 'secular' and 'religious' discourses.

Literary Commitment & Existentialism

In the context of the Pan-Arabist movement of the 1930s, the formation of the Arab League in 1945 and Nasserist Arab Nationalism in the 1950s, a discourse of cultural production connected to Arab nationalism emerged under the rubric of *Adab al-Iltizām* or *al-Adab al-Multazim* [Committed Literature].²³¹ Such literature was often, but not exclusively, realist in nature and sought to reflect current social and political realities. While this call to literary commitment peaked in the 1940s and 1950s as nationalist sentiments against French and British imperialism

²³¹ Pan-Arabism is a political ideology based on the shared cultural, linguistic and social affinity of Arab-speaking peoples and nations. While this ideology has evolved into various configurations over the latter half of the twentieth century, it most commonly entailed intergovernmental military, political, economic and cultural alliances between sovereign Arab nations. As an ideology it was first popularized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Jurji Zaydan (d. 1914) and the Sharif of Mecca Ḥusayn Ibn 'Alī who sought independence from Ottoman rule. In the 1930s, Pan-Arabism gained caché as an intellectual movement when Syrian thinkers of the Arab Ba'ath [Renaissance] Party such as Constantin Zureiq, Zaki al-Arsuzi and Michel Aflaq fused the concept with Marxist thought. More literal applications of the ideology emerged with the formation of various Arab unions, such as Nasser's United Arab Republic in 1958 that joined Syria and Egypt, the Federation of Arab Republics joining Jordan and Iraq also in 1958, and finally the Federation of Arab Republics by Mu'ammār al-Qaddāfi in 1972 to merge Libya, Egypt and Syria. The League of Arab States was formed in 1945 with Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, and now includes 22 member states. The League aims to encourage collaboration among member Arab states for the preservation of their sovereignty and independence as well as the institution of social, cultural, economic and political policies to protect these interests.

in North Africa and the Middle East were escalating, it actually began in the 1920s. On the coattails of the 19th century cultural revival known as the Arab Nahda, theories of literature inflected by Socialist and Marxist ideologies began emerging in the 1920s by such critics as Salāma Mūsa (1887-1958) and Lūis ‘Awad (1915-1990) in Egypt as well as ‘Umar Fakhūrī (1895-1946) and Ra’if Khūrī (1912-1967) in Lebanon. Attacking the supposed elitism of literature of the ‘Ivory Tower’ or *al-Burj al-‘ājī*, these critics developed a theory of literary commitment based on Dialectical Materialism. They argued that literature is both derivative of and obligated to existing social, economic and political realities.

As a number of scholars have argued, much of the discourse surrounding the Nahda problematically time-stamps the emergence of Arab consciousness – nationalist, but also modern Arab subjectivity as such – in relation to western cultural and political imperialism.²³² In June 1947, Ṭaha Ḥusayn, the “Dean of Arabic Literature” and a major figurehead of the Nahda and Arab Modernist movement, popularized Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of *littérature engagée* among the Arab literary community. In his literary journal *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī*, Ḥusayn commented and elaborated on Sartre’s series of essays first published in *Les Temps modernes* outlining *engagement* as an ethical obligation to socially responsible writing.²³³ Similarly in the Maghreb, the philosopher Albert Camus (1913-1960) contributed to a number of literary journals published

²³² See Stephen Sheehi’s *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* where he discusses the Nahda in relation to the ‘naturalization’ of the project of European Modernity (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004). Examples of critical works that reify this discourse include Albert Hourani’s *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1962) and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Durī’s *al-Juzur al-tarikhiyya lil-qawmiyya al-‘Arabiyya* [The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation] (Beirut: Dar al-‘Ilm lil-malayyin, 1960).

²³³ See Verena Klemm, “Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizām*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq,” *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* Vol. 3 No. 1 (2000): 51-62.

out of Algeria, such as *Rivages* (1930s) and *Simoun* (1950s), which expressed similar views on *engagement*.

By the early 1950s, Sartre's theory of commitment was naturalized and adapted for an Arab readership by Suhail Idrīs (1925-2008) who ran the Beirut-based journal *al-Adab*. To quote Idrīs: "As for me, I did not understand existentialism as a philosophy but as a social and political doctrine which puts the values of liberty and responsibility, so urgently needed in the Arab world, into the centre of ethical behaviour."²³⁴ This severing of literary commitment from Existentialism continued through the 1950s as a number of Marxist thinkers – such as Shihāda Khūrī in Syria and Muḥammad al-Shubāshī in Egypt – began to attack European thinkers like Sartre, Schopenhauer and Kafka for their theoretical dependence on religion, philosophy and psychology.²³⁵ They proposed a strict model of literary commitment based on Socialist Realism or *al-Wāqī'īya al-Ishtirākīya*, as well as the principles of Dialectical Materialism.²³⁶ This artistic ideology sought to move away from foreign influences and to focus instead on the plight of the 'everyman' in conformity with the ethical, social and political values of Soviet inflected Socialism.

Al-Mas'adī, however, took a conscious stance against this dichotomization between art of the 'Ivory Tower' and politically engaged art. In his address to the Writers' Congress in Cairo in December 1957 on "The Question of Protecting the Writer and Arab Nationalism" [*Mas'alit Ḥamāyit al-Adīb wa al-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya*], he states:

²³⁴ Interview with Verena Klemm, cited in "Commitment," 55.

²³⁵ Ibid, 53.

²³⁶ As Klemm explains, "These had been defined by Andrej Zdanov, Stalin's leader cultural ideologist, and introduced by Maksim Gork'iy during the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934," Ibid., 59.

ان الانسان جوهر فرد. ذلك ما ينبغي له ان يكون وذلك هو سر شرفه الأسمى في الوجود.
بل انه لمن الحق المبين أن الانسان ما اشتدت فردية جوهره الا اشتد اتصاله بانسانيته ووقاؤه
لرسالته في الكون. على أن الأديب قد يجد اكتمال انسانيته في الاتجاه بفرديته الى التعمق
في الذات والتهيه في أبعادها فيبدو منقطعا الى «الفن للفن» أو الى «الحياة فى البرج العاجية»
كما يقال ، ولكنه لا يزال مع ذلك ومن خلال فنه ذاك وحياته تلك يجتذبنا الى انسانيته الكاملة ،
ويرفعنا أفرادا وأقواما الى منازل الشرف والسمو.

Indeed, Man is an individual Being. It is what he must be and the secret to the radiant glory of his existence. As the manifest Truth [of God], when Man strengthens his individual essence it strengthens his humanity and accordingly he fulfills his role in the universe. A writer may find that the completeness of his humanity is in devoting himself to the contemplation of the self and meditation on its dimensions. This makes him appear to be devoted to 'Art for art's sake' or 'Living in the Ivory Tower,' as they say. He does, despite that; attract us through his art and life to his completed humanity, lifting us up as individuals and as nations to the heights of the sublime and the noble.²³⁷

Al-Mas'adī posits that it is the artist's spiritual devotion to self-awareness and exploration, the 'completion of his humanity,' that generates artistic production capable of elevating humanity. Therein, he argues, lies the true work of *al-Qawmiya al-'Arabiyya* or Arab Nationalism. It is in this context that I would like to frame Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī as a literary figure, demarcating the turn away from the aesthetics of Socialist Realism.

Employing a non-realist and highly symbolic style, al-Mas'adī's fiction avoids any direct reference to Tunisia's social or political context. His works seem almost mythical in nature, staged outside of time and space and devoid of markers of historical, geographical, social or political specificity. In this regard, Arab literary critics found it challenging to read them in

²³⁷ Al-Mas'adī, *Ta'ṣilā li-Kiyān* [Authenticating Being], 1979, *Al-A'māl al-Kāmila* [Completed Works] Vol. 1-3. Maḥmūd Ṭarshouna, Ed., (Tunis: Dar al-Janūb li al-Nashr, 2003) 60. Portions of the passage are cited in Omri, 42 though I have slightly modified his translation.

relation to Tunisia's status as a French protectorate and attempts at decolonization. They either imposed a didactically nationalist and anti-imperialist reading, or dismissed his writing as apolitical artistic navel-gazing.²³⁸

Ṭaha Ḥusayn for example entered into one such infamous public exchange with the writer in 1957 regarding his supposedly nihilistic appropriation of French Existentialism. Ḥusayn, who credits al-Mas'adī with the 'Islamicization' of Existentialism, warns the writer of the philosophy's atheistic proclivities.²³⁹ He compares al-Mas'adī's "Muslim Existentialism" [*al-Wūjūdiyya al-Muslima*] to the "Christian" Existentialism of the French philosopher Gabriel Honoré Marcel (1889-1973).²⁴⁰ Marcel, who felt more theoretically aligned with Søren Kierkegaard than Jean-Paul Sartre, described his work as a *Philosophy of Existence* rather than Existentialism as such.²⁴¹ Ḥusayn's contention with Existentialism is that it often substitutes Man's belief in the unlimited and infinite power and knowledge of God with an unlimited belief in the individual. In his open letter to al-Mas'adī Ḥusayn explains:

²³⁸ Tunisian critic Tawfīq Bakkar is one such example. See the introduction to Khalid al-Gharībī's *Jadaliyyat al-āṣālah wa al-mu'aṣīrah fī adāb al-Mas'adī* [The Dialectic of Authenticity and Modernity in the Fiction of al-Mas'adī] (Tunis: al-Wafa, 1994).

²³⁹ Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *al-Jumhūriyya* No. 29 (May 1957), republished in *al-Sudd* (Tunis: Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li al-Nashr, 1974) 243-4.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.

²⁴¹ In contrast to Sartre, Kierkegaard's existentialism is notable for its emphasis on individual choice in relation to Christian ethics and thought.

وهي وجودية قوامها ايمان الانسان بنفسه الى أبعد حدود الايمان ، بحيث يجعل الانسان بنفسه مقياسا للخير والشر ، ويحمل الانسان وحده تبعه أعماله ولا يُسأل عنها الا امام نفسه ، قبل ان يسأل عنها امام الجماعة وقوانينها...الوجودية التي ... أسلمت في تونس على يد الاستاذ المسعدي فهي تجعل لثقة الانسان بنفسه حدودا اهمها وأقواها وأضخمها هذا الحد الديني الذي يعصم الانسان من الغرور ومن الجموح ، ويلقي في قلبه انه مسؤول أمام قوة اشد منه بأسا وأعظم منه ومن الجماعة وقوانينها سلطانا ، وهي قوة الله الذي يراقب الضمير ويعلم خائنة الاعين وما تخفي الصدور.

This [French] Existentialism is founded on Man's unlimited faith in himself, whereby Man turns to himself as the measure of good and evil. It is Man alone who bears the consequences of his deeds, and he does not question them beyond [first] himself, and then society and its laws... The Existentialism that was... Islamicized in Tunisia at the hands of Professor al-Mas'adī, however, demarcates limits to Man's belief in himself. The most important, strongest and greatest of which, is the limit of religion. This safeguards Man from arrogance and recalcitrance, [such that] he knows in his heart that he is responsible before a force more powerful than himself, stronger and greater than himself, society and the authority of its laws. It is the power of Allah that keeps watch over the conscience, exposes illusions and what is hidden in [Mens'] hearts.²⁴²

Ḥusayn understands French Existentialism as a philosophy that propagates Man's unchecked faith [*īymān*] in himself as the ultimate arbiter of ethical, social and spiritual concerns. Whereas Islamicized (or for that matter, Christian) Existentialism maintains God's authority in such affairs, protecting Man from hubris [*ghurūr*], the unreliability of sense perception as well as the weakness of the conscience in betraying inner desires. It is precisely at this threshold between creative potential and self-delusion, man and the divine, as well as faith and reason that I believe al-Mas'adī's work is most theoretically and politically interesting.

²⁴² Ibid., 243.

While al-Mas‘adī’s fiction is often read as an anomaly within the Tunisian and broader North African literary scene, he is actually in dialogue with a number of literary, social and philosophical currents of the period. The critic Maḥjoub Bin Mīlād who wrote the introduction to the first edition of al-Mas‘adī’s *al-Sudd* for example, published a treatise on intellectual renewal in Tunisia entitled *Taḥrīk al-sawākin* or “Shake Up Those Who Are Sleeping.”²⁴³ The text employs the Islamic concept of *ijtihād*, or reasoning independent of precedent, as a basis for collective and individual creativity. He sought to bridge the gap between divine authority and human will in the domains of religious thought and praxis as well cultural production. Moreover, literature of the 1960s Tunisian avant-garde – such as the works of ‘Azz al-Dīn Madanī and Ṭaḥīr Hammami – often reflected existentialist themes and motifs.²⁴⁴ These writers sought to generate novel modes of artistic expression – both stylistically and linguistically. To quote literary scholar Jean Fontaine: “Plots were often reduced to backward spirals, in which times were embedded in each other. Heroes deconstructed themselves, and the real was cloaked in dreams. For that matter, members of the Avant-Garde no longer spoke about poetry or prose, but about ‘Ibdā’ (creation)”.²⁴⁵ This emphasis on *ibd‘a* or creation as a modality of artistic production touches on the heart of al-Mas‘adī’s view of literature, a point I will return to at length.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Maḥjoub Bin Mīlād, *Taḥrīk al-sawākin* [Shake Up Those Who Are Sleeping] (Tunis: Bou Slama, 1955). Referenced in Jean Fontaine, “Arabic Language Tunisian Literature (1956-1990),” *Research in African Literatures* (Summer 1992): 183-193, 185.

²⁴⁴ Fontaine, 186.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁴⁶ This dialogue was prominent in literary and cultural journals of the region such as the Moroccan periodical *Souffles-Anfas* [Breaths] under the direction of Abdellatif Laâbi.

One encounters literary engagements with Sufism and Existentialism in authors as diverse as Egyptian novelist Nagīb Maḥfūz (1911-2006) and Libyan writer Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī (b. 1948).²⁴⁷ Most notably, the Egyptian philosopher ‘Abd al-Raḥman Badawi (1917-2002), particularly in his 1947 work *al-Insāniyya wa al-Wujūdiyya fī al-Fikr al-‘Arabī* [Humanism and Existentialism in Arab Thought], draws parallels between Sufism, Humanism and Existentialism.²⁴⁸ His philosophy engages with the diversity of European existentialist thought, including Heidegger, Kierkegaard and Sartre, while also exploring such Arab thinkers as Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī. Al-Badawi describes the mutual affinity between Existentialism and Sufism as such: “Between these two tendencies – existentialism and Sufism (mysticism) – there exists, in principal, deep affinities of method and ultimate goals. Sufism is based on a doctrine of subjectivity: by that we mean that it recognizes no true existence other than that of the individual.”²⁴⁹ Al-Badawi further examines the Sufi concepts of *al-Insān al-Kāmil* [the Perfect Human] and *qalaq* or anguish in light of Kierkegaard and Heidegger respectively. Maḥfūz’s engagement with Sufism moved away from its mystical or metaphysical overtones to a self-described philosophy of Sufi-Socialism.²⁵⁰ While he expresses an appreciation for the sublime beauty of Sufism, Maḥfūz reads it as an aesthetic philosophy rather than a philosophy of life.²⁵¹ Al-Mas‘adī’s literary

²⁴⁷ The Sufi-inflected fiction of Libyan author Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī (b. 1948) is most notable for its emphasis on the natural world and particularly the desert as a source of spiritual awakening and fulfillment.

²⁴⁸ ‘Abd al-Raḥman Badawi, *al-Insāniyya wa al-Wujūdiyya fī al-Fikr al-‘Arabī* [Humanism and Existentialism in Arab Thought] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1947).

²⁴⁹ Cited in Mona N. Mikhail, “Existential Themes in a Traditional Cairo Setting,” in *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition* Eds. Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993) 81.

²⁵⁰ See: Sasson Somekh, *The Changing Rhythm: A Study of Najīb Maḥfūz's Novels, Volume 1* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishing, 1973) 55 and Mona N. Mikhail, “Existential Themes,” 81-94.

²⁵¹ See: *Naguib Mahfouz, The Art of Fiction No. 129* Interview with Charlotte El Shabrawy. Available online at: <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2062/the-art-of-fiction-no-129-naguib-mahfouz>. Maḥfūz’s 1971 short story *Hikāyya bilā bidāya walā nihāya* [Story without a beginning nor an ending] for example explores the confluence of Existentialism with Sufism through the trans-generational narrative of a Sufi father and existentialist son who discover a philosophical and spiritual common ground.

exploration of both Sufi and existentialist concepts, however, addresses their potentiality *both* aesthetically and as a philosophy of life.

The Literary World of al-Mas‘adī

As a literary figure, al-Mas‘adī challenges the role of the committed intellectual as well as the relationship between cultural innovation and Islam. His fiction is characterized by themes deeply embedded within both existentialist and Islamic Thought. Plagued by doubt, his protagonists embark on journeys of self-discovery that force them to confront a series of dialectics at the heart of the human condition: reason and faith, self-actualization and annihilation, free will and religious determinism, the spiritual and the material, as well as the sacred and the profane. Al-Mas‘adī’s literary works that have garnered the most critical attention are his controversial novel *Ḥadatha Abū Hurayra qāl* [Abū Hurayra spoke, saying...] and his play *al-Sudd* [The Dam]. While this chapter focuses on his novella *Mawlid al-Nisyān* [The Genesis of Forgetfulness], a brief discussion of his other works will help frame al-Mas‘adī’s broader literary oeuvre.

Written between the late 1930s and early 1940s but not published until 1973, *Ḥadatha Abū Hurayra qāl* consists of twenty-two hadiths, or tales, about Abū Hurayra that are recounted by himself, his friends and his admirers. Controversially, the protagonist shares the name, though not the life, of a prominent figure of Islamic history. Abū Hurayra (603-681) was one of the Prophet Muḥammad’s companions and a venerable transmitter of hadith often cited in Sunni *isnād*.²⁵² Furthermore, the story takes place during the early history of Islam, primarily between

²⁵² *Isnād* references the chain of transmission that is employed to verify the authenticity of a given hadith.

the cities of Mecca and Medina. Though it was not published until nearly thirty years after it was written, the manuscript for *Hadatha* was initially rejected and al-Mas‘adī was confronted with significant ire regarding the texts perceived parody of the apostolic tradition of hadith and representation of a revered figure of Islamic history as a flawed man who indulged in women, wine and other prohibited pleasures. Rather than reading the story as a mere satire of the life of the Prophet’s companion or the tradition of hadith, theorist Mohamed-Salah Omri presents it instead as a complex engagement with the narrative style of hadith – its ties to orality, chains [*silsilah*] of transmission and the reliability of narration – as well as the rhetorical device of *taqiyya* [concealment] that is part of the broader tradition of Islamic rhetoric.²⁵³ In this regard, the text is attempting to address the role of *turāth* [heritage] in contemporary Tunisian and Arab literary production by contesting the sacred preservation of traditional literary genres and stylistic conventions.

Al-Mas‘adī’s play *al-Sudd* [The Dam] recounts the story of the steadfast Ghaylān who enters into a conflict with the powerful Goddess Ṣāhabbā over the construction of a dam. The leader of a religion replete with a gospel, priests, prophet, rituals and followers, Ṣāhabbā’s faith is based on the principles of drought and aridity. Driven by his conviction in the power and autonomy of human will, Ghaylān along with his reluctant companion Maymūna begin to construct the dam. They are met, however, with a series of apocalyptic natural disasters reminiscent of the Qur’anic account of the Day of Judgment. Ghaylān’s obsession with the construction of the dam despite the various obstacles thrown before him reveals not only the strength of human will, but also the blinding dangers of hubris. The dam is eventually consumed by a storm of apocalyptic

²⁵³ Omri, 64-68.

proportions in which Ghaylān disappears. The play thus vividly enacts an ideological conflict between institutionalized religion and human creativity.

Mawlid al-Nisyān [The Genesis of Forgetfulness] was written in the early 1940s, serialized in 1945 and published in its entirety in 1974. The story traces the physical and spiritual journey of the physician Madīn *al-hakim* [the wise]. After wandering for many years, Madīn and his companion Layla arrive in a new land where they establish a hospice. The facility offers long-term patient care for the terminally ill and dying using a new breed of science and medicine. Their practices conflict with the sorceress Ranjahad who lives in the forest with her followers. Prior to their arrival, the townspeople were reliant on Ranjahad's healing powers and she would often leave them to suffer on the threshold between life and death. Haunted by the death of his former love Asmā', Madīn embarks on a mission to develop a drug to combat death by allowing for an existence free from the effects of time. When he falls ill with a fever one night, he hallucinates a conversation with Asmā' who describes her inability to move on to the afterlife and her desire for an earthly body. Frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the 'rational' sciences to stop death, Madīn seeks Ranjahad's assistance and magic. Specifically, he wishes her to lead him to *Salhawa*, a magical spring and plant rumored to provide *salwa* [consolation] *sahw* [obliviousness] as well as *hawā* [desire] and whose waters transform matter into air.²⁵⁴

Driven by his mission, Madīn ignores his companion Layla's warnings and accompanies Ranjahad on a quest of self-discovery. Over the course of their journey – and it is unclear whether it is real or imagined – Madīn and Ranjahad travel through a series of worlds where they

²⁵⁴ For a discussion of the etymology of *Salhawa*, see Omri, 7.

experience various supernatural phenomenon: disembodied souls stuck in limbo, the cycle of life and death at warp speed and the suspension of time. Inspired by these events, Madīn completes the drug and drinks it in order to “pass from one world into another.”²⁵⁵ The drug briefly works, granting him a feeling of eternal permanence, pure existence and obliterating his memory and sense of self. The transformation is physical and spiritual as the drug instills Madīn’s eyes with “the light of revelation” and he believes himself to be in the highest form of existence.²⁵⁶ The effects of the elixir are fleeting, however, and Madīn is quickly brought back to the material world. Before his soul ascends to the “World of the Dead,” Ranjahad reveals herself as a trickster, who has tempted Madīn with the impossible.

In drawing on a variety of literary, philosophical and religious influences, al-Mas‘adī’s fiction bridges genres as well as demarcations between western and Arab intellectual traditions. By engaging with literary and philosophical works ranging from Ancient Greece through the 21st century, he further breaks from literary periodizations. Al-Mas‘adī builds on the relationship between tragedy and literature in the Sufi poetry of the ascetic Abū al-‘Atāhiya (748-826), the mystical universalism of the Sufi mystic and poet Maṣnū‘ al-Ḥallāj (858-922), the philosopher Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arri’s (973-1058) understanding of rationalist Islam, the poiesis of the self from the theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) as well as the liminal concept of the *Barzakh* from the mystic Ibn al-‘Arabi (1165-1240). Al-Mas‘adī even wrote critical essays on the works of al-‘Atāhiya, al-Ma‘arri and al-Ghazālī in his early career.²⁵⁷ He is also heavily in

²⁵⁵ Al-Mas‘adī, *Mawlid*, 104.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁵⁷ *Abu al-‘Atāhiya kama yurahu Ṣāḥib al-aghānī* [Perceptions of Abu al-‘Atāhiya by Singers] *al-Mabāḥith* No. 12 (March 1945); *Abū al-‘Alā’ fīmā baynaka wa bayn nafsika* [Abū al-‘Alā’ Between You and Yourself] *al-Mabāḥith* No. 21 (December 1945); *Mushkilat al-m‘arifa ‘and al-Ghazālī* [The Problem of Knowledge in al-Ghazālī] *al-Mabāḥith* No. 3 (February 10, 1940).

dialogue with Greek tragedy and cites Baudelaire, Camus, Dostoevsky, Gide, Goethe, Ibsen, Malraux, Sartre, Shakespeare and Valéry among his influences. Al-Mas‘adī’s integration of early Arab and Islamic Thought as well as European philosophy and literature, offers a new vision of literary innovation. By working within a variety of traditions in a manner that is innovatively novel but also timeless – as in literally outside of time and history – al-Mas‘adī reimagines the Arabic literary heritage as well as its future potentiality.

Al-Mas‘adī’s stylistic and linguistic innovations coupled with his engagement with a variety of literary traditions challenges authoritative discourses on the relationship between cultural production and nationalism. More than merely reflecting his own literary proclivities, al-Mas‘adī’s fiction is representative of his broader view of cultural innovation at a critical moment in Tunisian history. To quote a statement by al-Mas‘adī speaking in his capacity as the Minister of Cultural Affairs:

Cultural development must be regarded both as a factor of national identity – or cultural identity – and as an instrument of transformation or change of a society... development and modernization must be pursued under the triple banner of (i) fidelity to oneself, (ii) the profound will to renew, and (iii) the wise and rational selection of borrowing and influences to integrate into the modernization process.²⁵⁸

Al-Mas‘adī here outlines the subtle dynamic of fidelity, renewal and exchange seminal to both cultural innovation and modernization more broadly speaking. His fiction tackles these questions with respects to: language – through intertextuality with the Qur’an as well as early Arab and Islamic poetic traditions – modes of representation – in his deconstruction of allegory, genre and certain stylistic conventions – and ideology – by challenging the relationship between *iltizām* and social reality in addition to rethinking the political, humanist and literary valences of

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Ruth Davis, “Cultural Policy and the Tunisian Ma‘lūf: Redefining a Tradition,” *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 41 No. 1 (Winter 1997): 1-21, 2.

Islamic thought and practice. In this regard, al-Mas‘adī not only integrates a variety of traditions and conventions, but more crucially, he challenges their very discursive authority in the act of bringing them together. To quote Omri on the author’s relationship with the Qur’an: “when al-Mas‘adī proceeds to rearranging the order of words in his sentences, using a *Qur’ānic* technique, we hear the voice of the *Qur’ānic* authority. But inserting this style in a parodic context *inscribes* the transgression of *Qur’ānic* authority at the same time...”²⁵⁹ Al-Mas‘adī simultaneously invokes and subverts these various discursive authorities in his literary bricolage.

This chapter then asks the following questions of al-Mas‘adī’s literary project: what are the various theological problematics he addresses, and what does it mean to insert them into a literary register? How does his work at once emerge from within the discursive traditions of Islam, while simultaneously attempting to transform them? And most crucially, what are the implications of this intertextuality on the Qur’an as a text and Islam as a practice? Omri argues that al-Mas‘adī “understood world literature as a humanist conversation” resonant with Goethe’s theory of *Weltliteratur* as a cosmopolitan attentiveness to literary and cultural exchange.²⁶⁰ Building on al-Mas‘adī’s dialogic conceptualization of literature, I will examine his lesser-known novella *Mawlid al-Nisyān* [The Genesis of Forgetfulness]. A close reading of this work offers a window into understanding the author’s broader literary project and its relationship to Islamic Thought.

²⁵⁹ Omri, 18

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 17

Mawlid al-Nisyān

Written in what many critics at the time described as decidedly archaic Arabic, *Mawlid al-Nisyān* consists in large part of a series of philosophical dialogues. Al-Mas‘adī describes it as *Qissa falsafaya* or a “Philosophical Story,” reminiscent of Voltaire’s notion of *Conte Philosophique*. Popularized in Europe during the 19th C, the *Conte philosophique* is a hybrid genre that employs fiction to explore philosophical and ethical questions. Such works often rely heavily on dialogue and questioning – as in the case of Voltaire’s *Candide* or Plato’s Socratic dialogues – in order to examine existence, the purpose of human endeavor, God and the role of reason. Structurally, *Mawlid al-Nisyān* is framed as a story within a story. In the brief opening frame story entitled *Tawjih al-Hadith* [Directing Speech], an unnamed man addresses an unnamed woman recounting a tale about “Forgetfulness” from the recesses of time [*fi ghīb al-zamān*]. By framing *Mawlid al-Nisyān* as a mythical tale within another story, evocative of the classical tale *1001 Nights*, al-Mas‘adī removes the narrative from time and history. By inverting the tale such that the male figure is the storyteller, however, one could argue that he is also subverting the gender politics of *1001 Nights*.

Madīn and Layla’s years of wandering, their pilgrimage to this new *balad* [land], as well as Madīn’s subsequent journey with Ranjahad, all harken to the tradition of *riḥlah* or travel writing in Classical Arabic literature. These journeys are framed as both a *hijrah* and the ascetic wanderings of a Sufi seeking divine knowledge. Madīn’s declaration upon their arrival signals his awakening to the struggle for a higher truth: “These are the lands of the dead and this is the day of jihad.”²⁶¹ Al-Mas‘adī here resignifies the physical and spiritual *hijrah* of the Prophet

²⁶¹ Al-Mas‘adī, *Mawlid*, 62.

Muḥammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in the 7th C. Madīn and Layla are outsiders and their alterity, like that of the Prophet Muḥammad, signals their prophetic higher calling. As Layla explains of Madīn: “When we came to this country he had in him the flame of prophecy [*shu‘alatu al-anbiya*]. He wanted to cure illness and bring the dead to life...”²⁶² A frequent motif in the story, this prophetic madness signifies faith as well as the drive for creation, renewal and change. A common trope in Sufi poetry – particularly in the work of Ḥafiz and Rumī – madness is often interpreted as a spiritual experience in the journey towards unification with the divine.

Madīn’s mad quest to develop a cure against the inevitability of death and the effects of time reaches a pivotal point after Asma’s visit. The realization that death is not simply the end, but rather a perpetual state of limbo induces a psychic break. Madīn internalizes Asma’s sense of the endlessness of time as well as the shackles of memory and earthly attachments. He even describes his encounter with Asma’ as a conversation with his ‘self’ or *nafs*. Madīn explains: “It is as if I am a soul [*rūh*] which has disposed of the body and passed from this world into the afterlife [*al-‘ākhirah*], wandering, possessed by time and bewildered by memory, revisited by all that has elapsed of its life... for eternity.”²⁶³ It is this sensation that prompts Madīn to seek an existence outside of the confining structures of time and memory. When Layla contests his belief that time can be defeated, she does so in a distinctly spiritual register, insisting that time is an “inevitable law [*sunna*], the law of God, the law of the universe, the law of death...”²⁶⁴ Layla uses the word *sunna* which can mean law or reference the practices and teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad upon which *shari‘a* is founded. Her response demonstrates the intimacy of the

²⁶² Ibid., 35.

²⁶³ Ibid., 50.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 49.

natural world with the spiritual world for according to Layla the law of the universe is indeed the law of God.

Madīn's description of limbo, however, seems more aptly to describe the state of *Barzakh*, which is referenced in the Qur'anic surahs: *al-Mū'minūn* [The Believers] 23:99-100; *al-Furqān* [The Criterion] 25:53 and *al-Rahmān* [The Gracious] 55:19-20. While there are various exegetical readings of the *Barzakh*, it essentially describes an intermediate state, separating two entities – which can be physical as in bodies or immaterial as in states – and not allowing them to intermingle. Its most common usage derives from the surah *al-Mū'minūn* in which, according to the Qur'anic translator and commentator Yūsuf 'Ali, it describes “a partition, a bar or barrier; the place or state in which people will be after death and before judgment... Behind them is the barrier of death, and in front of them is the Barakh, partition, a quiescent state until the judgment comes.”²⁶⁵ As scholars have demonstrated, the concept of the *Barzakh* is pivotal in the work of Ibn al-'Arabi where it takes on metaphysical, epistemological and even ontological dimensions – allowing meanings to materialize in corporeal form and both time and space to contract and expand.²⁶⁶

Madīn is drawn to the sorceress Ranjahad because of her ability to invoke the powers of nature as well as the supernatural. She embodies an other-worldly existence that defies the laws of humankind: she can travel without moving, communicate outside of language, exist beyond the laws of time and space and evolve without ever changing. Ranjahad therefore personifies the

²⁶⁵ *The Holy Qur'an*, Transl. Yūsuf 'Ali, 899.

²⁶⁶ Scholar Salman Bashier argues that the register of the concept of the *Barzakh* has shifted historically “from its temporal designation in orthodoxy, signifying a period of time that extends between death and resurrection, to its spatial designation within mysticism.” Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship Between God and the World* (New York: Suny University Press, 2004) 81.

forces at play in this liminal space of the *Barzakh*. Her very existence reinforces Madīn's belief in the possibility of achieving a higher state of existence; but more crucially, it causes his belief in the rational sciences to falter. Madīn frames his relationship to science and reason with the intimacy of faith. His language resonates with that of the Qur'an as he describes his surrender [*islām*], faith [*iymān*] and eventually his faithlessness [*kufṛ*] in science and reason. Madīn's quest to combat the disorder of the natural world becomes a spiritual journey, but one shadowed by his desire to harness the power of nature.

Journeys of Creation

When Madīn embarks on his journey he leaves behind the hospice and Layla – the ordered worlds of science and domesticity – and enters the disorder [*aḍṭrāb*] of nature. Further, language has no place in the dense forest where Ranjahad resides, as Madīn is immediately surrounded by a heavy silence [*ṣumt*] and stillness [*sukūn*]. He wanders without guidance [*ha'im 'ala ghīr hudā*] indicating a spiritual disorientation in addition to a physical one as the term *hudā* appears throughout the Qur'an to reference God's guidance for true believers.²⁶⁷ When the distant voice of Asma' beckons Madīn, the trees – which he likens to the columns of a mosque [*ka-sawārī al-masjid*] – unravel and a path [*maḥja*] opens before him to a clearing.²⁶⁸ She compares him to *al-musāfir al-raḥil*; connoting both a migrant traveler as well as someone departed or deceased – as in a traveler between worlds.²⁶⁹ Her voice warns Madīn that he will always be beholden to time and tethered by memory, walking with his “eyes turned backwards.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Al-Mas'adī, *Mawlid*, 68. Variations of the word *hudā* appear over seventy times in the Qur'an with over ten references in the surah *al-Baqra* [The Cow].

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 72.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 70.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 71

Ranjahad mysteriously appears as if she had emerged from the interior [*bāṭin*] of the Earth. She lures Madīn with her power over nature and he believes he is experiencing union with the universe [*al-itihād bi al-kūn*].²⁷¹ Ranjahad explains that a higher state of Being entails not only *itihād*, but also dissipation [*tatabaddad*] and inertia [*jumūd*] through the elimination of sensation [*al-ḥas*], pain [*al-ālam*] and happiness [*al-farḥ*]. Such stasis, however, requires that he be cleansed of matter [*m'adin*], release his earthly attachments, and more crucially, abandon the faculty of reason. Ranjahad warns him that they will encounter many miracles [*'ajabā*] along their journey of which he must ask no questions because Truth is elusive to reason. Just as it unsettles temporal structures, *Mawlid al-Nisyān* calls into question language as a system of signification. Ranjahad cautions Madīn that “Truth resists being grasped by way of sense or human logic [*al-m'ānī wa mantiq al-bashr*]. There is only the Truth that manifests itself to you; render language powerless, deceive reason and abandon all sense.”²⁷² Ranjahad thus evacuates language of both inherent meaning and transcendental truth: like time, Truth is individual and experiential.

Having endured the vertigo [*duwār*] that comes from seeing Truth, Madīn is able to enter the ‘World of Forgetting and Eternity’ [*ālim al-nisyān wa al-khulūd*]. In this world the forest is still while Ranjahad moves at warp speed and Madīn is weighed down by his memories and attachments. They then enter the ‘Cave of Sleepers’ [*kahf al-na`mīn*] that harbors those whose souls have departed but whose bodies remain, like Madīn, who “followed Asma’s soul and fell asleep to the world” becoming neither of the world of the living nor the dead.²⁷³ In the next world time is prolonged and they travel in slow motion, “covering distances as if they were eras

²⁷¹ Ibid., 72-3.

²⁷² Ibid., 74.

²⁷³ Ibid., 79.

[‘*asūr*].”²⁷⁴ As with most of the worlds they encounter, time and space meld together as Madīn imagines himself “winged as if he were flying through time,” or like “time was passing beneath him.”²⁷⁵ As Ranjahad explains, however, it is Madīn’s particular experience of time that has shifted because time itself is neither fixed nor universal. They then enter a strange universe [*kūn gharīb*] called the ‘World of Absolute Time’ [‘*ālim al-zamān al-muṭlaq*] whose essence is speed and where plants and animals grow, wither and dissipate “in the blink of an eye.”²⁷⁶ Time courses through Madīn in this “world of death and eternity” [‘*ālim al-mawt wa al-’abd*] where all creatures experience the cycle of life in an instant.²⁷⁷ Overcome by vertigo, he approaches a trance-like state [*ghashaya*] before succumbing to a rest. While resting, Ranjahad enters Madīn’s subconscious and “whispers from within himself” [*wa hatafat Ranjahad fi nafsihu*] the story of creation. This whispering from within aligns Ranjahad with evil spirits, including Satan, who tempt the faithful with false truths and demigods.²⁷⁸

Ranjahad’s account of the story of creation shares many similarities with the Qur’anic as well as Biblical versions. In her story, the God Salhawa created [*khalaqa*] the world from nothing in six nights: “He said: ‘Oh Worlds, Be!’” [*fa qal: ayatuha al-akwānu kūnī*] and they were.²⁷⁹ This resonates with the description of creation in the Qur’an from the surah *al-Baqra* [The Cow]:

بَدِيعُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ
فَيَكُونُ

Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter,

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 82.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 82

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 83.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 84.

²⁷⁸ See the surah *al-An‘ām* [The Cattle] 6:111-121. References to Satan’s whisperings include: *al-’A‘arāf* [The Heights] 7:20, *al-’Anfāl* [The Spoils of War] 8:11, *Ta-Ha* 20:120 and *al-Nās* [Mankind] 114:4.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 84.

He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is...”²⁸⁰

Al-Mas‘adī here cleverly puns on the oral resonance and shared root (*k-w-n*) between the words *kawn* – world or universe – and *kūn* – the verb to be. He further invokes the image of matter emerging from nothing, as well as the material power of God’s word in the act creation.

Salhawa, however, is disappointed with the earth [*al-ard*] as it is sullied by dirt, oil, tar, excrement and rot. So on the seventh day, he created Man as a creature of “greatness, beauty and purity” [*al-‘athama wa al-jamāl wa al-ṭahāra*].²⁸¹ Man’s ethereal and spiritual qualities render him almost angelic in nature. Jealous of Man’s purity, the earth confronts Salhawa:

خَلَقْتَنِي فَجَعَلْتَنِي مَادَّةً طَيِّبًا . وَخَلَقْتَهُ فَجَعَلْتَهُ صُورَةً نُّورًا . وَجَصَّصْتَنِي بِالذَّنَسِ وَالْقَبِيحِ ،
وَجَصَّصْتَهُ بِالطَّهَارَةِ وَالْحَسَنِ .

You created me, rendering me from the material of clay. And you created him, rendering him in the image of light. You devoted me to filth and ugliness, and you devoted him to purity and beauty.²⁸²

Notably, they are further distinguished by the earth’s materiality [*māddatan*] and Man’s representational nature [*sūratān*]. In an apocalyptic moment that invokes the Day of Judgment [*Youm al-Qiyama*], the earth explodes secreting rot as in the Qur’anic surah *al-Zilzalah* [The Earthquake] where “the earth discharges its burdens.”²⁸³

وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا

²⁸⁰ *Al-Baqra* [The Cow] Qur’an 2:117 Sahih International translation.

²⁸¹ Al-Mas‘adī, *Mawlid*, 86.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 87-88.

²⁸³ *Al-Zilzala* [The Earthquake] 99:2, *The Holy Qur’an*, Sahih International translation.

Despite Salhawa's divine power, Ranjahad represents him as a fallible and emotional being, susceptible to disappointment, hopelessness, failure, awe and heartbreak.²⁸⁴ Further, while Ranjahad's rendition of the story of creation bears many similarities to that in the Qur'an, it ascribes to Man divine attributes normally reserved for God. Most notably, Salhawa refers to Man as '*athīm* or magnificent, one of God's ninety-nine names.²⁸⁵ He also describes Man as his highest creation:

وقال: كن طهارةً وعظمةً وخملاً... أَنْتَ أَمَلِي مِنْ خَلْقِي ، وَسِرِّي فِي أَكْوَانِي ، وَاَنْتَ الْوَاحِدُ
الْأَوْحَدُ ، وَالْخَمَلُ وَالسَّلْوَى ، وَلَيْسَ سِوَاكَ مَعْنَى.

He said: Be Purity, Magnificence and Beauty... You are the [great] hope of my creations, the secret of my universes. You are the singular one, [embodying] beauty and consolation. [The world] is meaningless without you.²⁸⁶

This passage resonates with the doctrine of God's Oneness or the *Tawhīd*, that affirms that God alone is one [*wāḥid*] and unique [*aḥad*].²⁸⁷ This elevation of Man to the level of God is significant in so far as it signals Ranjahad as a devil-like temptress. More importantly, to return to the debate between al-Mas'adī and Ṭaha Ḥusayn, it touches on the heart of the controversy regarding the compatibility of Existentialism (or, for that matter Sufism) with Islam. I believe al-Mas'adī is intentionally complicating this traditional demarcation between the traits of God and those of Man. His view of existence seems to suggest that Man approaches the divine precisely in his striving for eternity, greatness and most importantly the will to create.

The end of the story of creation bears the most relevance to Madīn's quest, as Ranjahad explains why death leads to a state of limbo rather than a moment of deliverance. Salhawa sends down

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 86/87/89.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 87.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 87.

²⁸⁷ See the surah *Al-Baqra* [The Cow] 2:163.

Adam and Man's beauty is replaced by "ugliness, clay, fermentation and death," which he counteracts with love by providing Adam with a partner, Eve.²⁸⁸ The first mortal death, of Adam's progeny nonetheless, marks earth's victory over Man. Earth enacts revenge on Man by preventing the soul from ascending to the heavens upon death. The soul is destined to roam forever, lost in wonderment [*hayra*] and burdened by nostalgia [*shawq*] and memory [*al-dhikra*].²⁸⁹ Those souls that seek reprieve are briefly granted flesh only to then fall apart and decompose:

و نظر مدین فاذا هياكل من عظامٍ رميمٍ تقوم فتمشي. ثم تكتسي لحمًا والوانًا ،
وصحةً وجمالاً. ثم تشيخ وتساقطُ فيأكلُها الدود. فتذهب رماداً وتعود رفاتاً. في
طرفة عين ...

Madīn suddenly saw skeletons of rotten bones stand up and walk. Then they regained their flesh, color, health and beauty. [Finally] they aged and fell to the ground where they were consumed by worms [till they] became ashes and returned to being corpses. All in the blink of an eye.²⁹⁰

The wording of this passage also derives from the Qur'an and specifically the description of the Day of Judgment:

وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ، قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظْمَ وَهِيَ
رَمِيمٌ

And he makes comparisons for Us, and forgets his own (origin and) Creation: He says, 'Who can give life to (dry) bones and decomposed ones (at that)?²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Al-Mas'adī, *Mawlid*, 89.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 90-91,

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 93.

²⁹¹ Surah *Yā-Sīn*, Qur'an 36:78 Yūsuf 'Alī translation. See also surah *al-Dhāriyāt* [The Winds that Scatter] 51:41-46

Ranjahad compares this process to memory, explaining that nostalgia is like briefly experiencing the fullness of life before it fades. Memory embodies the ephemeral and fleeting nature of existence, merely tempting Man with the dream of eternity.

When Ranjahad deposits Madīn at the gates of Salhawa, she warns him that one must enter them alone, as with the moment of Reckoning [*ḥasāb*] on the Day of Judgment.²⁹² Al-Mas‘adī again imbues Ranjahad’s narrative of creation with references to the end of times. He thus reorients Qur’anic eschatology to demonstrate the manner in which the end is always already present in the beginning; creation is itself an act of destruction just as destruction is a creative act. Like al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār’s *al-Zilzal*, al-Mas‘adī’s incorporation of eschatological concepts impacts not only the story’s narrative content, but also its representation of time and temporal structure. Madīn cannot fulfill his wish to exist outside of time because time is inherently individual and experiential. To live outside of time in the world of *Mawlid al-Nisyān* implies annihilating the self, a fate not unlike Madīn’s own at the end of his quest.

Time, Reason and Consciousness

Before Madīn meets his untimely death, he briefly experiences the possibility of a life of eternal existence free from the constraints of the body, memory and time. When he consumes his magical elixir Madīn is transported to another plane of existence:

²⁹² Al-Mas‘adī, *Mawlid*, 94.

إني الان الحقُّ في حقِّها ... انظروا . فهذا قلبي سكت ، وقد غلب السكونُ الزمان . انا لا
أمرُّ ولا أُحول . انا الوجود ، انا الخلود ، لم استَحِلْ منذ القدم ... لكن من انا؟ أَوْلَدُ كُلَّ سَاعَةٍ
خُلُقًا جَدِيدًا . انظروا آفاقي تَنَآى ، فما أَوْسَعَ أَبْعَادِي! ها سكن عني الحسُّ وَأَن الحُلُول .
و عَظُمْتُ وَشَرِبْتُ السَّمَاءَ وَحَلَّتْ فِيَّ الْاَكْوَانُ جَمِيعًا...

Now I am Truth in itself. Look, my heart has stopped. Stillness has defeated Time. I neither pass nor change. I am Being. I am eternity. I have not changed since the dawn of time... But who am I? I am born every hour as a new creation. Watch my horizons expand; how vast are my dimensions! Feeling has subsided in me and the beginning has come. I have become great and drunk the heavens. The universes have all dissolved in me...²⁹³

In his ecstatic state Madīn utters words eerily reminiscent of Al- Ḥallaj’s infamous declaration that resulted in his execution in the 11th century: *Anā al-Ḥaqq*, or “I am Truth!” Like al-Ḥallaj, Madīn’s almost heretical self-description is highly abstracted but also divine in its attributes. As the embodiment of pure Being and Truth, Madīn exists beyond the laws of time and space, containing the expanse of the universes within him. But this ‘Truth’ straddles seeming oppositions: it is both ever evolving and constant, both the beginning as well as the end. In the simplest of terms, it is the power of the infinite, but also, I suggest, the power of imagination.

In this regard, I believe it is not simply ‘Reason’ that *Mawlid al-Nisyan* is concerned with, but rather, the epistemological structures that order and taxonomize the world. Madīn critiques the institutionalization of various forms of knowledge: “I witnessed gods, the self, religions, thought and science constrain and monopolize wisdom and reason like a dam.”²⁹⁴ Such orders, he believes, bar humanity from actualizing its full potentiality. Madīn argues that by relinquishing one’s fear of disturbing the rational order, it is possible to “imagine the unimaginable and think

²⁹³ Ibid., 110-111. Portions of the passage are cited in Omri, 130-1 though I have slightly modified his translation.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 99-100.

the unthinkable.”²⁹⁵ He rejects the confines of linear time and institutionalized knowledge, moving instead towards a vision of the world as perceptual and experiential. Madīn describes this poetic space in Sufi terms as a state of vertigo [*duwār*] that opens the horizons [*ʿafāq*] of the imagination.

This model of time and consciousness is not only linked to how we understand the imagination, but also the very notion of free will. In this regard, it resembles Bergson’s theorization of existence and consciousness in which time is understood as Duration [*la durée*].²⁹⁶ Temporal duration or *daymūma zamaniyya* actually appears frequently in al-Mas‘adī’s critical writings as well as in *Mawlid al-Nisyān* and the author’s commentary on it. He describes the relationship between temporal duration and human consciousness as such:

الخلق حينئذ مستحيل في غير الزمان. ولا يمكن ان نتصور شيئاً موجوداً لا يدوم
وجوده ادنى لحظة زمانية ، اي بدون ان يكون وجوده قائماً على امتداد اصغر
امتداد من الزمان. وما قد نتصوره من الوجود المطلق انما نتصوره بالنسبة الى
الله ، الذي يسمى واجب الوجود ، او هو عين الوجود المطلق الذي هو نقيض مفهوم
الزمان. اما على صعيد الحياة وفي مستوى البشر والكيان البشري ، فانه لا وجود
الا بزمان ولا تصور عقلي للوجود بدون ديمومة زمنية ، بالنسبة للأشخاص والجماعات
على حد سواء. فمسيرنا وحياتنا افراداً وجماعات مرتبطان وجوباً بالزمان.

Creation then is impossible outside of Time. We cannot conceive of something existing without its [very] existence revolving around a given moment in time. In other words,

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 106.

²⁹⁶ See Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (London: G. Allen & Co.; New York, The Macmillan Co., 1913) and *Matter and Memory* (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1912).

without its existence being limited by the span of its life. And what we can imagine in terms of Absolute Being can only be imagined in relation to God. That which we call Necessary Being, or the essence of Absolute Being, contrasts to our understanding of Time. With respects to life, mankind and human existence, however, there is no existence outside of time. Nor is there any rational conceptualization of existence without temporal duration – with respects to people and societies alike. Our fate and our lives as individuals and societies are necessarily linked to Time.²⁹⁷

According to al-Mas‘adī, Being as well as our very conceptualization of it, are necessarily mediated through time. More crucially, human existence is interpolated through Man’s understanding of himself in relation to the continuity of time. In its reliance on temporal duration [*daymūma zamaniyya*] human existence is always evolving and transforming. Further, this structuring principle applies not only to individual consciousness, but also to how individuals interact with society and the world they inhabit. Eternal existence – what al-Mas‘adī refers to as *al-wūjud al-muṭlaq* [Absolute Being] or *wājib al-wujūd* [Necessary Being] – can only be conceived of in relation to God whose existence is outside of the confines of time. Similarly, Bergson posits that time is indivisible, heterogeneous and individual. Since time is experienced through personal memory and sensual experience, it functions as the foundation for creative evolution and innovation.

In *Mawlid al-Nisyān* Madīn describes a haunting vision of “the future as if it were a memory, as if it had passed but cannot be forgotten...”²⁹⁸ This experiential understanding of time resonates with al-Mas‘adī’s vision of Islam as a philosophy of individual self-exploration. Madīn’s quest to exist outside of time is finally revealed as a delusion at the end of the story. As the fatal effects of the elixir take over, Ranjahad cautions him:

²⁹⁷ Al-Mas‘adī, *Ta‘shīl li-Kiyān*, 83. Portions of the passage are cited in Omri, 47 though I have modified his translation.

²⁹⁸ Al-Mas‘adī, *Mawlid*, 103-104.

الا إنَّ الوجودَ اللَّعنةُ الابد. لن يولد النسيان. لن يولد الفناء. لن يُغلب الزمان. لن تدرك
السماء. أنا البهتان...

Being is indeed an eternal curse. Forgetting will not be born. Annihilation [*fanā'*] will not take place. Time shall not be defeated. The heavens cannot be reached. I am deception [*bahtān*]²⁹⁹

While Madīn learns that his ambitions exceed the limitations of human existence, I believe the story still functions as a call to personal reflection and social innovation that is very much resonant with the social and political realities of 1940s Tunisia.

The story opens with Madīn describing the haunting sensation of being surrounded by death and decay. Since al-Mas'adī links the labor of the artist with the labor of the self, suggesting that cultural innovation must always begin with a cultivation of the self, this metaphor carries crucial implications. Madīn's mission, while at times misguided or hubristic, does embody a drive for renewal and creation. His deception by Ranjahad and ascension into the world of the dead at the end of the story, however, cautions readers against replacing one hierarchical system with another; in large part, because the work is concerned with the very mode of ordering itself. Madīn's obsessive mission to institutionalize the ineffable power of creation and the imagination leads him towards madness and eventually death. Al-Mas'adī seems to suggest that one not need abandon reason entirely, but rather that we expand the horizons of the imagination through critical thinking.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 114.

Islamic Poiesis

Throughout the narrative Madīn experiences and strives for states of consciousness seminal to Sufism, including: *duwār* [vertigo], *ḥayrah* [wonderment], *ṭahāra* [purity], *sukūn* [stillness] and *fana'* [annihilation]. The novella also consists of seven chapters, possibly mirroring the seven valleys or stations of Sufism, and scholars have commented that the figure of Madīn bears a striking resemblance to the 12th century North African Sufi Abū Madīn al-Anṣārī.³⁰⁰ By integrating Sufi states of consciousness into Madīn's spiritual journey, *Mawlid al-Nisyān* situates itself within the aesthetic tradition of Islamic Thought.

Metaphoricity is in an integral part of Qur'anic exegesis, which emphasizes the dialectic between the Qur'an's *ẓāhir* or exoteric and its *bāṭin* or esoteric meaning. Notably, various 'truths' are revealed to Madīn as having emerged from within the *bāṭin* of the earth. Moreover, al-Mas'adī's work is part of a distinct philosophical tradition within Islamic Thought. In particular, he seems to be building on the work of the theologian al-Ghazālī who explored the horizons of the imagination through a poetic and ethical engagement with the Qur'an. As Islamic scholar Ebrahim Moosa remarks of al-Ghazālī's work, "not only did he acknowledge that figurative or metaphorical discourse is compatible with reason and rationality, but, more importantly, he placed metaphor at the heart of religious discourse."³⁰¹ Both al-Mas'adī's fictional writing and his theorization of artistic production emerge from a similar understanding of Islamic discourse as inherently metaphorical.

³⁰⁰ Omri, 114.

³⁰¹ Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī & The Poetics of the Imagination* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 65. On the question of Ghazālī in relation to Aristotle's *Poetics*, see pages 38-40 and 78-80.

One could argue that al-Mas‘adī’s figurative engagement with Islam gestures at a more comprehensive vision of the genre of *Adab*. While in its contemporary usage the term *Adab* signifies the literary genre of *belle lettres*, its classical usage references the ethical, moral and even intellectual dimensions of personal and social conduct. To quote Roger Allen: “The ideas of intellectual nourishment, manners, and education were thus present from the outset and remained important features of the concept as it developed and expanded within the general framework of the Islamic sciences.”³⁰² In examining *Mawlid al-Nisyan* I propose that al-Mas‘adī’s literary project is based on an understanding of *Adab* that bridges these two significations. Al-Mas‘adī seems to suggest that literary creation and innovation begins first and foremost with an attentiveness to the cultivation of the individual Self as well as its relationship to social orders. This places him within a long tradition of scholars or *Udaba’* in the classical sense – such as Sayyid Qutb, Maḥmūd ‘Abbas al-‘Aqqad, ‘Abd al-Wahid Wafi, ‘A’isha ‘Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shati’), Amin al-Khuli and even Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal – who employed a “modernist hermeneutics for Islamic thought.”³⁰³ These scholars relied on literary techniques for the reinterpretation of early Islamic Thought and history as well as for Qur’anic exegesis. In the process, they also reimagined the divide between private and public, the individual and the social and secular and religious discourses.

In his 1958 essay, “Islam, Nationalism and Communism,” al-Mas‘adī radically reorients Islamic history and discourse by suggesting that the true Islamic conquest was not the proliferation of Islam as a systematic creed, dogma or religion, but rather as a philosophy of existence:

³⁰² Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of Its Genres and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 221.

³⁰³ Ellen McLarney, “The Islamic Public Sphere and the Discipline of *Adab*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* No. 43 (2011): 419-449, 431.

[S]i l'islam, non certes en tant que religion ou credo, mais en tant que mode d'interrogation et de réflexion de l'homme sur soi, ne devait plus susciter les efforts de création intellectuelle et spirituelle en Orient, c'en serait définitivement fini avec l'une des conquêtes de l'homme les plus originales, les plus fécondes et les plus valables, et avec les trésors de valeurs inappréciables qu'elle a su engendrer.

If Islam, certainly not as a religion or creed, but as a mode of inquiry and reflection by Man upon himself, were no longer to engender intellectual and spiritual creation in the East, it would definitely be the end of one of humanity's most original, most fertile and most valuable conquests; the end of the invaluable treasures generated by Islam.³⁰⁴

Using as his point of departure this apocalyptic image of civilization, al-Mas'adī theorizes Islam as a mode of questioning and reflection that reinvigorates the past while simultaneously opening up the horizons of the future. This aesthetic vision of faith as a vehicle of creation breaks down historical periodizations of Islam in addition to rethinking the relationship between existence, art and politics. By exploring Islam as a philosophy of existence intimately connected to the artistic process, it is possible to reimagine the epistemological divide between Faith and Reason. Al-Mas'adī envisions literature as a part of the process of individual critical thinking intrinsic to the very practice of Islam.

Mawlid al-Nisyan is a novel whose very aesthetics – its language and images – are built from the Qur'an and Islamic discourse. Moreover, the very motivations behind Madīn's existential crisis are themselves critical questions debated in Islamic scholarship. Al-Mas'adī frames the practice of Islam as a mode of thinking and critiquing that is not restricted to ethical domains. He mobilizes Islamic discourse to break down temporal, historical and literary periodizations. In the process, he reimagines the role of the Arab intellectual in relation to Tunisian nationalism and the forces of globalization. In so doing, al-Mas'adī contests the assumption that modernity must

³⁰⁴ Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī, "Islam, nationalisme et communisme," 1958 *Oeuvres Complètes* Vol. IV Ed. Maḥmūd Ṭarshouna (Tunis: Sud Editions, 2003), 330. Portions of the passage are cited in Omri, 41 though I have slightly modified his translation.

emerge from secular thought. This approach to literature certainly has implications beyond the Arab and Muslim world, impacting our very understanding of World Literature. Al-Mas'adī invites us to reexamine the very representational function of literature by exploring the political and artistic force of the text through its critical animation of intersecting yet heterogeneous discourses.

Conclusion

The diverse novels brought together in this study raise a series of critical questions on the relationship between literary and theological discourses. This is performed against the backdrop of the complex colonial histories and conflicted articulations of national identity, language and literature in the countries of the Maghreb. While the 130-year French imperial presence in the region left an indelible cultural, linguistic and literary imprint on the Maghreb, nationalist attempts at homogenizing these countries under a shared Arab and Islamic heritage were equally divisive. The novels of al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, Assia Djébar, Driss Chraïbi and Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī engage with Islamic Thought in order to reexamine the grand historical narratives of nationalism, modernity and postcolonialism. Each of these discourses relies on a teleological temporality that is unraveled in these novels. Moreover, the polyphonic structure of these texts reflects the diverse ethno-linguistic topography of the Maghreb.

While Arabic certainly played a crucial role in the fabric of anti-colonial and nationalist rhetoric in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the degree and nature of its institutionalization varied across the region. As al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's *al-Zilal* and Assia Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* demonstrate, *ta'rib* or Arabicization bears deep roots in Algerian history. In part, this stems from the active resistance of Berberophone populations to forced integration during the Arab and French occupations of Algeria. Further, the very platform of nationalist discourse espoused by the FLN relied on a foundational relationship between Arabic and Islam as signifiers of Algerian national identity. Not only did this rhetoric carry through institutionally in the policies of the newly independent government under both Ben Bella and Boumédiène, but it escalated into

unspeakable violence during the purges of the FIS against Berberophiles and Francophiles in the 1990s. *Al-Zilzal* and *L'Amour, la fantasia* unfold against this complex history, as each text questions the exclusionary politics of Algerian nationalist discourse. Moreover, they also explore the ways in which these ideologies in part emerged from and helped sustain the French colonial presence, even while they resisted it. Further, the novels question the legitimacy of claims made by the dominant schools of Islamic Thought in Algeria – particularly the Salafi-inflected reformist school of the 1930s. This is performed structurally and thematically, as both novels touch on the politics of transmission and interpretation with respects to early Islamic history, the corpus of hadith and even the Qur'an.

Driss Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* similarly targets the class of the religious elite that was fostered by French imperialism in Morocco. This is intertwined with the invocation of *Sherifian* lineage in the legitimization of the monarchy as well as the religious aristocracy. Chraïbi demonstrates the subtle collusion of these forces by employing imagery of the French revolution to chart his character's resistance to his father's patriarchy. By resignifying the enlightenment rhetoric of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*, the text succeeds in exposing the contradictions of French discourses of modernity. It further challenges the legitimization of patriarchy through religious authority. The novel's most creative intervention into narratives of origin emerges in the motifs of *le passé simple* and *la ligne mince*. Both the grammatical theme of *le passé simple* and the image of *la ligne mince* offer alternative temporalities that break the authority of dominant historical, linguistic or religious narratives.

The Bakhtinian motif of the threshold appears prominently in all four texts, but features most explicitly in Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī's ethereal novel *Mawlid al-Nisyān*. While *al-Zilal*, *L'Amour*, *la fantasia* and *Le passé simple* engage with the liminal concept of the threshold structurally and thematically, *Mawlid al-Nisyān* intervenes at the crossroads of aesthetics and ethics. The experimental novel exists in its own unique time and space and avoids any references to historical events or figures. Despite the abstract nature of the text, however, in many ways it reflects the integrationist and bilingual politics that differentiated Tunisia from the other countries of the Maghreb. Although the work is steeped in early Arabic literary and Islamic Thought, it is also very much in dialogue with European philosophical and literary traditions. Moreover, the very politics of the novel, as with much of al-Mas'adī's oeuvre, are tied to a particular vision of Islamic Thought inflected by Sufism. While Djébar envisions Islamic piety as an individual intellectual practice, al-Mas'adī links the intellectual process with a creative journey epitomized by the artistic process.

Waṭṭār, Djébar, Chraïbi and al-Mas'adī are all rather controversial literary figures. Each has been circumscribed within their personal politics, as well as their literary language of choice and respective critical and public reception. Moreover, they have all found their way within the literary canon, be it Arabophone or Francophone. In each of my chapters, I venture readings that go against the grain of existing literary criticism on these authors. These are informed by the overarching questions framing this literary inquiry, as well as the dialogues opened up by these particular textual pairings. While many other authors from the region could have found their way into this study – such as Leïla Abouzeïd, Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, Rachid Boudjedra, Tahar Djaout, Moussa Ould Ebnou, Mouloud Feraoun, Malek Haddad, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Abdelwahab

Meddeb, Fatima Mernissi, Ahlām Mustaghānimī or Katib Yacine – for the purposes of this dissertation, I have decided to focus on four authors whose texts provided diverse points of entry into fundamentally similar questions.

I posit that the novels of Waṭṭār, Djébar, Chraïbi and al-Mas’adī all embody the concept of *Adab* – as the ethical and intellectual dimension of individual and social behavior. For while they employ Qur’anic symbology, imagery and motifs, these texts also intervene into debates on Islamic exegesis, history and jurisprudence. Further, they reimagine the genre of the novel in dialogue with and opposition to Arabic as well as French literary and historical discourses. These works offer discursive interventions that are at once literary and ethical. Integrating a cacophony of cultural, linguistic and literary influences, the novels of Waṭṭār, Djébar, Chraïbi and al-Mas’adī manipulate narrative time and space to generate a disorienting literary experience. The *qalaq* or anxiety performed in these texts disrupts dominant novelistic, theological and historical discourses, encouraging readers to reside uncomfortably in their textual ambivalence.

Bibliography

- Abbott, Nadia: *'A'ishah, the Beloved of Mohammed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942.
- Abdel-Jaouad, Hédi. "‘Too Much in the Sun’: Sons, Mothers, and Impossible Alliances in Francophone Maghrebian Writing." *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 27 No. 3 (Autumn 1996): 15-33.
- Abun-Nasr, Jamil M. *A History of the Maghreb in the Muslim Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Addi, Lahouari. "Les Intellectuels qu'on assassine." *Esprit* (January 1995): 130-38.
- . "Algeria and the Dual Image of the Intellectual." *The Century of the Intellectual: From the Dreyfus Affair to the Rushdie Affair*. Eds. J. Jennings and T. Kemp-Welch. London & New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Ahmad, Aijaz. "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory." *Social Text* No. 17 (Autumn, 1987): 3-25.
- Ahmed, Leila. "Women and the Advent of Islam." *Signs* Vol. 11 No. 4 (Summer 1986): 665-691.
- Al-Gharībī, Khalid. *Jadaliyyat al-āṣālah wa al-mu‘aṣirah fī adāb al-Mas‘adī* [The Dialectic of Authenticity and Modernity in the Fiction of al-Mas‘adī]. Tunis: al-Wafa, 1994.
- Al-Ghazali, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife – Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-ma ba‘dahu*, Book XL of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences – Ihya‘ ulum al-din*, Transl. T.J Winter. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1989.
- Allen, Roger, ed. *Moroccan Folktales*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003.
- . *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of Its Genres and Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . & Mohamed Albakry. "The Literary world of Mohamed Zefzef: Three Short Stories." *Middle Eastern Literatures* 10.2 (2007): 129-136.
- Al-Mas‘adī. *Al-Sudd*. Tunis: Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li al-Nashr, 1974.
- . "Islam, nationalisme et communisme." 1958. *Oeuvres Complètes* [Completed Works]. Vol. 4. Ed. Mahmūd Ṭarshouna. Tunis: Dar al-Janūb li al-Nashr, 2003.
- . "Ta‘ ṣilā li-Kiyān" [Authenticating Being]. 1979. *Al-A‘māl al-Kāmila* [Completed Works] Vol. 1-3. Ed. Mahmūd Ṭarshouna. Tunis: Dar al-Janūb li al-Nashr, 2003.
- . *Abu al-‘Atāhiya kama yurahu Ṣāhib al-aghānī* [Perceptions of Abu al-‘Atāhiya by Singers]. *Al-Mabāḥith* No. 12 (March 1945).
- . *Abū al-‘Alā’ fīmā baynaka wa bayn nafsika* [Abū al-‘Alā’ Between You and Yourself]. *Al-Mabāḥith* No. 21 (December 1945).
- . *Mushkilat al-m‘arifa’ and al-Ghazālī* [The Problem of Knowledge in al-Ghazālī]. *Al-Mabāḥith* No. 3 (February 10, 1940).
- Al-Qushayri. *Principles of Sufism*. Transl. B.R. Von Schegell. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990.
- Anon. "Driss Chraïbi, assassin de l’espérance" [Driss Chraïbi, Assassin of Hope]. *Démocratie* (January 14, 1957).
- . "La Révolte d’un jeune homme ou le Maroc mis à nu." *Bulletin de Paris* 65 (7 January 1955): 9-10.
- Badawi, ‘Abd al-Raḥman. *Al-Insāniyya wa al-Wujūdiyya fī al-Fikr al-‘Arabī* [Humanism and Existentialism in Arab Thought]. Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1947.

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Transl. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- . *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Transl. Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.
- . *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bashier, Salman H. *Ibn al- 'Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship Between God and the World*. New York: Suny University Press, 2004.
- Bennani, Jalil, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Abdelfettah Kilito, et al. *Du bilinguisme*. Paris: Denoël, 1985.
- Benrabah, M. *Langue et pouvoir en Algérie: histoire d'un traumatisme linguistique*. Paris: Séguire, 1999.
- Bensmaïa, Réda. *Experimental Nations: Or, the invention of the Maghreb*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1913.
- . *Matter and Memory*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912.
- Bin Mīlād, Maḥjoub. *Tahrīk al-sawākin* [Shake Up Those Who Are Sleeping]. Tunis: Bou Slama, 1955.
- Bonn, Charles and Baumstimler, Yves. *Psychanalyse et texte littéraire au Maghreb*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991.
- Bonnfour, Abdallah. "Autobiographie, genres et croisement des cultures: Le cas de la littérature francophone au Maghreb." Vol. 1 of *Littératures maghrébines: Colloque Jacqueline Arnaud*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990.
- Bourget, Carine. *Coran at Tradition islamique dans la littérature maghrébine*. Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2002.
- Bourqia, Rahma. "The Cultural Legacy of Power in Morocco." *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power and Politics in Morocco*. Eds., Rahma Bourqia and Susan Gilson Miller. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Brown, Leon Carl. "The Islamic Reformist Movement in North Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 2 No.1. (1994): 55-63.
- Calle-Gruber, Mireille. "Écrire de main morte ou l'art de la césure chez Assia Djébar." *L'Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48 No. 4 (Winter 2008): 5-14.
- Celik, Zeynep, Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Terpak, eds. *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City Through Text and Image*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2009.
- Chraïbi, Driss. "Je renie 'Le Passé simple.'" *Démocratie* (February 4, 1957).
- . *L'Ane*. Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1956.
- . *Le passé simple*. Paris: Denoël, 1954.
- . *The Simple Past*. Trans. Hugh A. Harter. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990.
- Clancy-Smith, Julia A. *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters – Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Clerc, Jeanne-Marie. *Assia Djébar. Écrire, transgresser, résister*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997.
- Connolly, William E. *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

- Cook, David. *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*. Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 2002.
- cooke, miriam. "Women, Religion, and the Postcolonial Arab World." *Cultural Critique* No. 45 (Spring, 2000): 150-184.
- Courville, Mathieu E. *Edward Said's Rhetoric of the Secular*. London & New York: Continuum Books, 2010.
- Cox, Debbie. *Politics, Language and Gender in the Algerian Arabic Novel*. London: Edwin Mellon Press, 2002.
- . "The Novels of Tahar Wattar: Command or Critique?" *Research in African Literature* Vol. 28 No. 3 (Fall 1997): 94-109.
- . "Symbolism and Allegory in the Algerian Arabic Novel." *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* Vol. 1 No. 2 (1998): 193-204.
- Davis, Ruth. "Cultural Policy and the Tunisian Ma'lūf: Redefining a Tradition." *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 41 No. 1 (Winter 1997): 1-21.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Le monolinguisme de l'autre ou la prothèse*. Paris: Galilée, 1996.
- Dobie, Madeleine. "Francophone Studies and the Linguistic Diversity of the Maghreb." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23.1-2 (2003): 32-40.
- Donadey, Anne. *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.
- Djebar, Assia. Dialogue with Lyone Trouillot. *2005 PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature*. www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/1415/prmID/1550.
- . *Discours de reception*. Prononcé dans la séance publique. Paris Palais de l'Institut. 22 June 2006. http://www.academiefrancaise.fr/immortels/discours_reception/djebar.html.
- . *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade*. Transl. Dorothy S. Blair. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993.
- . *Far from Medina: Daughters of Ishmael* Transl. Dorothy S. Blair. London: Quartet Books, 1994.
- . *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Paris: Édition Albin Michel, 1995.
- . *Loins de Medine*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1991.
- Durī, 'Abd al-'Aziz. *Al-Juzur al-tarikhiyya lil-qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya* [The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation]. Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-malayyin, 1960.
- El Mansour, Mohamed. "The Sanctuary in Precolonial Morocco." *In the Shadow of the Sultan*. Eds. Rahma Bourqia and Susan Gilson Miller. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Elsadda, Hoda. "Discourses on Women's Biographies and Cultural Identity: Twentieth-Century Representations of the Life of 'A'ishah Bint Abi Bakr." *Feminist Studies* Vol. 27 No. 1 (Spring, 2001): 37-64.
- El-Shihibi, Fathi A. *Travel Genre in Arabic Literature: A Selective Literary and Historical Study*. Florida: Dissertation.com, 2006.
- Enan, A., Mohammad. *Ibn Khaldun: His life and Works*. Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1941.
- Erickson, John. *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Fieni, David. "Decadent Orientalisms: Configuring the Decay of Colonial Modernity in French and Arabic." Diss. Los Angeles: University of California, 2006.
- Fontaine, Jean. "Arabic Language Tunisian Literature (1956-1990)." *Research in African Literatures* (Summer 1992): 183-193.
- Gafaiti, Hafid. "The Blood of Writing: Assia Djebar's Unveiling of Women and History." *World*

- Literature Today* Vol. 70 No. 4 (Autumn 1996): 813-822.
- Gauch, Suzanne. *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Geesey, Patricia. "Exhumation and History: Tahar Djaout's *Les Chercheurs d'os*." *The French Review* Vol. 70 No. 2 (December 1996): 271-279.
- Gianotti, Timothy. *Al-Ghazali's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Ihya'*. Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill Press, 2001.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Poétique de la Relation*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.
- Gourgouris, Stathis. "Detranscendentalizing the Secular." *Public Culture* 20.3 (2008): 437-445.
- Gracki, Katherine. "Writing Violence and the Violence of Writing in Assia Djebar's Algerian Quartet." *World Literature Today* Vol. 70 No. 4 (Autumn 1996): 835-843.
- Graebner, Seth. *History's Place: Nostalgia and the City in French Algerian Literature*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007.
- Graiouid, Said. "We have not buried the simple past: the public sphere and post-colonial literature in Morocco." *The Journal of African Cultural Studies* Vol. 20 No. 2 (December 2008): 145-158.
- Granara, William. "Mythologising the Algerian War of Independence: Tahir Wattar and the Contemporary Algerian Novel." *The Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 4 No. 3 (Autumn 1999): 1-14.
- Haj, Samira. *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Hammoudi, Abdellah. "The Reinvention of *Dar al-Mulk*: The Moroccan Political System and its Legitimation." *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power and Politics in Morocco*. Eds., Rahma Bourqia and Susan Gilson Miller. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Hannoum, Abdelmajid. "Translation and the Colonial Imaginary: Ibn Khaldûn Orientalist." *History and Theory* Vol. 42 No. 1 (Feb., 2003): 61-81.
- Harrison, Nicholas. "Representativity (with reference to Chraïbi)," *Paragraph* Vol. 24 Issue 3 (November, 2001): 30-43.
- Hart, William D. *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Hayes, Jarrod. *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- , "Rachid O. and the Return of the Homopast: The Autobiographical as Allegory in Childhood Narratives by Maghrebian Men." *The Journal of Twentieth-Century / Contemporary French Studies Revue d'études français* Vol. 1 Issue. 2 (1997): 497-526.
- Heggoy, Alf Andrew and Paul J. Zingg. "French Education in Revolutionary North Africa." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 7 (1976): 571-678.
- Hiddleston, Jane. *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006.
- Hochberg, Gil Z. 'Colonial Hospitality': False Hosts and Ill-Mannered Guests in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*." *Nottingham French Studies* Vol. 40 No. 2 (Autumn 2001): 84-95.
- , "National Allegories and the Emergence of Female Voice in Moufida Tlatli's *Les silences du palais*." *Third Text* Vol. 14 No. 50 (Spring 2000): 33-44.
- Hourani, Albert. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1962.
- Ḥusayn, Ṭaha. *Al-Jumhūriyya* No. 29 (May 1957).

- Ibnlfassi, Laïla. "Chraïbi's *le Passé simple* and a Theory of Doubles." *African Francophone Writing: A Critical Introduction*. Eds. Laïla Ibnlfassi and Nicki Hitchcott. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1996.
- Jameson, Frederic. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* No. 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65-88.
- Judy, Ronald A. T. "On the Politics of Global Language, or Unfungible Local Value." *boundary 2* Vol. 24 No. 2 (Summer 1997): 101-143.
- Kadra-Hadjadji, Houaria. *Contestation et révolte dans l'oeuvre de Driss Chraïbi*. Alger: E.N.A.L., 1986.
- Karamustafa, Ahmet T. *Sufism: The Formative Period*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Kaye, Jacqueline and Zoubir, Abdelhamid. *The Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature and National Identity in Algeria and Morocco*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Khatibi, Abdelkebir. "Diglossia," *Algeria in Others' Languages*. Ed. Anne-Emmanuelle Berger. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- . *La mémoire tatouée*. Paris: Denoël, 1971.
- . "L'orientalisme désorienté." *Maghreb pluriel*. Paris: Denoël, 1983.
- . *Roman maghrébin*. Paris: François Maspero, 1968.
- Kilito, Abdelfettah. *Lan tatakalam lugatî*. Beyrut: Dâr al-Talî a, 2002.
- Klemm, Verena. "Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizām*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq." *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* Vol. 3 No. 1 (2000): 51-62.
- Kurzman, Charles, ed. *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Laâbi, Abdellatif, "Défense du 'Passé Simple.' *Souffles* No. 5 (May 1967).
- Lang, George. "Jihad, Ijtihad, and Other Dialogical Wars in *La Mère du printemps, Le Harem politique, and Loin de Médine*." in *The Marabout and the Muse: New Approaches to Islam in African Literature* Kenneth W. Harrow, ed. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996.
- Laroui, Abdallah. *La crise des intellectuels arabes: traditionalism ou historicisme?* Paris: Librairie Française Maspero, 1970.
- Lionnet, Françoise. "Ces voix au fil de soi(e): le détour du poétique," in *Assia Djébar: Littérature et transmission: Colloque de Cerisy*. Eds. Wolfgang, Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber, and Dominique Combe. Paris: Presses Sorbonne nouvelle, 2008.
- Mahfouz, Naguib. *Naguib Mahfouz, The Art of Fiction No. 129*. Interview with Charlotte El Shabrawy. Available online at: <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2062/the-art-of-fiction-no-129-naguib-mahfouz>.
- Marx-Scouras, Danielle. "A Literature of Departure: The Cross-Cultural Writing of Driss Chraïbi." *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 23 No. 2 *North African Literature* (Summer, 1992): 131-144.
- Matar Nabil, ed. *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the 17th Century*. New York & London: Routledge, 2002.
- McLarney, Ellen. "The Islamic Public Sphere and the Discipline of *Adab*." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* No. 43 (2011): 419-449.
- McDougall, James. "Dream of Exile, Promise of Home: Language, Education and Arabism in Algeria." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 251-270.
- . *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge

- University Press, 2006.
- , "Myth and Counter-Myth: 'The Berber' as National Signifier in Algerian Historiographies." *Radical History Review* Issue 86 (Spring 2003): 66-88.
- McLarney, Ellen. "Politics of *Le passé simple*." *Journal of North African Literature* Vol. 8 No. 2 (Summer 2003): 1-18.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*. London: Zed Books, 1996.
- , *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Mikhail, Mona N. "Existential Themes in a Traditional Cairo Setting." in *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*. Eds. Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993.
- Moore, Lindsey. *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Moosa, Ebrahim. *Ghazālī and the Poetics of the Imagination*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Mortimer, Mildred. "Assia Djebar's *Algerian Quartet*: A Study in Fragmented Autobiography." *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 28 No. 2 (Summer 1997): 102-117.
- Mufti, Aamir R. "Critical Secularism: A Reintroduction for Perilous Times." *boundary 2* Vol. 31 No. 2 (2004): 1-9.
- Murdoch, H. Adlai. "Woman, Postcoloniality, Otherness: Djebar's Discourses of *Histoire* and *Algérianité*," *L'Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48 No. 4 (Winter 2008): 15-33.
- Murray, Jenny. *Remembering the (Post)Colonial Self: Memory and Identity in the Novels of Assia Djebar*. Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2008.
- Murtad, Abdelmalek. *Nahdat al-Adab al-Arabi al-Mu'asir fi al-Jaza'ir: 1925-1954*. Al-Shirkah al-Wataniyya lil-Nashr wa al-Tawziy'a, al-Jaza'ir, 1969.
- Nicholson, Reynold Alleyne. *Studies in Islamic Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921.
- Omri, Mohamed-Salah. *Nationalism, Islam and World Literature*. London & New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Orlando, Valerie. *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999.
- Ostle, Robin. Eds. Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild. *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*. London: Saqi Books, 1998.
- Ouedghiri, Meryem. "Writing Women's Bodies on the Palimpsest of Islamic History: Fatima Mernissi and Assia Djebar," *Cultural Dynamics* 14.41 (2002): 41-64.
- Pandolfo, Stefania. *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- , "The Thin Line of Modernity." *Questions of Modernity*. Ed. Timothy Mitchell. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Pennell, C.R. *Morocco since 1830: A History*. London: Hurst & Company, 1988.
- Rahma, Bourqia. "The Cultural Legacy of Power in Morocco." *In the Shadow of the Sultan*. Eds. Rahma Bourqia and Susan Gilson Miller. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Rahman, Najat. *Literary Disinheritance: The Writing of Home in the Work of Mahmoud Darwish and Assia Djebar*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008.

- Ringrose, Priscilla. *Assia Djébar: In Dialogue with Feminisms*. Amsterdam-New York: Editions Rodopi, 1994.
- Saïd, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979.
- . *The World, The Text, The Critic*. London: Vintage, 1983.
- Sangmuah, Egya N. "Sultan Ben Youssef's American Strategy and the Diplomacy of North African Liberation, 1943-61." *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 27 No. 1 (Jan., 1992): 129-148.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot, 1916.
- Selim, Samah. *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985*. London & New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Sells, Michael A. *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1996.
- Sheehi, Stephen. *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004.
- Siassi, Guilan. "Itineraries of Desire and the Excesses of Home: Assia Djébar's Cohabitation with "la langue adverse." *L'Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48 No. 4 (Winter 2008): 56-68.
- Somekh, Sasson. *The Changing Rhythm: A Study of Najīb Mahfūz's Novels, Volume 1*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishing, 1973.
- Steadman, Jennifer Bernhardt. "A Global Feminist Travels: Assia Djébar and Fantasia." *meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* Vol. 4 No. 1 (2003): 173-199.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination." *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 23 No. 2 (May 2008): 191-219.
- Šukys, Julija. *Silence is Death: The Life and Work of Tahar Djaout*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.
- Tageldin, Shaden M. "Which *Qalam* for Algeria? Colonialism, Liberation, and Language in Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghānīmī's *Dhākirat al-Jasad*." *Comparative Literature Studies* Vol. 46 No. 3 (2009): 467-497.
- Thiel, Veronika. "La Querelle des discours: Techniques formelles de la réécriture de l'histoire dans *L'Amour, la fantasia*." *L'Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48 No. 4 (Winter 2008): 34-46.
- Vatin, Jean-Claude. "Revival in the Maghreb: Islam as an Alternative Political Language." *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World*. New York: Prager Publishers, 1982.
- Vinogradov, Amal and Waterbury, John. "Situations of Contested Legitimacy in Morocco: An Alternative Framework." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 13 No. 1 (January 1971): 232-59.
- Walker, Muriel. "Femme d'écriture française: la francographie djébarienne." *L'Esprit Créateur* Vol. 48 No. 4 (Winter 2008): 47-55.
- Wattār al-Ṭāhir. *Al-Lāz* [The Ace]. Algiers: SNED, 1974.
- . *Al-Zilzāl* [The Earthquake]. Beirut: al-Dar al-'Arabiyya li-l-'Ulūm, 2007.
- . *Urs baghl* [A Mule's Wedding]. 2nd edn. Algiers: SNED, 1980.
- . *The Earthquake*. Transl. William Granara. London: Saqi Books, 2000.
- Wehrs, Donald. *Islam, Ethics, Revolt: Politics and Piety in Francophone West African and Maghreb Narrative*. United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2008.
- Yetiv, Isaac. *La theme de l'aliénation dans le roman maghrébin d'expression française: 1952-1956*. Sherbrooke: CELEF, 1972.
- Zimra, Clarissa. "Disorienting the Subject in Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*." *Yale French Studies* No. 87 *Another Look, Another Woman: Retranslations of French Feminism*

- (1995): 149-179.
- . "Mapping Memory: Architectural Metaphors in Djébar's Unfinished Quartet." *L'Ésprit Créateur* Vol. 43 No. 1 (Spring 2003): 58-58.
- . "Not So Far From Medina: Assia Djébar Charts Islam's 'Insupportable Feminist Revolution.'" *World Literature Today* Vol. 70 No. 4 (Autumn, 1996): 823-834.