

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Voices of Silence in Francophone Women's Literature: Comparisons of Algerian and Mauritian Novels

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3v14742t>

Author

Schlosser, Kathryn Mary

Publication Date

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Voices of Silence in Francophone Women's Literature:

Comparisons of Algerian and Mauritian Novels

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in

French and Francophone Studies

by

Kathryn Mary Schlosser

2018

© Copyright by

Kathryn Mary Schlosser

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Voices of Silence in Francophone Women's Literature:
Comparisons of Algerian and Mauritian Novels

by

Kathryn Mary Schlosser

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Françoise Lionnet, Co-Chair

Professor Lia N Brozgal, Co-Chair

“Voices of Silence in Francophone Women's Literature: Comparisons of Algerian and Mauritian Novels” examines the use of silence in African Francophone women's literature. The topic of silence with regards to women, their voices and their writing has been central to feminist movements worldwide. In the novels analyzed in this dissertation, the gesture of breaking women's silences paradoxically, it would seem, still includes a variety of silences within the narrative. This dissertation queries at such an aesthetic, and how the use of multivalent silences enhances rather than undermines the act of speaking out. It aims to (re)valorize the use of silence in women's writing, and purports in fact to show its necessity in the iteration of subjectivity. I argue that silence operates as purposeful aesthetic narrative tool in Francophone African women's writing; I term this generative quality of silence within the narrative as *productive silence*.

As part of my interrogation of *productive silence*, I analyze six novels written by Francophone women from Algeria and Mauritius. Each chapter pairs together an Algerian and Mauritian novel; this transnational comparative approach puts the Francophone literature into dialogue in order to highlight the unique multicultural contexts of Algeria and Mauritius. In addition, I incorporate a multidisciplinary theoretical approach that looks at silence through the lens of literary, linguistic, communication, and philosophical theories. This project examines the ways in which silence is deployed to write autobiographical texts, to journey through the unknown in order to discover personal truths, and to recognize and memorialize the suffering and bravery of lost heroes. Within this selection of Francophone women's writing, multiform silences create a threshold for self-discovery, motivation to seek out untold histories, and a language with which to do it.

The dissertation of Kathryn Mary Schlosser is approved.

Andrea N Loselle

Lucia Re

Françoise Lionnet, Committee Co-Chair

Lia N Brozgal, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

For my family.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	vii
Vita	ix
Introduction	
<i>Voix du silence: Voices of Silence in Francophone Women’s Literature</i>	1
Chapter One	
<i>Entendre le silence: Understanding Theories on Silence</i>	9
Chapter Two	
<i>Au seuil de moi: Writing the Self through Silence in Cixous and Devi</i>	43
Chapter Three	
<i>Mouvement du silence: Journeys through Silence with Leïla Sebbar and Shenaz Patel</i>	100
Chapter Four	
<i>Voix du passé: Assia Djebar’s and Natacha Appanah’s Ghost Stories</i>	144
Conclusion	196
Works Cited	200

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project began many years ago, and came to fruition this year thanks to the support and guidance of UCLA's Department of French and Francophone Studies and Graduate Division. UCLA surrounded me with stellar examples of innovative researchers, dedicated scholars, and inspiring Francophone writers—making the daunting challenge of original research possible.

I am eternally grateful to several of my French professors, (and in some ways, to all of them!). To Arthur Evans, at DePauw University; he showed me how much I loved the challenge of French and the worlds I could explore by speaking it. To Anne Donadey, who introduced me to Algerian literature and the “war without a name;” she has been as an ever-present mentor during my time at San Diego State University, and throughout my time at UCLA. To Andrea Loselle, whose palpable passion for diving into theory inspired my deep foray into silence. To Lucia Re, for broadening my feminist theory horizons past French borders. To Françoise Lionnet, the ultimate example of a scholar who can elevate her field while keeping it relevant; she introduced me Mauritian literature, and remains still a consummate mentor and inspiration. Her ability to seamlessly connect the micro with the macro, the past and present, and literatures around the world and throughout time never ceases to amaze me. To Lia Brozgal, whose extraordinary efforts made this dissertation possible. Her work ethic and dedication to detailed and specific feedback has made all aspects of this project better. *Mille mercis à vous tous!*

So many others have contributed to the successful completion of my dissertation as well. To author Ananda Devi, who offered her time and expertise to me and the UCLA community. To my writing group, Anneka Haddix, Annie Mueller, and Lauren Van Arsdall, who helped me to be brave and share, and never stopped cheering me on. To fellow francophonists Michelle Bumatay and Katelyn Knox, whose original work and passion for scholarship inspires me. To my fellow

dissertating colleagues whose moral support and advice kept me keeping on. To Kerry Allen and the administrative staff of the UCLA Department of French and Francophone Studies for making all things paperwork happen. For those who came into my life during my time at UCLA, you have all influenced the person and scholar I am today in some way or another, *j'en serai toujours reconnaissante*.

And lastly I wish to express all my gratitude and love to my friends and family. For my father, John E. Schlosser, and his incredible and curious mind; I credit my intellectual curiosity to you. For my mother, Mary R. Schlosser, for reminding me that I will be fine, and knowing that I could do it, even when I didn't. For my brother John Schlosser, who wondered if I would ever stop going to school. For my grandmother, Phyllis A. Nordstrom, who brought me out to California and always reminds me how proud she is of me. Thank you to the friends who have become my family—Travis Nesbitt, Kirstin Fulton, and Jessica Rett—your support, advice, laughter and love have kept me going on this incredible and challenging journey! To Amy, Christy, Kelli and Leah, for always being the best. And to mon amour Dominic Mehling, who has helped me balance the silences of literature with the outrageously loud joys of life—thank you for your love, support and and above all, your patience.

VITA

- 2001 B.A. in French
DePauw University
Greencastle, IN
- 2005 M.A. in French Literature
San Diego State University
San Diego, CA
- 2007-2008 French Instructor
Imperial Valley College
Imperial, CA
- 2009-2010 Teaching Assistant
Department of French and Francophone Studies
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2010 Graduate Summer Research Mentorship
Graduate Division
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2010-2011 Teaching Associate
Department of French and Francophone Studies
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2010-2011 Robert Merrill Award for the Best Teaching Assistant
Department of French and Francophone Studies
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2011 Graduate Summer Research Mentorship
Graduate Division
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2011-2014 Teaching Fellow
Department of French and Francophone Studies
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2013 Teaching Assistant Coordinator
Department of French and Francophone Studies
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2014-2016 Visiting Instructor, Department of French and Italian
Miami University
Oxford, OH

PUBLICATIONS, CONFERENCE PAPERS AND INVITED LECTURES

Schlosser, Kathryn M. Translation with Anne Donadey (Schlosser primary author). "Assia Djebar. *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*. Book Review by Salim Jay. » *L'Esprit Créateur* vol.48, no.4, Winter 2008, pp. 133-134.

---. "A 'Bel Avenir' for Banlieue Literature." Paper presented at the Seventh Annual SLLC Graduate Student Forum: Reflections of Optimism. The School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, March 26-27, 2009, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

---. "Lire le silence : Entendre l'opacité dans *La Seine était rouge*." Paper presented at Dis/placing Boundaries in the Romance World. Bi-annual Romance Languages Graduate Student Conference, November 19-20, 2010, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR.

---"Djamila's Laugh: Recuperating Fanon's "Feminist Tendencies" in Pontecorvo and Bouchareb." Paper presented at 24th Annual Meeting of the Far West Popular Culture and American Culture Associations, February 24-26, 2012, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV.

Schlosser, Kathryn M. and Ruth Jones. "Alone Together: Introduction." *Paroles Gelées* vol. 28, 2014, pp. 1-2.

Schlosser, Kathryn M. "Le Je(u) postcolonial: The Game of Women's Subjectivity in Ananda Devi's *Indian Tango*." Paper presented at the Thinking Gender Conference, UCLA Center for the Study of Women's (CSW) 24th Annual Graduate Student Research Conference, February 7th, 2014, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.

---. Interpreter for Dafroza Gauthier's interview with Kelly McEvers. "Fighting for Rwanda's Justice in France," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio. April 6, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/2014/04/06/299503308/frances-rwandan-genocide-hunter-dafroza-gauthier>

---. "Commanding Expressions: Quoting Silences in *La Seine était rouge*." Works-in-Progress Talk. Department of French and Italian, November 4, 2014, Miami University, Oxford, OH.

---. "Death and Silent Histories: Remembering Assia Djebar." Paper presented at 20th and 21st Century French and Francophone International Colloquium, February, 2015, Baton Rouge, LA.

---. "Beyond Speech: Silence and the Unspeakable across Cultures." Paper presented at PAMLA 113th Annual Conference, November 6-8, 2015 Portland, OR.

---. "Seuil de Soi: Writing the Self through Silence Chez Cixous and Devi." Paper presented at 20th and 21st Century French and Francophone International Colloquium, March, 2016, St. Louis, MO.

INTRODUCTION

Voix du silence: Voices of Silence in Francophone Women's Literature

In the short essay “À propos d’un plaidoyer,” Frantz Fanon responds to the publication of *Pour Djamila Bouhired*, a book dedicated to the Algerian revolutionary. Fanon recalls her reaction to her death sentence at the end of her 1957 trial, which occurred in the middle of the Algerian war of independence from the French. Fanon explains:

Le rire de Djamila Bouhired à l’annonce de sa condamnation à mort, que personne ne s’y trompe, n’est ni bravade stérile ni inconscience.

Ce sourire est bien plutôt la manifestation tranquille d’une certitude intérieure demeurée inébranlable. (80)

This account of the courtroom scene highlights Djamila Bouhired’s strength and unwavering composure in the face of mortal danger. Fanon reminds the authors of the book, Georges Arnaud and Jacques Vergès, that Bouhired did not respond in shock to the verdict, and explains how she exemplifies the attitude of the Algerian people; she maintains her silence in order to protect her fellow revolutionaries, and she laughs in the face of death.¹ Fanon refers to the trial and the book written in Djamila Bouhired’s defense, highlighting the violence perpetrated by the French colonial authorities not only in Algeria, but also in France and Reunion. He closes the essay by asking the question : “Y a-t-il si loin de la Réunion à Alger?”

1. “Elle ne demande ni commisération, ni pitié. La dignité de Djamila Bouhired, son extraordinaire ténacité, son obstination à se tenir debout, à ne pas parler, son souci de sourire devant la mort, constituent les caractéristiques essentielles de l’attitude nationale du peuple algérien” (Fanon, “A propos d’un plaidoyer” 83).

Fanon's essay, though brief, makes two critical observations central to this dissertation. First, Fanon recognizes and praises Bouhired for her dedication to Algerian independence. He lauds the dignity of her refusal to speak, and holds her up as a symbol of revolutionary spirit. Second, Fanon reminds readers of the experiential similarities between two regions of French colonial heritage located thousands of miles apart; that French colonial subjects in Algiers, (capital of North African country Algeria), and Reunion, (one of the Mascarene Islands in the southeast Indian Ocean along with Mauritius and Rodrigo), have suffered violence and/or subjugation at the hands of French authorities. Inspired by Fanon's remarks, I aim to explore the meanings of silence in women's Francophone literature from the Maghreb and the Mascarene Islands, in particular Algerian and Mauritian literature.²

I have chosen to investigate Francophone literature Algerian and Mauritian for several reasons. Each country experienced a different type of colonial oppression under the French, and are now independent nations. Algeria became a settler colony, was in close proximity to European French soil, and experienced a violent war for independence from 1954-1962. Mauritius, on the other hand, endured several colonial powers, including the Dutch and British as well as the French; the small Indian Ocean island was far from France, a French colony for a much shorter period of time than Algeria, and gained independence in a comparatively less violent manner. As Reunion, the nation mentioned by Fanon, remains a French overseas territory to this day, it seemed necessary

2. In addition to Fanon's essay, I conduct my analysis in the spirit of Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih's comparative approach of minor transnationalism, theorized in the introduction their edited collection of essays of the same title. This theoretical concept refers to the interactions of minor cultures between each other without the constant reference to a major colonial power, in this case France. In this way I privilege the women's writing from postcolonial territories and put them into conversation with each other. Using the minor transnational approach, I analyze silence and how it intersects with subjectivity, memory, environment and writing.

to look to Mauritian Francophone literature in order to be able to look at the literature that has been created in the post-colonial era.³

In my experience reading African women's literature in general, I have been struck by the preponderance of silence figured in texts that purportedly aim to break down silences imposed on women. How can the use of silence be reconciled with the author's intent to speak out? Are these authors imitating the very oppression visited upon them (or their characters), or is there another explanation? In order to investigate these questions, I interrogate the ways in which women have been silenced and continue to implement silence in their narratives, specifically in six texts from Algeria and Mauritius. It is my contention that the deployment and integration of silences in narrative is a purposeful aesthetic technique, and that the silences produce potential meaning for author and reader alike.

In order to investigate the comparison of these two regions further, I will look at francophone literary texts from Algeria and Mauritius that are written by women authors. This includes Nathacha Appanah's *Le dernier frère*, H  l  ne Cixous's *Les r  veries de la femme sauvage*, Ananda Devi's *Les hommes qui me parlent*, Assia Djebar's *La femme sans s  pulture*, Shenaz Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos*, and Le  ila Sebbar's *La Seine   tait rouge*. The novels chosen for analysis in this dissertation share several characteristics: the sparing use of dialogue, the use of short paragraphs, and the emphatic deployment of the word *silence*. This multivalent deployment of silences allows the writers to (re)create the most truthful experiences, in that they re-present events—personal, communal, and national—that have somehow been silenced. It also allows the

³ For more information on French colonialism in Algeria please see works by Anne Donadey, Jim House and Neil Macmaster, and Benjamin Stora. For more information on French colonialism in Mauritius please see works by Fran  oise Lionnet, Emmanuel B. Jean-Fran  ois, and Khal Thorabully.

authors to be inclusive by leaving space for alternate narratives. This space of silences also provides the reader with the opportunity to engage with and interpret the narrative, and thus to experience a story that is both personal and shared.

Because the term *silence* carries with it contradictory and paradoxical connotations, it becomes critical to identify how I understand it and read it as a literary device. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *silence* is defined firstly in the nominal form as “forbearance from speech or noise” or “absence of sound or noise.”⁴ A second meaning of the word indicates another kind of lack, albeit a total absence of sound, not just an absence of words. The definition continues with the verbal form, such as “to compel or reduce to silence” and “to suppress” or “to cause to cease.” In order to examine the productive nature of silence, this dissertation will explore the denotative definition of silence in the hopes of complicating the current connotative understanding. Theoretical feminist scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s, by intellectuals like as H  l  ne Cixous, for example, posited that women cannot be heard using the language of the patriarchal system. Gayatri Spivak’s 1983 essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” questioned the ability for third world voices to be understood by first world interlocutors. The communication challenges faced by women that Cixous and Spivak highlight, however, cannot be the only reason for its significant presence in women’s Francophone literature. It is my contention that the deployment of silence in its various manifestations, as seen in the six novels analyzed in this dissertation, provides a means by which women’s voices *can* and *have* made themselves heard. Moreover, it is a method by which they preserve a path for women’s voices to make themselves heard in the future.

It is not simply adjectives, adverbs, and well-chosen verbs that can create an image for the reader, but also the moments in between when these signs connect (or in some cases do not),

⁴ "Silence." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 9 Sept. 2018.

creating a more vivid and visceral representation of events in the narrative. In a written text, silence functions in a synesthetic manner via the minimal presence of dialogue, punctuation indicating an interruption in dialogue, descriptive passages that incorporate the actual word *silence*, and even the absence of any words at all on the page. Manifestations of silence do not represent empty meaningless placeholders within the text that simply set apart words and thoughts from each other. Rather, the silences provide generative opportunities for meaning-making. This propagative aspect of silence is what I term *productive silence*. Additionally, I propose that the practice of using silence to break silence is emblematic of what feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray describe as “écriture féminine.”

In addition to analyzing silence’s relationship to the content of the narrative, I will also focus on the structure of the text and visible silences on the material page. Within the physical binding and paper that constitute the books, I consider the manifestations of silence in the margins of the sentence, the page, the chapter and the entire text as a whole. Part of the analysis will require focusing on the space around the text on the page, or simply the blank page itself. In focusing on the edges of writing, I hope to gain a different perspective on the meaning of the text. Can structural links be drawn between these texts, and if so, what is the significance? Does this use of silence relate to specific types of events, or certain types of characters? I will answer these questions by looking at these texts comparatively.

The first chapter, “*Entendre le silence: Understanding Theories on Silences*,” provides the theoretical underpinning of the analyses of silence to come in chapters two, three and four. I begin with the American feminist scholars Tillie Olsen and Adrienne Rich, whose works were instrumental in the concrete, public recognition that women’s voices were still being silenced in the 20th century. Olsen’s and Rich’s perspective on American women and silence is then followed

by discussion of the position of women in postcolonial territories, like Algeria and Mauritius where the novels in this dissertation take place. Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern situates the authors and many of their characters in positions of silence from the outset. The multicultural transnational reach of silence comes into play when examining anthologies of essays that address women of various religious, ethnic, and national identities. Several researchers look at the ways in which women writers from North African and the Mascarene Islands break silences through writing, and the cultural pressures that hinder them in the process. The global approach extends to understanding both Western and Eastern connotations of silence; Trinh T. Minh-ha and King Kok Cheung explanation of the meanings associated with Japanese and Chinese characters for silence provide an alternative to associating silences with absences or emptiness. Similarly, linguists explore the potential plenitude of silence as a form of communication, which I look at as representative of Hélène Cixous's concept of "écriture féminine." Western philosophers such as Wolfgang Iser, Merleau-Ponty, and Ludwig Wittgenstein delve into the philosophical exploration of silence, language and communication. Michel de Certeau and Rosi Braidotti provide theorizations on movement, walking and the journey, and how these acts lead to individual agency. Lastly, an ecocritical lens provides a perspective through which to examine the role of nature in the narrative and the natural world as language. The close readings found in subsequent chapters will then deploy several theoretical approaches in order to examine silences in the narratives.

Chapter two, "Au seuil de moi: Writing the Self through Silence in Cixous and Devi," focuses on autobiographical texts dealing with the lacunae in individual histories and the personal voyage to subjectivity. Hélène Cixous' *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage* (2000) and Ananda Devi's *Les hommes qui me parlent* (2011) are both complex autobiographical texts that imbricate the act of writing with the development of agency and identity, all the while unpacking issues of

gender inequality and racial politics. Moreover, silence is present explicitly and implicitly in the text, acting as an integral thread to the overall narrative. For example, Cixous returns several times to the story of le Vélo, and describes the unspoken desire that united Hélène and her brother. This absence of conversation proves to be a recurrent theme in Cixous' text, and one she writes about at length. Hélène insists that "je ne parlerai pas de l'inconscience de ma grand-mère pendant ces années, je préfère ne rien dire" (*Les rêveries* 29). The same is said with regards to the grief she and her family experienced after the death of her father. But in underlining the fact that she will not speak of certain moments, she gives them importance that cannot be ignored by the reader. Ananda Devi's female protagonists enable her to bring issues of femininity, gender and the feminine condition to bear on the historical and cultural realities of Mauritius. She often incorporates the figure of silence in her writing, showing "the struggles for women's emancipation are complexly interwoven with the processes of modernization" (Felski 16). Other subversive gestures appear in Cixous and Devi's work, such as neologisms and creative typography, that show the effort to challenge the established systems through manipulation of linguistic norms.

Chapter three, "*Mouvements du silence: Journeys through Silence with Leïla Sebbar and Shenaz Patel*," compares Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999) and Shenaz Patel's *Silence des Chagos* (2005). Leïla Sebbar, a French-Algerian writer, also uses the Algerian War as the backdrop for her novel. She recounts, through a polyphonic narrative, the deadly protest that took place in Paris on October 17, 1961. Silence surrounds the event on a national and personal level for the protagonist Amel, and Sebbar implements this silence within the structure and syntax of the novel. Shenaz Patel, a Mauritian journalist and novelist, tells the story of the displacement of about 3000 people from the Chagos archipelago as part of a treaty between Britain, Mauritius and the United States in 1968 in *Silence des Chagos*. The evacuation took place in just 72 hours

without the consent of the community. Through descriptions of a lack of communication between characters, and the inclusion of blank pages and ellipses, the silence or break in communication that the characters experience is then passed on to the reader. Both authors maintain silence within their storytelling, not as a result of outside censorship, but as a critical aspect of the narrative.

The fourth and last chapter, “*Voix du passé: Silence Assia Djébar’s and Natacha Appanah’s Ghost Stories,*” will delve into narratives that break a silence surrounding an historical event whilst still maintaining the use of silence within the text. I will analyze Nathacha Appanah’s *Le dernier frère* (2007), Assia Djébar’s *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002). Nathacha Appanah, a Mauritian writer, sets her story during the Second World War, when Mauritius hosted Jewish refugees and sequestered them in a former prison. Through the unusual friendship that forms between a local boy, Raj, and a displaced Jewish refugee named David, Appanah gives voice to marginalized groups of people, both Jews and Coolie descendants, via a narrative in which dialogue is nearly impossible. Assia Djébar, perhaps the most well-known Algerian woman writer, highlights the contributions of Zoulikha, a locally renowned revolutionary during the Algerian War for Independence. Silence is prevalent via the institutional silence that called the war an “event”, as well as via the premise that a ghost is one of the protagonists.

The following “micro-aesthetic” analysis of silence seeks to provide “fine-tuned descriptions of aspects of reading that have suffered the repeated ignominy of cursory or cavalier treatment” (Felski, *Uses of Literature*, Ch. 4). Silence in its many manifestations becomes a subversive language in and of itself, and the deployment of silences facilitates reader engagement with autobiographies and identities, literatures and languages, histories and memories.

CHAPTER ONE

Entendre le silence: Understanding Theories on Silence

As part of the overarching goal to find the purposeful uses of silence in Francophone women's literature from Algeria and Mauritius, it felt necessary to create a theoretical base from which to analyze silence. Moreover, my work on women, silences, and literature does not occur in a vacuum, and part of the gesture of this work is to speak women's voices. In order to do this, I have looked at the acknowledgement of women's silencing; the collective efforts to remediate women's silencing and share their stories; the particularities of women and their silence from Algeria and Mauritius; multicultural transnational connotations of silence, and cross-disciplinary scholarship on language, silence and communication. While I have attempted to gather information from a wide variety of resources, my analysis of theories of silence remains admittedly limited due to the nature and size of the dissertation process. With the understanding that there is much more that has been said about silence, I will take you through the histories of silence and the method with which I developed the notion of *productive silence* that appears in the texts studied in chapters two, three and four.

The discussion of the silencing of women in society is a central topic of feminist theory and gender studies. One of the most-well known feminists to explicitly address the silencing of women is Tillie Olsen. Her non-fiction book of essays, *Silences*, published in 1965, included her reflections on silence in literature that she presented at the Radcliff Institute in 1962 (5). The notes from this talk were later transformed into the essay that appeared in Harper's Magazine in 1965. The publication history is important to note for it demonstrates that her audience was not limited to academics, but open to a wider readership, as is this case with fictional writing. Olsen continued

to develop her ideas about silence throughout her career, and is credited by feminists for breaking the silence on silence. Olsen distinguishes between various types of silence: hidden silences, censorship silences, other silences, foreground silences, illiterate silences (8-10). Such silences lead to a suppression of writing, whether by disadvantage, discrimination, or creative disability. Olsen focuses mostly on what is “lost by unnatural silences” such as those described above, including theoretical, literary, and personal examples (21).

Adrienne Rich, like Tillie Olsen, was concerned primarily with how to break silences and oppression against women. In her book *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, Rich likens silence to violence and oppression (204). For her, silence can also serve as a sign of “deprivation and ignorance” due to a lack of education (281). Rich lists important political feminists such as Susan B. Anthony and Mary Wollstonecraft in order to highlight women’s accomplishments in the 18th and 19th centuries, noting that their work, even for feminists, had fallen into a “muffled” silence (10-11). She lauds women’s activity throughout history and encourages curiosity, questioning, and the sharing of stories, thus bridging the gaps in historical memory.

Silence, however, is not always negative for Tillie Olsen and Adrienne Rich. Though only briefly mentioned at the beginning of the essay, Olsen does identify that she is not addressing “*natural* silences—what Keats called *agonie ennuyeuse* (the tedious agony)—that necessary time for renewal, lying fallow, gestation, in the natural cycle of creation” (6). Rich also describes a type of “natural silence”, which she names the “void.” This notion is depicted as “a part of every woman” and the site of “the beginning of our truth” (191). This womblike space is described as dark and lacking, but also as having the capacity to generate. Jane Hoogestraat, in her essay “Unnameable by Choice”: Multivalent Silences in Adrienne Rich’s *Time’s Power*”, identifies Rich’s motivation for noting the dearth of written records on women as an opportunity and

obligation to “imagine the absent narratives” (29). This brief and abstract acknowledgement of the potential productivity of emptiness underpins my conception of silence as a generative element within a literary text. It is the production, enactment and representation of *productive silence* that I examine in the novels by Hélène Cixous, Ananda Devi, Shenaz Patel, Leïla Sebbar, Nathacha Appanah-Mouriquand and Assia Djebar, which are replacing the absent narratives.⁵ The generative quality of silence, left underdeveloped by Tillie Olsen and alluded to by Rich, is the type of silence that I analyze in this dissertation.

The relationship between women and silence must take into consideration the cultural specificities of Algeria and Mauritius. This includes a variety of ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds for both countries, interrogated by several 20th- and 21st-century Francophone scholars.⁶ As a result of the ever-expansive critical work on Francophone literature, discussing writers from former French colonies inevitably calls to mind Gayatri Spivak’s seminal question and essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” While academic exercises like this dissertation aim to answer this question in the positive, it is important to remember why Spivak, in 1988, said that “the subaltern cannot speak” (104). She points out that “in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak,” and that “the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (83). Through this argument, Spivak concretizes the obstacles that descendants of colonial subjects face when trying to speak their stories, and join in the theoretical conversation. The colonial project has erased the subaltern’s agency and ability to speak, and even though he or she may inherently possess such agency, and have in the postcolonial age received the same

⁵ Authors names are listed in the order they are discussed in the dissertation.

⁶ For example, see work by Anne Donadey, Charles Forsdick, Alec Hargreavs, Françoise Lionnet, Kumari Issur, Srilata Ravi, Najib Redouane, Alison Rice, and Dominic Thomas.

education as descendants of the colonizers, they are not given the same legitimacy. They may speak, but no one (in power) is listening. Spivak's essay was a call to action to look beyond immediate and understood epistemologies and ontologies and to seek out "the discourse of the Other" (66). The authors studied in this dissertation have pursued this goal, inscribing the words of deportees, refugees, lower-class, immigrants, revolutionaries, children, and above all, women.

Cixous, Devi, Sebbar, Patel, Djebbar, and Appanah-Mouriquand, whose texts serve as the primary sources throughout this dissertation, have also provided literary evidence that answers criticisms put forth by scholars Anne McClintock and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. In her 1992 article "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Post-Colonialism," McClintock discusses the oversimplified notion of post-colonialism, in which the specificities of the types of colonialism enacted, and the multicultural identities of the colonial subjects are made to fit into one term, ignoring individual experiences and perpetuating the dominating practices of colonialism that plundered subjectivity in the first place. Cixous's autofictional text represents the life of an adolescent Jewish girl in an Algeria on the brink of revolution; Devi takes us back to her childhood in Mauritius as in transitions from British colony to independent nation; Sebbar recounts the struggle of a young girl of Algerian descent as she tries to understand what happened to her mother on the night of the October 17 protest in Paris, 1961; Patel describes the legacy of the forced deportation of the Chagossian people to Mauritius in the early 1970s; Djebbar brings the voice of her hometown heroine during the Algerian War back to life; and Appanah-Mouriquand creates the story of a childhood friendship in 1940s Mauritius to highlight the humanity of the detained Jewish refugees in Beau Bassin prison, as well as that of the impoverished Coolie population. These narratives also answer Mohanty's insistence that women, and those considered third world

women, must retain their individuality and not be lumped into one monolithic group (196-197, 200, 213).

The call to specificity has been answered by many scholars in the past thirty years as well. I will mention a but few that have directly or indirectly influenced the analyses found in this dissertation. Françoise Lionnet and Shuh-mei Shih's anthology *Minor Transnationalism* (2005), a collection of essays that incorporate a transnational and/or global perspective, providing recognition of hybridized marginalized populations and how they interact with each other. Deirdre Lashgari's 1995 book *Violence, Silence and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression*, takes a thematic approach by looking at scholarship from women around the world. In addition to her own work on Nigerian Oyo oral traditions, Oyèrónké Oyewùmí's edited a volume of essays in 2005 called *African Gender Studies*. This collection of cross-disciplinary scholarship begins to account for the diverse conceptualizations of gender roles across the continent. *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical essays by Arab Women Writers* (1998) by Fadia Faqir sheds light on the "challenges of being female in Arab-Islamic societies" with a collection of autobiographical testimonials (14). Faqir's text aims to demonstrate how "Arab women [...] weave a 'language' of their own," and resist the "pressures to hide themselves" (23, 14). *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo caras* (1990) provides a multi-genre compilation of poetry, essays and journal entries by women of color in North America. Gloria Anzaldúa, the anthology's editor, is also well-known for co-editing the 1981 anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* with Cherrie Moraga, as well as her 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Both Anzaldúa's individual and collective projects give voices to people, women in particular, living on the edges of society because of ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexuality, gender, or some combination thereof. The work produced by Lionnet, Shih, Lashgari, Oyewùmí, Faqir

and Alzaldúa has contributed significantly to the identification of and appreciation for the diversity of women around the world, and the continued importance of making sure all of their voices can be heard.

Transnational Connotations of Silence

If one traces silence through various philosophical and religious trends in ancient and medieval history, both Eastern and Western, one can see that silence has often represented wisdom, transcendence, authority and the sacred, not just subjugation. In order to support these claims of productive silence in Algerian and Mauritian women's literature, I turn to the theorizations of Asian feminists Trinh T. Minh-ha, and King-Kok Cheung. Their analyses of female subjectivity offer non-Western conceptions of identity, society and gender, and have provided alternative views to the negative and destructive role of silence in women's literature. In her chapter "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference", Trinh describes the diverse functions of silence:

Within the context of women's speech silence has many faces. Like the veiling of women, silence can only be subversive when it frees itself from the male-defined context of absence, lack, and fear as feminine territories. On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lack and as blank in rejecting the importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity of placing women on the side of negativity and of working in undertones, for example, in our attempts at undermining patriarchal systems of values. Silence is so commonly set in opposition with speech. Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored. (372-373)

This multivalent silence is only one example of Trinh's approach to difference, a concept she views as a potential source for creativity, as opposed to the origins of conflict and segregation. Trinh's work also proves useful for this project because she analyses the "liberating potential" of both veiling and unveiling for the Muslim woman (372). While there have been many discussions on the transgressive power of the veil, Trinh attempts to analyze the act outside of the male/female binary. This approach, as well as the non-verbal nature of veiling and unveiling, will underpin my analyses of the generative potential of silence.

Similar to the gesture made by Trinh, King-Kok Cheung has offered another perspective from which to read women's silences. Cheung agrees that "silence should [...] be given its due" (*Listening to Silences* 113). In her essay adaptation from her book *Articulate Silences* (1993), Cheung looks at the "use of non-verbal expression" in Joy Kogawa's autobiographical novel *Obasan*. One of the first pieces of evidence that Cheung employs to support her defense of silence is a syntactic comparison of the term in English and Chinese/Japanese:

In English, *silence* is often the opposite of *speech, language, or expression*. The Chinese and Japanese character for *silence*, on the other hand, is antonymous to *noise, motion, and commotion*. In the United States, silence is generally looked upon as passive; in China and Japan it traditionally signals pensiveness, alertness, and sensitivity. (113)

The Chinese and Japanese character portrays an absence, but not one that is lacking in meaning or intention; such a discrepancy between simply two languages then opens up the possibilities that silence in writing can and should be read alternatively. Cheung goes on to distinguish between "protective, stoic, and attentive silences" within Kogawa's novel (*Listening to Silences* 114). Her development of the relationship between silence and nature will also be critical to readings in chapter four of this dissertation, "*Voix du passé*." A passage from Kogawa's novel associates

silence with the “sturdiness, endurance, and impregnability” of stone; not only is this description in opposition to connotations of silence as lack, but it also concretizes the connection between silence and nature.⁷ The view that silence and speech are complimentary and linked with the environment makes Cheung an excellent theoretical model.

Francophone African Women and Silence

In addition to Cheung’s and Trinh’s frameworks for the textual analysis of silence and subjectivity, it will also be critical to include postcolonial and feminist criticism of identity and agency. These disciplines inform central concepts necessary to my project that seeks to highlight the role of silence in representations of African Francophone women. Three critics whose perspectives are particularly useful to my approach are H el ene Cixous, Layla Zayzafoon and Frantz Fanon. Cixous and Zayzafoon provide a framework from which to discuss women in literature, the myths that have been created about them, and the ways in which to dispel those myths in order to create more accurate portraits, while Fanon’s contribution resides primarily in the postcolonial context and the modern relationship between colonizer and colonized.

Whilst Cixous gives women a roadmap as to how to reassert their subjectivity in essays such as “Le rire de la M eduse,” Lamia Zayzafoon deconstructs one of the more prevalent identities in Maghreb literature: that of the Muslim woman. In her book *The Production of the Muslim Woman* (2005), Zayzafoon looks at the notion of “Muslim Woman” and investigates its authenticity, purpose, and basis in reality. According to Zayzafoon, the Muslim Woman is an invention created both by Western and Islamist thought. When discussing female subjectivity, she

⁷ “We are the silences that speak from stone... We disappear into the future undemanding as dew” (111-12). Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1981. Boston: David R. Godine, 1982.

prefers the term *production* over that of *representation*; the latter implies that some representations are true and some are false, whereas the former fits less problematically into the notion of Muslim Woman as invention. Zayzafoon employs a methodology in which she analyzes female characters in Western and Islamic texts, and approaches them through the optics of orientalism, colonialism, feminism, and historicism. Zayzafoon sees the Muslim Woman as a predominantly false construct, and thus issues a warning to be critical with regard to the female Muslim identity.

Frantz Fanon, Mauritian-born psychiatrist who practiced in Algeria during the revolution and wrote much about the subjectivity of colonized people, during a time when most of the French colonies were gaining independence. His first book, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), analyzed the subjectivity, or rather lack thereof, of black French citizens. He used his personal experiences as a black man on the streets of Paris to discuss issues of racism and the lasting legacy of colonialism through description of what he coined as “le regard” or “the gaze.” Years later, Fanon catalogues and scrutinizes the effects of the Algerian Revolution in his second book, *L’An V de la révolution algérienne* (1959). In the chapter entitled “L’Algérie dévoilée,” Fanon attempts to address the position and predicament of Algerian Muslim women. The chapter discusses the back and forth strategical maneuvering, by both the French government and the Algerian revolutionaries, with regards to the wearing of the veil. As Fanon understands, the veil becomes a source of power for the women who wear it, creating the ability to be seen without being seen, and a means to smuggle contraband across checkpoints (44). Its removal then acts as a way for the French to strip the women of their camouflage, leaving the women to recreate or reimagine themselves (52-53, 61). Within *L’An V*, Fanon also addresses the psychological pathology that occurs in colonial subjects who live without freedom in their own countries, which he calls “depersonalization.”

Not only is silence valuable in Asian cultures, but also in African cultures. In Oyèrónké Oyewùmí's book, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, she uses Yoruba language and culture to highlight the domination of Western thought and norms on academic scholarship. She notes the Western focus on sight as opposed to the Yoruba emphasis on sound. The distinction Oyewùmí makes bolsters the claim that silence and its counterpart voice, or speech, play an important role in African societies, and thus merit further analysis in African literature. In Dorothy Davis Wills examination of silence in novels by Senegalese women writers Mariama Bâ and Aminata Sow Fall, she underscores the nobility of silence in Senegalese culture, highlighting that "the superior status of the noble is signified by quiet, little speech, submission to God's will, [and] contemplation" (162). These analyses serve as a baseline with which I will analyze silence in women's francophone literature.

Several female Africanist critics have analyzed the symbolism of silence in literature. Zahia Smail Salhi, who studies the works of Assia Djebar, observes that silence operates as a "weakening tool", an opinion that highlights the relationship between silence and oppression (93-94). Salhi underscores the negative connotation associated with silence vis-à-vis women, and how silence limits them and thus weakens them. Irène Assiba d'Almeida focuses on the writing of African women writers in her 1994 book *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. D'Almeida's study looks at autobiography in terms of intersections self, family, and society and how writing is a weapon against oppression (24-25). For some cultures, the silence of women had long been ingrained in the social consciousness; Rafiki Merini recalls that for Arab women, there is an "ancestral reluctance to reveal themselves" (21). They remain silent in certain environments because their culture has taught them to hide themselves from the public sphere. The cultural custom imposed on women has become an automatic and inherent

habit. The reticence to reveal themselves then reinforces the system of oppression. Françoise Lionnet's 2012 book, *Écritures féminines et dialogues critiques: subjectivité, genre et ironie*, brings together previously published articles and chapters addressing the notion of hybridity or *métissage* in 20th and 21st century Francophone literature, and in particular on Mauritian authors. She develops, for example, the leitmotif of the sari in Ananda Devi's literary oeuvre and its various symbolisms, including that of "an archive of the unspeakable, a vehicle of truths – hatreds, silence, and abuse" (266). Véronique Bragard and Srilata Ravi's *Écritures mauritiennes au féminin* (2011) provides a collection of a variety of authors who address Mauritian women's writing and the trope of 'une identité d'altérité' as a newer development in Mauritian literature ("Penser l'altérité"). The issues brought forth in Mauritian women's literature address the silences surrounded diversity within the notion of Mauritian identity.

Silence as Language

Silence as a language of its own that crosses national borders, as well as racial and religious borders, supports the idea that it is a means by which to connect Algerian and Mauritian literature, other than by the French language. But why focus on the use silence instead of that of French? Because silence also carries with it elements of subversion. The discussion of using the colonizer's language instead of local vernacular to write has been and still is very much a topic of discussion.⁸

⁸ In his essay "The Language of African Literature", Ngugi wa Thiong'o discusses the relationship between language and culture and how the colonial project, by imposing the colonial language and teaching children how to read and write in it, alienated the children from themselves (443). Senghor and Achebe sing the virtues of the universality of the colonial language, which for Thiong'o is the evidence of a final triumph of domination (445). Thiong'o focuses on the work produced at a conference in Makerere and the relationship to nationalist projects (445). He highlights the limited audience that could access such literature (446). Thiong'o credits the peasantry with the maintenance of the African languages (447). Auto-critical of African writers' dependence on European languages and highlights the irony of many of the arguments being

If taken into consideration that to have a larger audience, and perhaps though unfortunately an audience with more power to make change, texts need to be written in Western languages, languages that have a more established print history. That is not to say that oral histories are not established, or not important, but things being as they are, it is still the written word that carries more weight. So one way of combating the claim that there is mimicry or even falsehood in literature written by Africans in European languages is to focus on the use of silence, the moments of silence, and view it as a subversive language in and of itself. Other subversive gestures appear in Cixous and Devi's work, such as neologisms and creative typography, which show the effort to challenge the established systems through manipulation of linguistic norms.

Issues of language and subjectivity have been taken up by several feminist scholars, including Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, who argue that language is a masculine construct, and therefore limited in expressing non-masculine stories.⁹ Writers, and women writers in particular, must deconstruct linguistic rules and norms in order to make language work for them. Hélène Cixous proposes concrete methods by which women can construct identity through writing. Her theory creates a roadmap, detailed and abstract at the same time. Writing and the manipulation of the French language is a means and an end for Cixous. The various cultural influences in Cixous' life manifest themselves in her experimental syntax and sentence structure. In opposition to the grammatically strict structure of French, Cixous uses repetition and sentences without verbs

shared (450). Sites Obi Wali as someone who believes that African literature can only be written in African languages (450). Thiong'o calls for African writers to do for their languages what Shakespeare did for English, and to get back in touch with "the revolutionary traditions of an organized peasantry" (452) in order to combat a "neo-colonial state" (453).

⁹ See in particular Cixous, Hélène. "Le rire de la Méduse." *L'ARC* 61 (1975): 39–54. ; Irigaray, Luce. "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine." *The Irigaray Reader*. Ed. Margaret Whitford. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991. 118–132. ; Kristeva, Julia. *Étrangers à Nous-mêmes*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1988.

to linguistically express her ambiguous position in the French system. She creates neologisms such as *juifemme* and *inséparable* to express her internal plurality, as well as to exert her agency and deploy her belief that “l’écriture est l’infini.” Cixous’ innovative style, both in the syntax of her writing and in the overall delivery of her message(s), provides a creative space that encourages the literary critic to interrogate the absence of words and looks for the potential meanings of silence. One contention I hope to prove is that this practice of using silence to break silence is emblematic of what feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray describe as “écriture féminine”. While these feminists may not specifically address the productive aspects of silence in women’s literature as I aim to do in this dissertation, they provide alternative methods by which women can use, manipulate and interpret language, and it is my contention that the use, manipulation and interpretation of silence within women’s text is one way in which “l’écriture féminine” is deployed.

In the 1996 collection of essays edited by Gudrun M. Grabher and Ulrike Jessner entitled *Semantics of Silence in Linguistics and Literature*, the authors take an interdisciplinary approach to the “multifaceted phenomenon of silence” (xi). Grabher and Jessner note in the introduction the particular significance for women writers, and that they have been “striving for either their own language or a silence that becomes their specific chosen code” (xiv). I find this statement both reassuring and problematic. On the one hand, the observation that silence is an important issue for women writers, and that they seem to use it purposefully supports my claim that silence is productive in women’s literature. On the other hand, the expression “their specific chosen code” seems to once again force a binary onto the topic, as if women writers are trying the limit the possibilities of what silence can mean, to whom it can refer, and who can use it. And this seems antithetical to the messages of many feminist writers; while there is a revalorization of what “feminine” means, and a reevaluation of the certain situations that women find themselves in and

the words they use to describe this situations, the feminist gesture aims to open up possibilities for women, not limit possibilities for men. Rebekka Ehret, in her ethnolinguistic study which took place in Africa and the South Pacific, also understands silence as “metacommunication” (105). She writes that “Communicative silence can therefore be viewed as an event of human interaction replacing, synchronizing, or complementing and supplementing the verbal event” (101). Ehret’s findings support the notion that silence can be communicative, a conclusion that lends credence to my claim that silence is a productive dynamic in the narrative. In Christian Mair’s essay “The Semantics of Silence,” he examines (Western/German) newspapers to find the most common collocations with the word silence, noting “that silence is rarely experienced as quiet and calm” (25). He catalogs seventy-nine negative collocations and only twenty-one positive collocations, showing that the prevailing connotation of silence is a negative one. Philip Herdina then follows up Mair’s linguistic analysis of silence by recognizing Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Tabu* (1913) and Ludwig Wittgenstein as leading the way to understanding silence as more meaningful than simply being an absence of speech (30).

Freud’s and Wittgenstein’s conclusions lead in part to Merleau-Ponty’s indirect analysis of the substance of silence in his text *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945). Merleau-Ponty uses the condition of aphasia to discuss the relationship between thoughts and speech, and concludes that the speech act is closely related to thoughts, but not the only indication that thoughts are occurring.¹⁰ The notion that the spoken word, or parole, accomplishes a thought, intimates that there is meaning in the silence prior to speaking. Giorgio Agamben also notes power of silence in

¹⁰ “...si l’enfant peut se connaître comme membre d’une communauté linguistique avant de se connaître comme pensée d’une Nature, c’est à condition que le sujet puisse s’ignorer comme pensée universelle et se saisir comme parole, et que le mot, loin d’être simple signe des objets et des significations, habite les choses et véhicule les significations. Ainsi, la parole, chez celui qui parle, ne traduit pas une pensée déjà faite, mais l’accomplit” (207).

his series of lectures “Language and Death: The Place of Negativity” (1991). He observes: “That which is thus unspeakable for language, in none other than the very meaning, the *Meinung*, which as such, remains necessarily unsaid in every saying” (13).

As evidenced by the scholarship of Agamben, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein and others, the role of silence in language has been understood as predominantly negative. George Steiner acknowledges this history of Western philosophies and academics, but observes a paradigm shift in his book *Language and Silence* (1982). Steiner postulates that society is moving into a “post-linguistic” era, or into an era of silence (vii). He is concerned in particular with what he calls “humane literacy,” and promotes an active reading style in order to engage the voice of the book (10). While Mr. Steiner seems to criticize the evolution from the verbal/oral tradition to the silent/written tradition, he also creates a genealogy of silence across the globe, highlighting the emphasis on silence as evidence of enlightenment, in both Eastern and Western religious traditions. Steiner observes that language has a temporal structure, while silence can encompass the past, present and future (13). Silence has the ability to open up the possibilities for reader interpretation. Yet still, Steiner continually refers back to silence as absence of words and a suicidal rhetoric, despite attributing a divinity to it by valorizing the value of silence in mysticism. Perhaps what can best be gleaned from Steiner’s work is that silence is multifaceted, capable of both positive and negative, but not nothing.

Ulrike Jessner, in her article “Female Empathy: Linguistic Implications of a “Restricted Code”” analyzes the linguistics of what she terms “motherese” and finds value in the nonverbal communications, or silences, that occur between mother and child (89). This study, while focusing on the social interactions of parents and children, and not on literature, shows how silence can mobilize empathy in children; it then can be reasoned that blank spaces within the text might

mobilize empathy within the reader for the characters in the narrative. In Helga Ramsey-Kurz's essay "Telling Silences," she focuses on British women writers and how they invert the binaries of speech and silence by focusing on female/female relationships. This paradigm of maternal and female/female relationships becomes particularly relevant in the analyses of silence in Assia Djebar's *La femme sans sépulture*, Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, and Ananda Devi's *Les hommes qui me parlent*. All three texts focus on interactions between women and the role that silence plays in their interpersonal development.

Katrin Meise, author of the essay "On Talking about Silence in Conversation and Literature," writes: "Every silence is full of information. The information in silence is not auditory and thereby easily ignored [...] But if we shift modalities [...], we discover that silence is anything but nothing. Silence speaks" (45). Through her examination of conversational interactions and poetry, Meise comes to the conclusion that "A variety of phenomena subsumed under this concept: from silence as a topic of conversation and as a narrative technique to blank spaces and linguistic opacity as a secret mode of expression" (46). Meise also notes the "the typographical feature of blank space takes on meaning above its structuring function in the text and obtains an iconic character because of its mere materiality" and categorizes this space as one "for joint imagination" (59-60). This concept is explored in my textual analysis of several of the texts treated in this dissertation, in particular Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. While it is true that blank spaces are somewhat controlled by book formatting, making it difficult to attribute to their presence to the desire of the author, they are nonetheless able to affect the reader. Having space on the page structures the story, separates moments in the narrative, and allows a spatiotemporal opportunity for the reader to engage more fully in the content of the text, or as Martha King puts it, "silence draws out the reader's imagination" (77). Blank spaces could also be read as providing a place for

the creation of an intimate closeness, or empathy, both between characters and between the reader and the text.

Limited dialogue in a text can be emblematic of the limits of language, a concept examined at great length by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. In his work *Tractatus*, he explains: “Language can only deal meaningfully with a special, restricted segment of reality. The rest, and it is presumably the much larger part, is silence” (21). Many of the texts addressed in this dissertation deal with highly emotional events: assassination, disappearance, displacement, and death. Such charged emotional events lead to charged emotional reactions, which can be expressed in any number of different ways. Wittgenstein’s observation on the limits of languages suggest that silence comprises a wide range of realities and contains much more meaning than can be expressed through language.

In his book *The Power of Silence* (1993), sociolinguist Adam Jaworski employs Wittgenstein’s reflections on silence to create “a theoretical account of different communicative aspects of silence” (xi). In his study, he identifies a “general Western bias in favor of speech rather than silence,” but still finds that silence is comparable to speech in terms of communication (7, xii). In chapter 4, “The Politics of Silence,” Jaworski addresses the relationship between women and silence. While he manages to reference the accomplishments of such feminists as Tillie Olsen, Adrienne Rich and Hélène Cixous, he also seems to oversimplify the task at hand, maintaining the rational/emotional dichotomy that historically has divided men and women. He concludes:

Thus feminist writers create their own style(s) of expression. Apart from exploring the communicative and symbolic values of silence they break their own silence and speak with new voices. They introduce into their writing elements of intuitive knowledge and associative thinking; they rely heavily on the use of neologisms; and they rename old

concepts, alter the meaning of words (often based on their etymology), and alter syntax.
(121-2)

The verbal expressions to “rely on” and “alter” express somewhat negative connotations; it is as if women are still dependent and making emotionally grounded changes to linguistic expression. The implication that women have “new voices” places their voices once again in a system where male voices are normative, and the only way that women can write is to misuse the system at hand. And yet, though formulated in a somewhat dismissive tone, there is truth to Jaworski’s remarks on women’s writing and silence. As will be shown in my dissertation, Appannah tracks the development of a friendship via intuitive knowledge, Patel deploys associative thinking to connect childhood traumas across borders, Cixous creates neologisms that express in her inner turmoil, Sebbar rethinks the act of memorialization by using spray-paint, Djebbar transforms a mosaic into a piece of literature, and Devi alters spelling and syntax to show her conflict over her vocation. Rather than “rely on” or “alter” language, I propose that women enhance and ameliorate it.

Nature and Silence

The primacy of the environment in the most of the texts examined in this dissertation suggests the need for a methodological understanding of ecocriticism. Greg Garrard’s book *Ecocriticism* provides basic terminologies and an overview of the approach as it gained popularity in the 1990s. The introduction to W.J.T. Mitchell’s *Landscape and Power* discusses geography as active in the development of the subject and also theorizes the power dynamics that lie within certain spaces. Since Mitchell references Michel de Certeau’s *L’invention du quotidien*, it is crucial to understand this work as part of ecocriticism; it will also be productive in analyzing the trope of the journey and women’s navigation through male-dominated society which will be

discussed later in the dissertation. Glissant comments on the role of landscape in a Caribbean aesthetic, and although this region is out of my purview for this dissertation, his theorizations on landscape and language will be useful in looking at stylistics. Lawrence Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism* will provide a more recent survey of both the field of ecocriticism until 2005 and the developments of sub-disciplines such as ecofeminism. Karen J. Warren has contributed much to the development of the ecofeminist field and provides an overview of the intersections between feminism and the environment in her introduction to *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (1996). One aspect of her research questions the role of "unequal distributions of power and privilege" and how they maintain "systems of domination over both women and nature" (xvii).

The role of the environment can be seen through the nonverbal elements of narrative, such as descriptions of natural surroundings; their presence and recurrence in the narrative progression supports my conception of silence as a critical part of storytelling. In the concretization or physicality of silence, aspects of geography become characters and/or plot devices by which readers understand, or can come to understand, the emotions and experiences that cannot be communicated via word alone. That is to say that the emotions of the reader intensify with the threat of danger as characters stand at the edge of a waterfall, or the fear of confinement as characters are crammed in the belly of a ship at sea. Elements of nature, such as trees, become metaphors for life events such as birth, death, exile and reunion. They can *figuratively* speak to the reader; the author makes them do so by juxtaposing them with certain events and memories in the protagonists' lives.

One of the contemporary disciplines in which we can see the echoes of such interrogation can be found at the intersection of feminism and ecocriticism. In her 2000 book *Ecofeminist*

Philosophy, Karen J. Warren discusses the relationship between nature and women that has been promulgated through language, and explores how this relationship has been used to maintain inequalities. She writes:

Many philosophers (e.g. Ludwig Wittgenstein) have argued that the language one uses mirrors and reflects one's concept of oneself and one's world. As such, language plays a crucial role in concept formation. Ecofeminists argue that it also plays a crucial role in keeping intact mutually reinforcing sexist, racist, and naturist views of women, people of color, and nonhuman nature. (27)

Warren brings up many points underscored by Val Plumwood in her essay "Nature, Self, Gender." Plumwood critiques environmental philosophy for failing to engage properly with rationalist tradition, which she finds inimical to women and nature (155). Plumwood states:

It is in the name of such reason that these other things—the feminine, the emotional, the merely bodily or the merely animal, and the nature world itself—have most often been denied their virtue and accorded an inferior and merely instrumental position. (157)

She cites philosophers such as Emmanuel Kant and John Stuart Mills as maintaining the reason/emotion dichotomy, and claims that this dualism leads to a discontinuity in which the "genuine or ideal human self" is in opposition to the "natural and/or feminine self" (163). Being that Warren and Plumwood, among others, have mapped out the persistent association between women and nature and its opposition the relationship between men and reason and modernity, the enduring relationship between silence and women's subservient nature, can be understood as a prevailing norm that influences, or at least could influence, a Western reader's comprehension and interpretation of silences in a literary text.

Carol H. Cantrell addresses the power of listening in her essay “Woman and Language” found in the anthology *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (1996).¹¹ Through her analysis of Susan Griffin’s book *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978), Cantrell argues:

Griffin’s ecofeminist conception of language is enabling: its grounding in the material world undercuts the binary oppositions usually associated with language; its incorporation of silence and emphasis on the listener fosters movement from silence to speech; and its emphasis on language as process supports and elucidates the feminist practice of recovering lost and obscure “voices.” (198)

Rather than viewing listening as a passive act, Griffin, and thus Cantrell, understand the generative potential of silence. This foreshadows the work of many 20th-century feminists who have theorized that women cannot be heard using the language of the patriarchal system, and that third world voices can never be understood in first world contexts.¹²

This nonverbal relationship between surroundings and characters in a written work is developed theoretically in the work of Michel de Certeau. He is originally inspired by the occupation of the city of Paris by protesters in May of 1968 to look at the intersection of streets and buildings in a new light. In the seventh chapter of his book *L’Invention du quotidien* published for the first time in 1980, de Certeau deconstructs the act of walking in the city. For him, this displacement contains a linguistic aspect and thus exists in a manner similar to that of writing. In order to flesh out this “street writing,” de Certeau categorizes the figures in his stories in terms of “rhétoriques cheminatoires” (151). De Certeau links stylistics with the layout of the city, and

¹¹ Carol H. Cantrell uses ecocriticism as a “tool for disentangling the “human” from what is in fact “male human”” in order to question the gendered relationship between language and nature (197). She views violence of language coming from its use and not its nature, and asks the reader to focus on the “interdependence and renewal” of language and nature (198, 207).

¹² See Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Gayatri Spivak.

how the map of the city describes or writes one's existence. Whether in an urban or non-urban setting, de Certeau's concept provides a platform from which to understand Rosi Braidotti's theorization of the nomadic subject, which will allow for the analysis of female subjectivity and agency.

The fact that de Certeau mentions "a man's" fundamental way of being, though perhaps meant in general to refer to mankind, is nonetheless an example of the linguistic exclusion of women recognized by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. This in some ways implies that there is no place in society for women, a segregation that serves a motivating function in Cixous' overall oeuvre: "le monde te fait savoir qu'il n'y a pas de place entre ses états pour ton espèce" (*Entre l'écriture* 16). This particular "missing place/manque de lieu" for women limits the extent to which de Certeau's strategies and tactics can be used to analyze the narrative journeys of women, which is where Braidotti becomes useful.

Because de Certeau develops the relationship between writing and the environment focuses on urban spaces, the theories of Italian feminist Rosi Braidotti will also underpin the analysis of movement and journey in this chapter. In order to examine the nomadic subject in these works, it is important to delineate some of the basic tenets of Braidotti's theory. Informed by both post-structuralism and postmodernism, the construct of the nomadic subject insists on movement as a part of identity formation, whether that movement is physical, psychological, mental, spiritual or philosophical (3). In *Nomadic Theory* (2011), Braidotti puts into practice the theoretical concept of the nomadic subject which she began developing twenty years prior.¹³ She explains:

¹³ The theorist's notion of the nomadic subject is informed by the theories of poststructuralists Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, postmodernists Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Baudrillard, as well as feminists Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler (Restaino and Cavarero 241). Braidotti implements, for example, Deleuze's concept of the rhizome and

Thinking is about tracing lines of flight and zigzagging patterns that undo dominant representations. Dynamic and outward bound, nomadic thought undoes the static authority of the past and redefines memory as the faculty that decodes residual traces of half-effaced presences; it retrieves archives of leftover sensation and accesses afterthoughts, flashbacks, and mnemonic traces. (2)

Braidotti promotes an ontology of activity geared towards moving away from prevailing modes of thought and seeking out the vestiges of marginalized histories and memories in order to obtain agency. This conception presupposes that there has always been a multiplicity of representations or existences, and that subjectivity is discovered through travel. It acknowledges that there is a power structure at play in society, but not one that can destroy the intersecting identities of the nomadic subject. Her approach is affirming and inclusive; even when undoing “the static authority” of the past, there is an impetus to continue to remember its contributions in future theorization. Braidotti offers an approach to identity analysis which considers nationality, gender, ethnicity and religion and insists that they develop through movement and the confrontation with diverse peoples. Her focus on movement provides a model for my own approach to the development of identity through journey in chapter three.

Entendre le silence : Understanding Silence in Literature

Silences allow for slippage between languages, thus allowing for a more transnational reception and understanding. If the colonial language forever relates back to colonial domination and the subsequent nationalist project, then the breaks in text/dialogue/narration serve to create an

Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental' as part of her conceptualization of feminine subjectivity (170).

intertextual/extratextual connection between books written in French. It is another way to look at Francophone literature, not as reproduction of 19th- and 20th-century French colonial domination, oppression and manipulation, but as a production of its own accord, that expresses African experiences in a language in which they did happen. Silences, when looked at closely, serve to maintain the connection to people of Algeria and Mauritius, and in particular the women, at the same time as it tells their stories. All the authors studied in the following chapters show that their use of silences creates space for the inclusion of other voices. They revere the literature they were educated on, but remain critical of it and reshape language and writing in order to make it represent them, and potentially others.

The conceptualization of silence and the manner in which it operates in Algerian and Mauritian women's francophone literature borrows significantly from the work done by Édouard Glissant on Antillean literature. The Martiniquan writer published *Discours Antillais* in 1981, a work which sought to delineate the specificities of Antillean literature. He explained how the origins of the population, those of former slaves, colonizers and tradesmen, the dialects they spoke, and the island environment intertwine to create a discourse that is unique to the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. In his analysis of Antillean identity, Glissant develops a concept he calls "l'opacité." He warns against the cultural transparency valorized by Western systems, and offers another way of understanding or viewing difference: "Car la tentative d'approcher une réalité tant de fois occultée ne s'ordonne pas tout de suite autour d'une série de clartés. Nous réclamons le droit à l'opacité" (11). Glissant's supposition follows the logic that it is impossible for Martiniquais of European origins to completely understand the influences of those of African ancestry, and therefore it is necessary to keep some obscurity in order to have a more honest and authentic depiction of Antillean identity. In other words, to achieve the true essence of a human

being, it is necessary to keep some aspects obscure in order to demonstrate that they are inexplicable. Because silence has neither syntax nor grammar, it can serve as a way to express the impossible, or a method of representing what is found *between* languages. Silence both renders and maintains the diffusion of these histories.

Discussing the transnational connections situates them within the paradigm of the feminist praxis of forming communities through literature. Patricinio Schweickart, in her article “Reading Ourselves,” notes:

It is equally true that feminist critics need to question their allegiance to text- and author-centered paradigms of criticism. Feminist criticism, we should remember, is a mode of *praxis*. The point is not merely to interpret literature in various ways; the point is to *change the world*. We cannot afford to ignore the activity of reading, for it is here that literature is realized as *praxis*. Literature acts on the world by acting on its readers. (203)

This element of praxis is what is being put into play by using silences within the text. Silences make the reader wonder why, what happened, what’s going to happen; they are encouraged, and maybe even unwittingly forced, to participate in the narrative.

Taking into consideration some of Cixous’s theoretical writings, such as “Le rire de la Méduse” (1975) and “La venue à l’écriture (1976), the incorporation of silence as part of her aesthetic approach might seem antithetical to her “call to words” or “call to writing”. In her seminal essay about the mythical monster’s laugh, Cixous encourages writers, women in particular, to speak up, scream, laugh, to reword language to fit their needs so as to appropriately represent their identities and experiences (48). Thus, one could assume that producing silences within a text would contradict her approach. However, Cixous’s constant deployment of paradoxes within her work allows for the silences that appear therein to be read or understood as

a way of challenging the status quo of patriarchal language and writing practices, and therefore supports the use of silence as another way with which to produce “l’écriture féminine.”

Silence’s absence and presence echoes the rationale behind negative theology. Both religious practitioners and philosophers have taken this approach of understanding the divine by what it is *not*; one could then trace the notion of a generative, positive silence to the concept of negative theology. Jacques Derrida, a founder of the deconstructionalist theoretical movement, explains the technique through his analysis of a quote from St. Augustine:

In the movement of the same paragraph, a quotation of St. Augustine recalls the simultaneously negative and hyperaffirmative meaning of *without (sans)*: “St. Augustine says: God is wise without wisdom, good without goodness, powerful without power.” *Without* does not merely dissociate the singular attribution from the essential generality: wisdom as *being-wise* in general, goodness as *being-good* in general, power as *being-powerful* in general” (*Derrida and Negative Theology* 78).

Derrida shows that the repetition of the preposition “without” serves to indicate an essence of such magnitude that language is inadequate. By underscoring the “hyperaffirmative meaning” of silence in francophone women’s literature, I aim to show how women use silence in the formation and affirmation of female subjectivity.

Borrowing in part from Derrida’s approach, I conceptualize silence as a trace or aura of the untranslatable or unspeakable. Silence is often just as productive as the speech or writing act; it not only sets apart words and thoughts, but also provides a space for meaning-making to occur. It is my hope to highlight the ways in which these women’s voices do and have made themselves heard through the deployment of silence in its various manifestations, i.e. ellipses, blank pages, descriptions of silence, lack of dialogue, and the preponderance of the word *silence* in the texts.

Such an African tradition of ‘effacement of rigid boundaries’ can be traced back to Augustine’s *Confessions* (Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices* 36). The deployment of silences facilitates reader engagement with literatures and languages, histories and memories, autobiographies and identities. All the authors studied in this dissertation contextualize their works historically and socially in order to broaden the understanding of what these settings mean to individuals, while at the same time maintaining the specificity of their respective personal experiences. Rather than limiting someone’s identity to their gender, nationality, skin color, religion, age, position in family or society, the effect is to highlight the multiplicity of identities that one person can have. This then leads to a more nuanced understanding of African identities (Lionnet, AV 4-21).

Silence, in its many forms, can then perform operations on the function of language that subvert the traditional form of language and thus allow, and perhaps even force, alternative and varying readings of one text. The sparing use of dialogue, the use of short paragraphs, and the emphatic deployment of the word *silence* allow the writer to (re)create experiences in a more authentic manner, thus providing the reader with the opportunity to digest the material and experience the story. It is not simply adjectives and adverbs and well-chosen verbs that can create an image for the reader, but also the moments in between when these signs connect (or in some cases do not), creating a more vivid and visceral representation of events in the narrative. This generative quality is what I refer to as *productive silence*.

While my dissertation will venture to study silence in 20th and 21st century francophone texts by women, the writing of silence into fictional literature has already happened. Cristanne Miller, in her analysis of Afro-Caribbean author M. Nourbese Philip’s *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991), credits Philip with a nuanced feminist approach to silence.

Instead of identifying constructs like identity, validated selfhood, and wholeness with voice, and as a corollary oppression and lack with silence, Philip contends that one may both hear and express strategic and powerful thoughts, feelings and experiences through a variety of verbalized *and* silent, non-verbalized forms. (139)

Miller sees Philip's work as one that promotes the power of silence through her deconstruction of the novelistic form by using alternating poetry and prose, as well as the substantiation of silence within the text via personification and the quest-narrative genre. The search for silence is transposed/juxtaposed against the well-known colonial African narrative of Sir Henry Morton Stanley's quest to find explorer David Livingstone. Setting the novel in Africa at an intersection of times and cultures is gesture that speaks to the inquiry of this dissertation; its very existence validates the need for continued study of silence in literature, and in particular African women's literature. Miller notes that Nourbese Philip's work draws primarily from Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean experiences and texts, and Miller herself cites Western theorists such as Luce Irigaray in order to interrogate the "odyssey of silence." The placement of the story in Africa, though, suggests that other theoretical lenses could and should be used to examine silence and its relationship to African women.

Similar the medieval story of *Silence*, by Hildris of Cornwall, the personification of silence intimates its importance. Whereas *Silence* was most likely originally communicated as part of the oral tradition of epic poems, and therefore follows a chronological narrative arc, with repetition for the sake of reminding both storyteller and audience the plot points, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* combines poems, journal entries, and various anagrams for silence, which in turn theorizes silence through the medium of the written word in both concrete and abstract ways.

While Miller appreciates Nourbese Philip's contributions to the "feminist theorizing of language and silence" in this novel, she also worries that the choice to valorize silence runs the risk of maintaining oppressive silences, as well as her reification of the male:female::word:silence dichotomy (145).

Lecteurs entendent les silences: Reader Response

The last element to this dissertation on silence involves an analysis of reader response and silence's role in the reading process. The notion of the productive role of silence, which appears consistently throughout the research, requires a more intricate explanation in order to avoid undermining the overarching goal of sharing women's stories. During the act of reading, the reader doesn't physically hear any sound nor the rhythm of the words, yet it can be said that the reader "entend" the words. In French, the work *entendre* the verb meaning "to hear," is also the verb meaning "to understand," perhaps revealing the particular interest in studying silence in francophone literature. The polysemic nature of the verb "entendre" is thus not antithetical to the inaudible nature of *silence* and offers up linguistic proof for the productivity of silence in that it helps the reader better understand the message of the text. Silence manifests itself in the act of reading; with the exception of reading aloud, the reading of any of the words on the page, including *silence*, begins the literary conversation. In his discussion on the phenomenology of reading, Wolfgang Iser purports that an internal personality split occurs within the reader of a text, by which the reader becomes "'occupied' by the thoughts of the author" while at the same time remaining influenced by her/his personal experiences (203). This happens when the reader wishes to decipher the text and understand what someone else is thinking, which gives the reader the opportunity to "formulate the unformulated" (204). Though his theorization centers on the intentions of the author, and I

will analyze the various manifestations of silence to see how they allow and promote this kind of literary empathy. The silences serve as a means to connect author and reader, and writer and self, despite the diverse and sometimes paradoxical deployment of silences with their works. The complex operation of silences may initially hinder reader comprehension, or perhaps escape recognition, but interrogation of their meaning creates another layer of meaning within the text.

Wolfgang Iser's scholarship values the importance of implicating the reader in the text. He believes that "the text is not a staged play that the reader observes, but it's an event that's happening for and because of the reader" (336). Iser understands the text as operating as a game, which then opens up the number of potential outcomes of reader interpretation. He enumerates four different strategies of play that can take place within the narrative, and it seems to me that silence, in medieval text as well as others, acts as a tool to making these different kinds of literary games play out. According to Iser, "textual play is an operation driven by negativity, its enabling structure. Negativity 'lures absence into presence'" (336). In the introduction to the edited collection of essays *Languages of the Unsayable*, Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser theorize negativity as a sort of threshold, a passage which allows the most productive discussions of negativity (xv). This notion of negativity begetting positivity underpins my conception of productive silence in women's literature. I understand silence as being the space or the vacuum that allows the reader to fill in the blanks, to add meaning and gravitas to the events of the story.

There are some critics, however, who maintain a new critical attitude which limits at text to one interpretation. Donald Lowe, in the *History of Bourgeois Perception*, looks at various times in history through the lens of the predominate medium, the hierarchy of the senses and epistemic presuppositions (1-2). For Lowe, the aural of the Middle Ages moves towards visual emphasis in the Renaissance and Enlightenment. As such, silence in literature would seem to play less and

less of role, and yet for Lowe, the novel is the space where communication between writer and reader unfolds: “It is a silent, detached, one-way address by the writer using linguistic signs, which the reader receives through the eyes” (75). Lowe’s “one-way address” is contested by other reader-response theorists such as Wolfgang Iser who valorize the interpretation created by each individual reader who enters into the author-text-reader relationship.

Patricinio P. Schweickart cites this need to connect with the reader as the motivating force behind feminist readings of women authored-texts. In her chapter “Reading ourselves: Toward a feminist theory of reading,” Schweickart gives an overview of reader-response theory, highlighting the importance of genre to female readers and the resistance they experience when reading androcentric literature. She devises a dialectic of reading that focuses on duality of subjects and contexts (440). The doubling of characters is a common motif in the literature I will study in this dissertation, and Schweickart’s insights will be particularly useful for looking at the fourth chapter on autobiography and the metadiscursive approach to writing that Ananda Devi and H el ene Cixous employ.

In her article that appeared in an issue of *The International Journal of Francophone Studies* dedicated to scholarship on Mauritius, Guillemette Jeudi de Grissac grounds her study of silence in the theorizations of Umberto Eco, who conceptualizes a text as a “un tissu de non dits, d’espaces blancs, d’interstices   remplir dans lesquels le destinataire introduit du sens” (1985: 84-106). De Grissac writes: “L’int r t pour les ‘silences du texte’ conduit   se r f rer   la notion de ‘cooperation du lecteur’ th oris e par Umberto Eco” (490). Lisa Block de Behar’s *A Rhetoric of Silence and Other Selected Writings* (1995) brings up some interesting questions and highlights the ambiguity involved in the study of silence when it comes to reader response. She contends that “silence is the necessary space for the encounter and reception” of literature, and underscores “the

limitless polysemic abundance” of silence in the narrative (161-162). Block de Behar’s understanding of silence informs my use of the concept of a threshold created by silence within the autobiographical narrative developed in the second chapter. In particular, for anecdotes within both autobiographies that have remained untold until the writing and publication of these two works.

While filling the narrative gaps remains a central objective to the writers and theoreticians included in my history of silence, it is also necessary to recognize the issue of women’s literacy, or illiteracy, and the impact that has had on the ability of women of various backgrounds to have a voice. Jane Hoogestraat notes this concern on the part of Adrienne Rich, though places it curiously in a footnote. She writes:

Breaking the silences emerges as a complex issue in Rich also because she remains aware of the fact that neither French feminisms nor Anglo-American feminisms have adequately addressed the problem of illiteracy among women, a problem that leaves a great many women in the silent cold. (36)

This recognition on the part of both Hoogestraat and Rich reminds us of the predominantly Western lens with which and in which they are operating. It is for this very reason that the inclusion of African and Asian intellectuals helps broaden the scope of what silences can mean in writings, and in particular writings from and about countries like Algeria and Mauritius. The writers analyzed in this dissertation, for their part, have published texts in French, and thus have most likely not personally experienced the plight of illiteracy. However, the multilingual populations that inhabit their narratives represent a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds,

and in many cases, their writings voice the silences of those who could not write it down themselves.¹⁴

Silence encore

In my quest to *entendre le silence* across the domains of women's studies, postcolonial literature and communication studies, I eventually came across a publication that overlapped my research to a great extent. Sheena Malhotra's edited 2013 compilation, *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound*, sought answers to many of the same questions I was asking.¹⁵ In the first chapter, "Still the Silence: Feminist Reflections at the Edges of Sound", in fact, Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Sheena Malhotra catalogue much of the same research on silence that appears in my own first chapter. Rowe and Malhotra describe their work as an attempt "to excavate a genealogy of silence as it has emerged as an object of intellectual inquiry" (3). They include discussions about Gloria Anzaldúa, King-Kok Cheung, Audre Lorde, Tillie Olsen, Adrienne Rich, Gayatri Spivak, and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, intellectuals whose theorizations on women's voice and the meanings of silence also inform the analysis of silence in this dissertation. As part of their project which "examines silence as a possibility," Rowe and Malhotra incorporate a diverse array of researchers, both in terms of discipline and background. For example, Kris Acheson's chapter, "Fences, Weapons, Gifts: Silences in the Context of Addiction," addresses the metaphorical use

¹⁴ I am thinking in particular of the character Charlésia in Patel's *Le silence des Chagos*.

¹⁵ "*Silence, Feminism, Power* builds on the ironic relationship between the voice, silence, and power to reveal the complexities that lie within these often-observed interconnections. Authors engage questions like: What forms of resistance and healing does silence make possible? What nuances, strategic forms of engagement and ways of navigation or resisting power are made possible through silence? What alliances might be enabled as we learn to read silences? Under what conditions is it productive to move between voice and silence? How might the binaristic construction of voice and silence be reconfigured and with what political effects? What is silence?" (2)

of silences to aid in the communication of families dealing with addiction (189). The editors cite Barbara J. Boseker's and Sandra L. Gordon's pedagogical research and how United States educators could observe Native American teaching strategies, including the use of silence, to students' benefit (10).¹⁶ Rowe and Malhotra explain that they "theorize silence as a space of fluidity, non-linearity, and as a sacred, internal space that provides a refuge—especially for nondominant peoples. Silence is a process that allows one to go within before one has to speak or act" (2). These conceptualization of silence as 'non-linear' and as 'procedural' coincide with the notions of the threshold of selves and the journey through silence presented in chapters two, three and four respectively. This intellectual coincidence serves as a reminder of the broad transnational reach of silences, both negative and positive.

The analyses of the generative qualities of silence in Francophone women's writing that appear in my dissertation do not seek to negate the rupture of silence in sociocultural contexts promulgated by feminists like Tillie Olsen. The particular focus on the productive nature of silence in its multivalent forms and manifestations will thus add to the discussion of women's creative contributions to Francophone literature. It is with all this in mind that I examine silence in terms of untold or widely ignored stories, the gendered understanding of silence, and silence in a globalized context. In the end, I aspire to be able to say, as the narrator of Heldris's epic poem said, that "I have praised Silence more" (line 6698).

¹⁶ Boseker, Barbara J., and Sandra L. Gordon. "What Native Americans have taught us as teacher educators." *Journal of American Indian Education*, vol. 22, no.3, 1983, pp 20-24.

CHAPTER TWO

Au seuil de moi:

Writing the Self through Silence in Cixous and Devi

The 20th century saw considerable production in nationalist, anticolonial, and feminist literature by Francophone writers, and formerly colonized subjects in particular.¹⁷ The gains in freedom from colonial domination have then coincided with the development in 20th- and 21st-century Francophone literature that focuses on the individual. In some ways, it is as if political liberation has allowed for literary explorations that emphasize psychological introspections as well as reflections on personal memory. This opportunity has been seized by women writers to voice their unheard stories. The deployment of silence and its various manifestations within writings about previously disregarded or untold narratives, then, inherently positions in a precarious and paradoxical position: how can women break the silences surrounding their lives when they continue to infuse their writing with descriptions of silence? How can we understand the prevalent use of the word silence as anything other than examples of oppression and suppression of the female subject? Is it possible that the inclusion of silences, in the form of vocabulary, blank spaces,

¹⁷ For a limited list of criticism referenced with regard to 20th-century francophone and postcolonial literature, please see: Ashcroft, Bill. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed. New Accents. London ; New York: Routledge, 2002; Brozgal, Lia Nicole. *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory*, 2013; Lionnet, Françoise. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Edited by Shari Benstock and Celeste Schenck. Reading Women Writing. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989; ---. *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. Reading Women Writing. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995; Makward, Christiane, and Odile Cazenave. "The Others' Others: 'Francophone' Women and Writing." *Yale French Studies*, no. 75 (1988): 190–207. doi:10.2307/2930314 ; Thomas, Dominic Richard David. *Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2002; Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

punctuation, and content, can accurately portray the agency of women instead of representing absence in their autobiographical narratives?

In this chapter, I will interrogate the intricate and complex role of silence and the stakes of its very rupture in the autobiographic texts of two prolific and influential Francophone women, Hélène Cixous and Ananda Devi. Both *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* (2000) by Hélène Cixous and *Les Hommes qui me parlent* (2011) by Ananda Devi are examples of multifaceted autobiographical texts that imbricate the act of writing with the development of agency and identity, all the while examining issues of gender inequality and racial politics.¹⁸ As with the other comparisons to follow in this dissertation, it is not only the French colonial influences on these authors that are diverse, but also their respective cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. What they share, however, is the creative use and deployment of silence and the French language in the telling of their stories.

I put these two Francophone women writers into conversation because of their respective prolific oeuvres, their common interest in making women's voices heard, and the various genres and approaches that they employ to allow women to speak out. Both texts in question for this chapter serve as fruitful examples of what Françoise Lionnet would describe as "an attempt to excavate those elements of the female self which have been buried under the cultural and patriarchal myths of selfhood" (*Autobiographical Voices*, 91). Hélène Cixous, for example, has been engaged in such an excavation via both her feminist theoretical and fictional writings, and has in turn been the subject of feminist literary studies¹⁹. Scholars such as Mireille Calle-Gruber,

¹⁸ These texts will be referred to throughout most of the rest of the chapter as *Les rêveries* and *Les hommes*.

¹⁹ For more scholarship on Hélène Cixous's treatment of women's issues, please see: Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Hélène Cixous. *Hélène Cixous, Photos de Racines*. Paris: Des Femmes, 1994; Donadey, Anne. *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing between Worlds*. Portsmouth, NH:

Jane Hiddleston and Mireille Rosello have produced a substantial amount of research that analyzes how Cixous weaves intricate messages about women and writing into her manuscripts, and the multiple ways in which they can be interpreted. Ananda Devi has also ‘unearthed’ several women’s issues through her fictional writings, and her novels are generating increased scholarly interest.²⁰ Literary critic Rohini Bannerjee credits Devi’s oeuvre with being representative of the complex cultural influences present in Mauritian society, and thus a contribution to “une francophonie authentique” (506).

In addition to their engagement with gender, ethnicity and identity, both Cixous and Devi demonstrate their awareness of the use of silence in their writing. My aim is to explore how silence functions paradoxically “as a means of auto-emancipation from the yoke of domination and as a

Heinemann, 2001 ; Lionnet, Françoise. *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995; ---. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989; Rice, Alison. *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria*. Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia P, 2012; ---. *Time Signatures: Contextualizing Contemporary Francophone Autobiographical Writing from the Maghreb*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006 ; Rosello, Mireille. “Ecriture Inséparable: Hélène Cixous.” *Travaux de Littérature* vol. 23, 2010: pp. 347–356 ; Shiach, Morag. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*. New York: Routledge, 1991; Thomas, Lyn, and Emma Webb. “Writing from Experience: The Place of the Personal in French Feminist Writing.” *Feminist Review* vol. 61, 1999, pp. 27–48.

²⁰ For scholarship on Ananda Devi’s treatment of women’s issues, please see: Bragard, Véronique. “Cris de Femmes Maudites, Brûlures Du Silence: La Symbolique Des éléments Fondamentaux dans L’œuvre d’Ananda Devi.” *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* vol. 142, (2000): 66–73. Cazenave, Odile. “Les Hommes Qui Me Parlent d’Ananda Devi: Un Nouvel Espace Pour Se Dire?” *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones* 28.2 (2013): 39–52 ; Corio, Alessandro. “Entretien avec Ananda Devi.” *Francofonia Francofonia: Studi e Ricerche Sulle Letterature di Lingua Francese* 25.48 (2005): pp. 145–67. Lionnet, Françoise. “‘Cinq Mètres D’ordre et de Sagesse,... Cinq Mètres de Jungle Soyeuse’: Ananda Devi’s Unfurling Art of Fiction.” *Ecritures Féminines et Dialogues Critiques: Subjectivité, Genre et Ironie*. L’Atelier d’écriture, 2012. pp. 240–284; ---. *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995 ; Ramharai, Vicram. “Ananda Devi; Repenser L’identité de La Femme Mauricienne.” *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* 146 (2001): 110–112 ; Thorabully, Khal. “L’Ile Intérieure: Entretien Avec Ananda Devi.” *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* 142.Oct-Dec (2000): 58–65 ; Waters, Julia. “‘Ton Continent Est Noir’: Rethinking Feminist Metaphors in Ananda Devi’s Pagli.” *Dalhousie French Studies* 68 (2004): 45–55.

way of asserting a subjectivity that had long been, often literally, silenced” (Brozgal 60-1).²¹ Women’s stories still need to be told, and these texts provide self-aware and complicated commentaries on the relationships between women and silence within the Francophone literary canon, and how writing as a means to self-discovery necessitates such silence.

It is thus my contention that silences, what second-wave American feminist scholar Tillie Olsen would refer to as “natural silences” or the moments when nature is preparing for growth, play a productive role in autobiographical texts written by Francophone women.²² As will be shown in the close readings later in this chapter, the fact that both Cixous and Devi are cognizant of the role silences play in their respective oeuvres underscores the importance of analyzing the nascent qualities of silences within their writings. In order to examine the role of silence within these narratives, I have catalogued the appearance of the word silence within both texts, the number of blank pages, and the passages of self-reflexive, self-conscious writing which interrupt the overall narrative. I then analyze how these manifestations of silence contribute to the overall motif of silence within the texts. Which aspects of silence are most prevalent for Cixous? for Devi? How does silence enter into the autobiographical project for these authors? Do Cixous and Devi complicate or undermine the autobiographical genre through their deployment of silence? In what ways? Through the analysis of silences, I reveal how both authors use silences to broach the

²¹ Lia Brozgal book *Against Autobiography* analyzes texts within Albert Memmi’s oeuvre and queries the tendency within francophone postcolonial literature to interpret such texts through an autobiographical lens. This citation comes from a passage that speaks about “the act of writing” as a way to break the silence surrounding subjectivity. In this chapter, I am focusing on a specific aspect of this act for Cixous and Devi, that of the use of silences within the text, in order to let their voices speak out.

²² “These are not *natural* silences—what Keats called *agonie ennuyeuse* (the tedious agony)—that necessary time for renewal, lying fallow, gestation, in the natural style of creation. The silences I speak of here are unnatural: the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot.”(6) Olsen, Tillie. *Silences*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1979.

broad topics of gender and identity with unique specificities. Silence is present explicitly and implicitly in the texts, acting as an integral thread throughout each narrative. Moreover, I argue that one critical aspect of silence is how it plays an active role in engaging the reader. As silence remains ever-present in both Cixous's and Devi's projects, I also seek to explore the idea that the multivalent silences in the written text construct a threshold in which author and reader recognize, manifest and develop their respective identities.²³

Le Genre: Textual and Personal Identities

French and Francophone autobiographical literature remained largely silent with regards to secular women's lives until the second half of the 20th century. Decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the feminist movements of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries have allowed women to break these silences and share their stories. Magda M. Al-Nowaihi, in her article "Resisting Silence in Arab Women's Autobiographies," views autobiographical writing as an example of the empowerment of the author-narrator to break a silence, but that "the writing of these autobiographical novels became possible only when these women understood their silences not as the inadequacy or weakness that they had previously considered them to be, but as a further expression of their ambivalence about power and its structures, including the literary" (478).

Like the memories evoked in both texts, the discussions of gender and genre do not progress in a chronological manner, but rather follow a cyclical or woven pattern which avoids a teleological commentary on women's identity formation. Moreover, the combination of creation and destruction that both authors express begs us to examine Francophone women's autobiographical writing, and how it reconfigures previously established notions of the

²³ While I have chosen to use the same term, threshold, as Gérard Genette in his 1987 book *Seuils*, I do not employ the concept in the same manner.

autobiographical within literary criticism. Writing establishes identity for Cixous and Devi, and exemplifies the “transformative and visionary dimension” of “postcolonial autobiography” by displaying “the conviction that writing matters and that narrative has the power to transform the reader” (Lionnet, *PR* 23). What is perhaps most noteworthy about the ways in which Cixous and Devi craft their autobiographical works is that they avoid assuming authority over the reader, (or the text for that matter,) and in fact recognize the essential role that the reader plays in the meaning making of their works.

This practice of interplay between structure and content in Devi and Cixous’s work aligns with what Lia Nicole Brozgal suggests in her book *Against Autobiography*. Her analysis of Albert Memmi’s oeuvre promotes the removal of the autobiographical lens for interpretation in order to liberate the potential meaning making of the text.²⁴ Turning to Umberto Eco’s concept of “textual intentions,” she promotes the reading of Memmi’s work as literature in and of itself, and encourages readers to avoid the trap of understanding all his writing as exercises in autobiography. This tendency, to equate the work of francophone writers as initially autobiographic, is a common

²⁴ “Notwithstanding its admittedly pugnacious title, *Against Autobiography* does not seek to demonize the genre of autobiography. To the contrary, under pressure in this study is not autobiography as a form of writing but rather its deployment as an interpretive lens or reading strategy. Such practices, which continually return us to questions of the author’s intention, illuminate neither the works they interpret nor the genre of autobiography itself in its complex, protean nature. Further, they do not account for a whole raft of textual possibilities such as generic ambiguity, hybridity, and subterfuge. In addition to its failure to conceive of certain texts as something other than autobiography, criticism of works by Maghrebi writers has often been unwilling or unable to account for autobiography’s potential to function as a discursive strategy capable of multiple forms of subversion” (Brozgal xiii).

“Once the concept of autobiography as interpretative filter is removed, however, and autobiography itself is reconceived as a textual strategy, Memmi’s corpus of essays, novels, prefaces, personal *récits*, and interviews can be understood not in terms of their *author’s* intentions but rather as a repository of *textual* intentions that contain within them embedded theoretical discourses” (Brozgal xiv).

trend recognized by literary critics.²⁵ By including self-reflexive commentary on the writing process and its integral role in their identities, both Cixous and Devi foreground the nature of the text as inextricably linked to the author. At the same time, however, this very same self-reflexive commentary demonstrates an awareness of a separate writing-self, extricate from the author's non-writer identity. The understating reiterates itself in the play with language, typography, and material silence on the pages of the texts. The complexity that results therefrom render it on the one hand difficult to distinguish between "author intentions" and "textual intentions" when the first-person narrator repeatedly reflects on the writing of the text. On the other hand, however, the tension between the intentions creates space for reader to enter into the meaning of the text; in other words, the author and the text collaborate to encourage the involvement of *reader intentions* as well. These intersections, or thresholds as I would like to call them, mark the spaces in the text where the reader generates meaning for and from the text. My use of this term borrows on Gérard Genette's theorizations on the relationship between the text and the paratext, as developed in his 1987 book *Seuils*.²⁶ Some of the silences that I discuss do come in the form of the paratext, or more particularly, the blank spaces surrounding the paratext; however, it is the multiform silences that create a threshold for the reader to begin her journey to self-discovery alongside the autobiographical author. It is in these thresholds that the author, text and reader engender significances greater than that of a straightforward autobiography.²⁷

With this notion in mind, I have identified moments within both texts that serve as such

²⁵ Refer to footnotes 17.

²⁶ Genette analyzed the place, function and effect of aspects such as titles and epigraphs, and how these typographical elements converge to form an entryway into the text, creating certain expectations for the reader and hopefully ultimately peaking her/his interest (1-2).

²⁷ See Philippe Lejeune's *Le pacte autobiographique* (1975).

thresholds. Devi's parenthetical interjection discussed earlier in the chapter provides one instance in which the punctuation forces the text to pause and allows the reader into dialogue (in a sense) with both author and text (*Les hommes* 65-66). Cixous, for her part, entices the reader to engage with her complex writing style at several moments in the text where the narrative voice changes (*Les reveries* 23, 34, 48, 83, 98). For most of the text, Cixous recounts her memories in the first person; occasionally however, the narrator addresses Cixous's brother, the brother addresses Cixous the narrator, or Cixous the author addresses the reader. In one such instance, Cixous the author comments on the writing process in real-time, explaining what is happening to her as a writer: "Je file maintenant vers la fin de ce chapitre, entre le Vélo et la Bicyclette il faut sortir de la cage du Clos-Salembier et passer au présent" (83). Now that memory of "le Vélo" is written down, Cixous leads the reader to a space of silence, the blank page, in order to get back in touch with her writing-self. As Cixous prepares herself to return to the present, to the nostalgic conversation with her brother, the reader has the space to contemplate where the story has taken her or him, and make connections between the disappointment and restrictions the Cixous experienced as a child and her or his own childhood experiences.

Compared to Cixous's fairly brief interjections about writing in *Les rêveries*, Devi's reflections in *Les hommes* are lengthy and intricate. This makes *Les hommes qui me parlent* a more direct and explicit treatment of the relationship between writing and the self, and create what might be described as more spacious thresholds for readers to enter into self-reflection alongside the author. Devi writes: "Les mots, mon refuge, mon histoire, le lieu où enfin une autre image se dessinait, celle d'une femme qui méritait d'être" (36). In this passage, Devi locates her home in language and the writing process, as well her ideal self-image. Despite the relief and satisfaction of belonging that accompanies the writing process, Devi still feels a division between her writer-

self and her woman-self, and begins to recognize more fully the plurality of her identities, as she takes time away from her family during a time of crisis. She writes:

J'écris depuis presque quarante ans. Mais quand on me regarde, j'ai encore l'impression que c'est elle qu'on voit. J'ai le sourire d'excuse des grands timides. Devrais-je laisser blanchir mes cheveux pour être traitée avec le respect que l'on accorde aux écrivains indiens, dans leurs tenues sobres et leur dignité proche de la majesté ? Mais ce serait de nouveau un rôle, rien de plus, pour habiller ma transparence. Pendant que je me pose toutes ces questions, l'homme qui me parle me dit que je jouais un psychodrame avec ma famille. Mais je ne sais qui, de la femme et de l'écrivain, en est responsable.

Je n'en pouvais plus d'être sans cesse dédoublée, démantelée, remise en question, mise à la question, adulée, méprisée, adorée, détestée, anéantie d'amour et de reproches. (23-24)

This multiplicity, which seems to normally be a source of comfort and pride for Devi, now seems to become a complication as she tries to decide which part of her is to blame for the family problems. This question of culpability then leads into a list of adjectives, both positive and negative, that describe Devi's understanding of her existence. The pairs are often antonyms, and the inner conflict they have been causing Devi culminates in the exclamation that both praise and criticism are destroying her. As she reflects on her son's accusations that she is "playing out a psychodrama with her family," she identifies an internal division, a tension Beniamino recognizes as a characteristic of Mauritian women's writers.²⁸ The stream-of-consciousness list catalogues the good and bad pressures, mirroring the complicated and intertwined relationship that Devi has

²⁸ "Cette littérature tente de résoudre le dilemme entre l'exaltation des origines plurielles, parfois suspecte de fantasmes, et la prise en compte des tensions qui animent la société mauricienne, tensions dans lesquelles l'écrivain est pris, au double titre d'écrivain et de femme (et de femme prise dans les filets des cultures dont par ailleurs elle exalte la pluralité" (149-150).

with her writing-self and her self as a woman.

Devi's self-reflection and self-interrogation from the above passage is one of the aspects text that distinguishes *Les hommes qui me parlent* from *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*. Both texts mingle present-day observations with past recollections and literary allusions, but Devi's self-exploration takes places in the present-day portion of the narrative, while Cixous's self-exploration focuses more so on her identity as a child and adolescent in Algeria. This is not to say, however, that Cixous has not thoroughly investigated this problematic in other works. Cixous's theoretical essays, of the 1970's in particular, spend much time discussing the connection between writing and identity. In her essay "La venue à l'écriture" (1976), Cixous explains her hesitations and insecurities in writing about her identity.²⁹ Cixous worries that if she does not understand who she is, she will be unable to write anything with authority. She then acknowledges the multiplicity of identities that she possesses, and that she has hidden many of these aspects of herself away. Cixous's reservations, however, do not prevent her from writing, and the passage that ensues ends with the recognition that it is through writing that she becomes someone. Similar to Devi's aesthetic approach, Cixous appreciates in equal measure the dark and light aspects of a multifaceted identity through the use of vocabulary. She includes words with positive associations, such as "alliance," alongside those with negative connotations, such as "impure" and "monstres." Furthermore, she continues to juxtapose conflicting ideas, that of "multiple" versus the singular, distinct "one," thus proposing and providing a model for understanding identity as encompassing

²⁹ "Ecrire ? Mais si j'écrivais « JE » qui serais-je ? Je pouvais bien passer sous « JE » dans le quotidien sans en savoir plus long, mais écrire sans savoir qui-je, comment l'aurais-je fait ? Je n'en avais pas le droit. L'écriture n'était-elle pas lieu du Vrai ? Le Vrai n'est-il pas clair, distinct et un ? Et moi trouble, plusieurs, simultanée, impure. Renonces-y ! [...] « Chez » le Livre je devenais quelqu'un, [...] Et dans la réalité, je n'étais pas capable d'être une personne ? Rien qu'une, mais bien moi !" ("Venue" 39)

both. Having written through these questions decades earlier, Cixous is then able to focus on her childhood memories, and understanding the environment in which she grew up.

In addition to Cixous's emphasis on recalling her childhood, and Devi's existential journey, these autobiographical texts also engage their readers through the use of questions gendered identities. Devi begins *Les hommes* by setting the stage of the central problematic of narrative.

She writes:

Tous ces hommes qui me parlent. Fils, mari, père, amis, écrivains morts et vivants. Une litanie des mots, d'heures effacées et revécues, de bonheurs révolus, de tendresses éclopées. Je suis offerte à la parole des hommes. Parce que je suis femme. (11)

From the outset, Devi emphasizes importance of the spoken and written words, and her relationship to them as a woman. She then proceeds to ask several questions, of herself and ostensibly the reader as well:

Puis je changer de sexe et de corps? Ne garder de moi qu'une forme androgyne, asexuée, débarrassée de ses propres besoins et du désir des autres ? Car tout est là, finalement, la clé et le secret : être un objet du désir sur lequel s'engluent des formes autres, mensongères, conjurées par les fantasmes ou par les illusions, femme, mère, amante, proie inaccessible ou au contraire être de faiblesse et de fragilité, pourquoi ne pas tout détruire d'un seul coup en disant : je suis un monstre ? (11)

There are several aspects to note about these questions. To begin, the fact that Devi asks such a question is a commentary on how she views the female body and gender. She also introduces the juxtaposition between monster and woman, implying that being monstrous contradicts the natural state of woman. Devi revisits memories of being a daughter, a lover, a wife and mother in order

to understand her connection with her body, and the female roles she has performed throughout her life. Though unspoken and unwritten, the reader is drawn into Devi's self-questioning.

In addition to reflections on gendered roles from her past, Devi problematizes gender through her use of French, in particular the universal employment of the masculine form of the noun "écrivain/*writer*," as well as her use of the term "les hommes/*men*." According to Devi, neither "les hommes" nor "les écrivains" refers necessarily to men:

Tous ces hommes, tous ces hommes qui ont parlé au monde. Quand je dis hommes, je parle d'humains, bien sûr, puisque les écrivains sont au-delà du genre. Virginia Woolf ou Thomas Eliot, George Sand ou Colette, Céline ou George Eliot, quelle importance qu'ils soient hommes ou femmes ? Ils ont écrit. Ils nous ont écrit. Ils sont là, autour de nous, et tant qu'ils sont là, rien n'est perdu. (154)

For Devi, both terms are beyond a traditional heteronormative understanding of gender; her list of "hommes/*men*" and "écrivains/*writers*" includes both men and women. Rather than manipulate language to more clearly represent the gender of the writers about whom she speaks, she evacuates the term's social gender significance from the linguistic gender used in the French language. This approach contradicts the gestures of many other feminist writers, including Cixous, and might be viewed as problematic for some branches of the feminist movement.³⁰ Devi herself said she hesitated for a long-time to call herself a "feminist" because of the potentially restrictive and negative implications that came with such a label within the larger literary and philosophical community. Paradoxically, her works take great pains to highlight the difference in the male and

³⁰ For example, second-wave poststructuralist feminist writers such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, spent much time unraveling how and why language was phallogocentric and thus non-representative of women, and therefore inaccessible to them, resulting in half the population being bereft of a mode of communication.

female bodies, and the role of sexuality in life; to dismiss the difference between "hommes" and "femmes" when it comes to the gender of the "écrivain/writer" seems inconsistent. Also notable is the male pseudonyms of several of Devi's examples, including Sand and Eliot. However, the attempt to move beyond the discussion of gender in language can also be seen as a way of spotlighting the overall act of writing and the work that is associated with the label "écrivain", and not the gender of the person performing the job. The choice also invites reflection on the part of the reader to decide whether she/he agrees with Devi's approach that neutralizes the gender power seemingly inherent in the French language.

Chez Cixous, however, the struggle to understand gender plays out via the often conflicting memories of her childhood in Algeria. As discussed in an earlier section, the memory of "le Vélo" plays a recurring role in Cixous's understanding of her time in Algeria, and marks a particular moment which she feels her brother was "offered" Algeria, and she was kept from it. As an adult, Cixous recognizes that her mother's decision to buy a less-expensive girl's bicycle that both her children could use was an economic decision, and that her mother did not consider the psychological impact on her children; her brother felt emasculated by the gift, while young Cixous felt ignored and insignificant because the bicycle was offered to her brother.³¹ She reflects:

Tout ce qui nous arrivait au Clos-Salembier nous venait en féminin et en masculin et inversement et nous nous étions nécessaires et insuffisants, il me semblait que notre couple tirait au masculin, mais selon mon frère nous étions menés par le féminin, et tout cela provenait de l'incessante turbulence nébuleuse algérienne sexuelle. (23-24)

³¹ — puisque moi je n'utilisais pas le vélo, en vérité, c'est un fait, ce Vélo qui n'était pas d'homme était devenu la chose de mon frère, par un détour du destin, et par un détournement de l'intention de ma mère, qui avait eu l'idée d'offrir à mon frère un Vélo pour deux sexes" (Cixous 23-24).

By presenting the conflict of memory between Cixous and her brother Pierre, and by attributing gender to certain places and memories. This demonstrates not only the child-like lens through which she and her brother are revisiting their memories, but also the arbitrary nature with which gender becomes attributed to objects and locations.

The juxtaposition that Cixous creates with her word choice with regards to gender is congruent with her skepticism of the autobiographical genre. In an article that delves into Cixous's aversion to the category of autobiography, Hanrahan notes Cixous's experimental approach to genre and understands her work as "an exploration of the self as Other, an attempt to paint the alterity of the self. Not *auto*, but *altobiography*" (283).³² Scholars Décarie, Fisher, Hanrahan, Hiddleston and Rice all acknowledge Cixous's problematization and incorporation of autobiographical elements within her writing.³³ Their recognition of Cixous's "resistance" makes sense, for the author clearly expresses it when she writes:

³² "What is so interesting in Cixous's case is the combination of the ubiquity of the autobiographical references and the resolute refusal, as vehemently expressed in the second quotation, of the genre of autobiography itself. This refusal is all the more marked given the number of genres with which Cixous has experimented" (Hanrahan 283).

³³ "Alors que certains récits d'Hélène Cixous se classent sous la dénomination quelque peu obscure de «Fiction», se distinguant ainsi de ses autres ouvrages qui portent l'appellation «Roman», «Essai» ou «Théâtre», on pourrait penser que l'expression «Scènes primitives», le sous-titre du récit dont il sera question ici, *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage 1*, désigne un nouveau genre hybride dans la catégorie déjà protéiforme de l'écriture de soi" (Décarie 69).

"Cixous rarely alludes to the process of auto-representation in her work; instead she often discusses the importance of different perspectives in a story or the representation of writing within her texts. Even if she accepts that her life is indirectly mirrored in her work, she may prefer to offer an intellectual resistance to the autobiographical pact" (Fisher 60).

"Through the years, Cixous moved from a submerged auto-fictive representation to an open use of autobiography" (Fisher 61).

"Defining herself is something that Cixous is constantly doing; it is an act that takes place repeatedly throughout her oeuvre, contributing to an inexhaustible autobiographical project that

Je ne redoute rien autant que l'autobiographie. L'autobiographie n'existe pas. Mais tant de gens croient que cela existe. Alors je déclare solennellement : l'autobiographie n'est qu'un genre littéraire. Ce n'est pas un genre vivant. C'est un genre jaloux, décepteur, —je le déteste. Quand je dis 'Je', ce n'est jamais le sujet d'une autobiographie, mon je est libre. Est le sujet de ma folie, de mes alarmes, de mon vertige. (*Le Livre de Promothea*, 28)

Consistent in the use of homonyms and disruption of French language syntax and grammar, as seen throughout her oeuvre, Cixous casts a multifaceted and complex doubt on the autobiographical genre, while at the same time participating in its construction through the use and repetition of the subject pronoun *je*. An autobiography portends to delineate the truth and facts of a person's previous existence. However, if Cixous's "je" is free, then any reading of a first-person text by Cixous must constantly question any monolithic perspectives and always expect to include a plurality of truths, fictions underpinned by facts. Or in the words of Cixous's compatriote Assia Djebar: "Ma fiction est cette autobiographie qui s'esquisse, alourdie par l'héritage qui m'encombre" (*L'amour, la fantasia* 244).

With the knowledge that Cixous detests the stagnant qualities inherent in the autobiographical genre, it becomes even more pertinent to read between the lines of Cixous's writing. Understanding that Cixous is motivated to freely express all aspects of herself within her

continually questions the assumptions of such terms as "Francophone," challenging them with personal details that defy all normative labels" (Rice, *Time Signature* 15).

"Cixous's 'theoretical' essays, then, are often interspersed with autobiographical incursions, but the autobiographical persona at the same time remains uncertain about the status of those incursions and about their ability to provide information on her fracture, displaced 'je'. Moreover, even in the still more hybrid texts exploring specifically her 'background' in Algeria Cixous's attitude towards autobiography is somewhat changeable. Some of Cixous's recent essays, and certainly the narratives of *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage* and *Le jour où je n'étais pas là*, are clearly autobiographical explorations of the narrator's origins. But the autobiographical turn is at the same time a rejection of the basic conventions and assumptions of the genre" (Hiddleston 56).

autobiographical text in order to keep it alive, makes reading the silences all the more important. Jane Hoogestraat believes that Cixous “acknowledges the importance of that which lies beyond language” (27). In her analysis of a passage from Cixous’s seminal essay “Le Rire de la Méduse,” Hoogestraat contends that for Cixous, “references to silence can disrupt oppressive language and logic” (27).³⁴ Hoogestraat terms this quite literally as “speaking silence,” and understands this gesture as “subversive of hierarchical order” (27). And it is perhaps the subversion of both of social hierarchies and those represented via the constraints of the autobiographical genre that is Cixous’s greatest legacy. Towards the end of the text *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, Cixous returns to the primacy of writing and its role in speaking the unsayable: “Tout ce qui encore indicible est déjà lisible” (156).

What has always been legible, or readable, for Ananda Devi, is her autobiographical presence in all of her texts. She did not make her ever-present existence therein obvious, however, to the reader. She writes:

J’ai si bien su me déguiser dans mes romans que personne n’a compris que j’y étais toute. La seule fois où l’on m’a demandé si l’un de mes romans était autobiographique, c’était à la parution de *Moi, l’interdite*. Le journaliste a aussitôt souri en donnant sa propre réponse: « non, évidemment » - la narratrice avait un bec de lièvre. (*Les hommes* 26)

Though one must acknowledge that every published text is edited and sculpted into a particular narrative, Devi makes a choice to reveal the secrets of her writing through the creation of the text

³⁴ “Il faut que la femme écrive par son corps, qu’elle invente la langue imprenable qui crève les cloisonnements, classes et rhétoriques, ordonnances et codes, qu’elle submerge, transperce, franchisse le discours-à-réserve ultime, y compris que celui qui se rit d’avoir à dire le mot « silence », celui qui visant l’impossible s’arrête pile devant le mot « impossible » et l’écrit comme « fin »” (Cixous, “Le rire de la Méduse” 48).

Les hommes, detailing the process by which she created and continues to create her own subjectivity and identity via the writing process. It seems incredibly transparent, and yet admitting that she had been “disguising” herself in all her novels inherently casts doubt on the authenticity of her literary self-portrait. If she has hidden herself before, how can we trust the truth of her self-portrayal now? Nonetheless, even this uncertainty for the reader mirrors Devi’s existential journey to come to terms with her multiple roles of writer, woman, wife, mother and human being.

Prior to *Les hommes qui me parlent*, Devi wrote *Indian Tango*, a novel with autobiographical echoes that deals intimately with writing and female identities. The novel goes back and forth between two storylines: the first follows Subhadra, a menopausal Indian woman, struggling with Indian traditions; the second follows an unnamed Mauritian writer of Indian descent as she roams the streets of Delhi trying to come to terms with her simultaneous feelings of belonging to the home of her ancestors and alienation from a place she’s never visited. Both characters clearly have autobiographical resonances in Devi’s personal life; Devi is a Mauritian born writer of Indian descent, and a middle-aged woman when *Indian Tango* is written and published. These similarities with the author render the internal struggles that the characters face regarding identity as a woman, a writer, a mother, and a daughter-in-law all the more illuminating. The observations and feelings of the characters in *Indian Tango* can then be interpreted as representing Devi’s musings as an author. For example, the unnamed author character, who writes in the first-person in the chapters entitled *Mars 2004*, reveals: “Pour une fois, me mettre en scène, devenir le sujet de mon histoire: cette tentation m’était jusqu’alors inconnue” (23). By narrating a character’s experience with autobiography, Devi writes her way toward the text that becomes *Les hommes qui me parlent*.

Devi recognizes that she has developed her identity through the writing of her fictional characters; and yet, she still questions the term *autofiction*. She struggles with the idea of classifying her writing in such a way, and yet at the same time admits the validity and usefulness of the term. Devi writes:

Je me méfie du mot autofiction mais toute écriture n'est peut-être que cela, déguisée de mille et une façons. Même en faisant la folle tentative de la révélation, l'on se transforme en fiction. Ou alors, un jour, on comprend qu'il n'est plus nécessaire d'utiliser des personnages pour revenir vers soi. A l'infini démultipliés, ils ont tous porté notre visage.

Ils sont tatoués de la tête aux pieds de l'encre qui nous constitue. (*Les hommes* 68-69)

Though Devi is wary of the term, she realizes that it is perhaps the most appropriate word to describe her oeuvre. Devi understands the act of writing about the self as one in which the author turns herself into a fictionalized version of the self. Inversely, she comprehends that all her characters have expressed some kind of personal truth, and thus the act of writing about the self had already occurred many times over. In other words, writing fiction always contains the autobiographical, and the autobiographical always becomes a fictionalized version of the self.

Devi's fluid notion of literary genres and how they feed into and off of each other in circular fashion to develop the author's identity can also be seen in her understanding of gender identities. In his article "Problématique de l'Autre et du Même dans l'œuvre romanesque d'Ananda Devi," Vicram Ramharai analyzes the topic of identity formation in five of Devi's earlier works: *Rue de la Poudrière*, *Le Voile de Drapaudi*, *L'Arbre fouet*, *Moi, l'interdite* and *Pagli*. In order to discuss identity within these texts, Ramharai conceptualizes a gender binary in which he terms the Other as referring to male characters and the Same as referring to female characters: "Si l'on postule que la Même est la narratrice, l'Autre serait appréhendé à travers les personnages du père, de l'époux,

ou de l'amant" (Kindle) He concludes that in order to achieve subjectivity, the female characters must transgress social norms and become the Other; in other words, women must act like men. This conclusion is at the same time appropriate and oversimplified, and Ramaharai himself acknowledges the inherent complexity of such an analysis at the end of the article.³⁵ Nonetheless, Ramaharai's analysis underscores how Devi calls gender roles into question throughout her oeuvre.

The blurring of genre, entangling her novel with (seemingly) autobiographical statements, also comes to center stage with regards to the gender of the main characters in *Indian Tango*. In the early stages of the manuscript of *Indian Tango*, the unnamed writer character was originally male. However, the subsequent sexual encounter that occurs between Subhadra and the unnamed writer at the end of the novel was not, for Devi, transgressive enough, and seemed to undermine Subhadra's self-exploration as a woman. Making both characters female allowed the focus to remain on female gender and sexuality. Moreover, Subhadra's sexual encounter with the writer, a new experience for her, echoed the writer's new experience of writing autobiography. She brings into question the expectations of both autobiography and femininity as related to the category of artistic composition as well as the cultural concepts of femaleness and femininity. In this manner, Devi writes a narrative which explores the polysemic French word "genre."

³⁵ Dans ces romans, la problématique de l'identité et de l'altérité n'est pas évidente à cerner. On ne peut avancer avec certitude que le glissement du Même à l'Autre et de l'Autre au Même dans le cas de la narratrice conduit cette dernière à passer d'un mal-être à un bien-être. [...] C'est en rompant avec les normes sociales qu'elles trouvent le bonheur et le moyen de satisfaire, dans une certaine mesure, leur quête d'identitaire (Ramharai ; Location 1521).

Michel Beniamino, in his article "Écritures Féminines à L'île Maurice: Une Rupture Postcoloniale?" also recognizes the complex identity construction present in Devi's oeuvre, which "signe l'émergence d'une nouvelle identité, construite sur le modèle de la différence non essentialisée, qui porte en elle la reconstruction d'une affiliation volontaire à des valeurs partagées et non plus imposées" (152).

While Devi does return to childhood memories as part of the origin of her writing-self, *Les hommes qui me parlent* functions more explicitly as a declaration of self-acceptance and her right to write as an adult, than a traditional chronological autobiography. She writes: “Nous ne pourrons cheminer les uns vers les autres que lorsque chacun se sera compris lui-même. Ce texte est ma tentative” (75). As she writes through the family crisis she is experiencing, Devi asks herself questions that echo Cixous’s. She expresses feelings of doubt, uncertainty, self-hatred, shame and fear, which then lead to reassurance and self-confidence.³⁶ During “les grands jours de soleil et de silence,” Devi creates her most true to life text; one through which she is able to process emotional, historical, and literary baggage (94). As with her previous texts, Devi writes because “il lui faut écrire”; this time, however, she “est devenue un sujet” and finally feels that she is “matière à écrire” (177, 32).

This relationship to writing is vital to both Devi and Cixous’s respective identities. This is a common characteristic of works by Francophone women writers, acknowledged and analyzed by several critics, who have noted not only the nascent power of writing for identity formation, but also the plurality of identities that these women possess.³⁷ Furthermore, the multiplicity of identities is not viewed as diluting the strength of any one aspect, but rather creating a being of interdependent parts that in turn reveals a multidimensional subjectivity, not only for Cixous and Devi, but also by extension Francophone women. Through their use of language, interrogation of gender roles and freedoms, and analysis of the writing process, both authors enrich our understanding of the 21st-century autobiographical text. Lastly, they subvert the authority inherent

³⁶ See pages 11, 16-17, 18, 24, 25-26, 31-32, 33-34, 72-73, 82-83, 96, 100, 120, 129, 165, 177, 205.

³⁷ Refer to footnote 17.

in autobiographical work, and through the use of silences, construct thresholds in which the reader may and must participate in the self-discovery. Before reaching the reader, however, Cixous and Devi must begin their texts; and for both, it starts with silence.

Le Début: Beginning with Silence

As mentioned in the introduction, H  l  ne Cixous and Ananda Devi anchor their texts in the generative aspects of silence. In interviews and presentations, both Cixous and Devi recognize and laud the abstract relationship between writing and silence. The authors' explicit recognition of silence's role in the creative writing process notwithstanding, the theoretical concept manifests itself on the page; the most concrete representation of silence is the presence of the word and its derivatives, as well as in the overall structure of their respective texts. Silences show up in the content of the narrative as much as in the form. Both authors describe moments couched in silence, whether it be a nostalgic conversation with her brother for Cixous, or the quiet observations of a young Devi as she drives around a newly independent Port Louis. The proliferation of silences leads me to explore its beginnings in *Les r  veries de la femme sauvage* and *Les hommes qui me parlent*.

Mireille Calle-Gruber is one scholar who has helped communicate Cixous's musings on the nascent qualities of silence. During her extensive career, she has dedicated a significant portion of scholarship to understanding Cixous's writings and sharing Cixous's contributions to the Francophone literary canon in at least ten of her publications.³⁸ Calle-Gruber unpacks the

³⁸ This includes : *H  l  ne Cixous*. Association pour la diffusion de la pens  e fran  aise, 2005 ; "La langue des alliances: 'Mon alg  riance.'" *Etudes litt  raires*. -, vol. 33, no. 3, 2001, pp. 83-94 ; "Le livre d'Alg  rie." *Expressions maghr  bines: revue de la coordination internationale des chercheurs sur les litt  ratures maghr  bines*. -, vol. 2, no. 2, 2003 ; "L'essai comme forme de r  criture: Cixous    Montaigne." *  tudes fran  aises*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2004, pp. 29-42 ; Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Centre culturel international de Cerisy-la-Salle, editors. *H  l  ne Cixous, crois  e d'une*

complicated narratives that Cixous creates, using a similarly complex and erudite vocabulary and voice to explain the “Cixousian book” (*The Book*, 75). In a book-length interview with Calle-Gruber titled *Photo de racines*, Cixous describes her writing process: “J’essaie de l’organiser: à commencer par le silence” (114). After Cixous acknowledges the incipency of silence in her writing, she describes her prewriting stage as a withdrawal from the noise and activity of everyday life in order to recognize, then inscribe, the story that is forming inside her imagination: “Par les conditions d’un retrait, oui, les conditions d’un voyage intérieur. Avec le moins de frein possible. [...] C’est comme si—ce qui, sans que je me le formule, s’impose à moi—c’est comme si j’écrivais à l’intérieur de moi-même.” Cixous links her body and the body of the text, a concept to which I will return later in this chapter. Calle-Gruber’s interview allows Cixous to lay the groundwork in which silence is thus requisite for reaching the state where the concepts and ideas swirling in her imagination can be transcribed into words on the page.

Cixous’s indispensable silence accompanies her as she describes how her narrator’s brother is “the one who begins” conversations about their childhood (21). In fact, the first real dialogue of *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage* (not counting the moments when Cixous talks to herself or quotes her previously written work,) comes from the narrator’s brother’s mouth. The text interposes the conversation between the adult siblings with Cixous’s accounts of her life as young Jewish girl in Algeria during the 1940s and 1950s. Cixous expresses the various cultural influences

oeuvre. Galilée, 2000 ; Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Hélène Cixous. *Au théâtre, au cinéma, au féminin*. L’Harmattan, 2011 ; Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Verena Andermatt Conley. *Du féminin*. Le Griffon d’argile, 1992 ; Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Marie Odile Germain, editors. “Genèses Généalogies Genres: Autour de l’oeuvre d’Hélène Cixous.” *Genèses Généalogies Genres: Autour de l’oeuvre d’Hélène Cixous*, Éditions Galilée, 2003 ; Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Sarah-Anaïs Crevier Goulet. “Hélène Cixous’s Imaginary Cities: Oran-Osnabrück-Manhattan: Places of Fascination, Places of Fiction.” *Newlithist New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2006, pp. 135–45.

in her life as an Algerian-born Jewish woman of German descent through her innovative style, both in the syntax of her writing and in the overall delivery of her message(s). Evident in *Les rêveries* is her experimental syntax and sentence structure. Antagonistic to the strict grammatical structure of French, Cixous uses repetition and lacunae (sentences without verbs, for example) to linguistically express her ambiguous position in French society. She creates her own words such as “inséparable” and “juifemme” as evidence of her internal plurality, as well as to exert her agency through the creation of neologisms, thus iterating her belief that “l’écriture est l’infini” (*Les rêveries* 45, *La venue* 15, 33). Several nouns, including “le Vélo” and “le Chien” are capitalized, hinting toward the German linguistic influence on Cixous’s life, while at the same time emphasizing the objects’ importance to her childhood memories. These practices exemplify Cixous’s concept of “écriture féminine,” terminology first published in her 1975 essay “Le rire de la Méduse” and described in greater detail in the introduction chapter of this dissertation.³⁹ Her

³⁹ For more scholarship on Cixous’s “écriture féminine,” please see: Anderson, Elizabeth. “Writing as Sanctuary: Place, Movement and the Sacred in the Work of Hélène Cixous.” *Literature & Theology: An International Journal of Religion, Theory, and Culture*, vol. 27, no. 3, Sept. 2013, pp.364–79, <http://proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2013701788&site=ehost-live>. ; Calle-Gruber, Mireille. *Hélène Cixous*. Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française, 2005 ; ---. “La langue des alliances: ‘Mon algériance.’” *Etudes littéraires*. -, vol. 33, no. 3, 2001, pp. 83–94; Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Sophie Thomas. “The Book Inside The Book.” *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 24, 2002, pp. 71–95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44030923>. ; Caradec, Gwenola. “Deux Cas d’écriture Ou de Violence Textuelle Dans Le Cahier d’un Retour Au Pays Natal d’Aimé Césaire et Les Rêveries de La Femme Sauvage d’Hélène Cixous.” *Expressions Maghrébines: Revue de La Coordination Internationale Des Chercheurs Sur Les Littératures Maghrébines*, vol. 14, no. 1, Summer 2015, p. 101 ; Corbin, Laurie. “The Other Language, the Language of the Other in the Work of Assia Djebar and Hélène Cixous.” *MLN*, vol. 129, no. 4, Sept. 2014, pp. 812–828 ; Eroğlu, Çağrı. “Scènes Primitives et Algériennes Dans Les Rêveries de La Femme Sauvage d’Hélène Cixous.” *Littera*, vol. 33, Dec. 2013, pp. 67–80; Hubbell, Amy L. “The Past Is Present: Pied-Noir Returns to Algeria.” *Nottingham French Studies*, vol. 51, no. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 66–77; Kaiser, Birgit Mara. “(Un)Grounding the Human: Affective Entanglements and Subjectivity in Hélène Cixous’s Algerian Reveries.” *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3–4, Feb. 2013, pp. 477–96 ; Mairéad Hanrahan. *The Time of Hospitality: Les Rêveries de La Femme Sauvage*.

expert manipulation of language encourages the reader and literary critic to interrogate not only the meaning of the words on the page, but also the meaning of the absence of words. Her deployment of multiple languages highlights the need to engage in the examination of the many meanings of silence throughout the text.

The significance of absent or *silent* words is illuminated in the text that frames Cixous's overall narrative. *Les rêveries* opens with an anecdote about coming to writing, losing writing, and searching for writing again. Cixous had awoken in the middle of the night and felt the irresistible need to write. She recalls having written five pages, but come morning, she can only find half a page; this paragraph then becomes the beginning of *Les rêveries*:

Tout le temps où je vivais en Algérie, je rêvais d'arriver un jour en Algérie, j'aurais fait n'importe quoi pour y arriver, avais-je écrit, je ne me suis jamais trouvée en Algérie, il faut maintenant précisément que je m'en explique, comment je voulais que la porte s'ouvre, maintenant et pas plus tard, avais-je noté très vite, dans la fièvre de la nuit de juillet, car c'est maintenant, et probablement par des dizaines ou des centaines de raisons, qu'une porte vient de s'entrebâiller dans la galerie Oubli de ma mémoire, et pour la première fois, voici que j'ai la possibilité de retourner en Algérie donc l'obligation...(9, original formatting)

This first sentence, what Laurie Corbin calls the “the haunted and haunting first sentence,” reappears as the last sentence in the text, presenting a commentary on memory as well as on the

2014 ; M'besso, Anicet Modeste. “Résistances à l'oeuvre dans les fictions d'Hélène Cixous.” *Cahiers ERTA*, 2016, pp. 151–63 ; Rosello, Mireille. “Ecriture Inséparable: Hélène Cixous.” *Travaux de Littérature*, vol. 23, 2010, pp. 347–56 ; ---. “Remembering the Incomprehensible: Hélène Cixous, Leïla Sebbar, Yamina Benguigui, and the War of Algeria.” *Remembering Africa*, edited by Elisabeth (ed. and introd.) Mudimbe-Boyi, Heinemann, 2002, pp. 187–205 ; Sellers, Susan. *Hélène Cixous: Authorship, Autobiography and Love*. Polity Press, 1996.

writing process (823). Through such a device, Cixous illuminates the cyclical nature of memory and recollection, thus subverting the proscribed chronological approach to autobiography. Moreover, it suggests that while she may be struggling with her origins and belonging to Algeria, she is nonetheless able to continually return to this past moment of writing in her current writing, to the memory of a memory, as well as to the memory of writing. Although she may have everlasting doubts about her place in Algeria, this repetition confirms her belonging to writing.

That Cixous begins the text with a metatextual gesture in turn prioritizes writing and the writing process for the reader. The suggestion that this text represents an attempt to recover lost pages primes the reader to pay attention to the discussion of the writing process that follows, as well as to her childhood stories. This debut foretells that Cixous will continue to address the act of writing of histories as she writes her own personal “histoire”.⁴⁰ With these concurrent narratives established at the outset, the reader is compelled to acknowledge that there are gaps in Cixous’s story. As a result, just as Cixous is searching her home for the missing pages of her memorial to life in Algeria, so will the reader search the text for meaning in the interruptions of the narrative.

Though unable to find the missing manuscript written in the middle of the night, Cixous still manages to recover memories in the company of her brother. These “rêveries” disclose themselves in the silent moments they share together on the balcony of her house. Cixous recognizes that “la construction silencieuse signe que nous sommes en train de traverser le même rêve” (85). Cixous sits quietly listening to her brother, who for many years was considered an essential part of her identity as a young girl, in order to help write her own story as an adult woman. She comments: “et moi, assise immobile et silencieuse à son côté, j’écoute de toute mon âme ce

⁴⁰ By using the French word for story, “histoire,” I am trying to imitate Cixous’s use of polysemy and evoke the both meanings, i.e. “history” as well as “story”.

que psalmodie sa pensée, je le lis toujours, mon frère” (88-89). Cixous’s repetition of the adjective “silencieuse” underscores the critical role silence plays in the development of her writing, and in particular, writing about herself.

The recurrence of the notions of silence may be due in part to the multiple languages to which a young Cixous was exposed. She grew up in a home where French, German and Spanish were spoken, in a country where Arabic and French were the lingua franca, and raised in the Jewish faith which expresses itself in Hebrew. All the languages linked Cixous to specific aspects of her life; while she chose to use French to write about her individual identity, it was not a decision made without pressure or doubts. She addresses the conflict of language and writing in her essay “La Venue à l’écriture”:

Tout de moi se liguait pour m’interdire l’écriture : l’Histoire, mon histoire, mon origine, mon genre. Tout ce que constituait mon moi social, culturel. A commencer par le nécessaire, qui me faisait défaut, la matière dans laquelle l’écriture se taille, d’où elle s’arrache : la langue. Tu veux – Ecrire ? Dans laquelle langue ? La propriété, le droit me gendarmaient depuis toujours : j’apprenais à parler français dans un jardin d’où j’étais sur le point d’être expulsée parce que juive. J’étais de la race des perdus de paradis. Ecrire français ? De quel droit ? Montre-nous tes lettres de créance, dis-nous les mots de passe, signe-toi, fais voir tes mains, montre tes pattes, qu’est-ce que c’est que ce nez-là ? (21-22)

The confluence of multi-lingual, and thus multi-cultural, influences then leads Cixous to play with and subvert language in her writing. In Laurie Corbin’s 2014 article “The Other Language, the Language of the Other in the Work of Assia Djebar and Hélène Cixous,” she contends that Cixous’s aporetic debut and conclusion to *Les rêveries*, as well as her creative neologisms, exemplify “an exploration of identity fragmented by language and the challenge of expressing this

identity through a breaking down of the language” (826). This notion of a fragmented identity, as Corbin implies, should not be mistaken for a broken one with disparate parts, but rather one which reflects the multiple influences that lead to Cixous’s distinct and complex deployment of the French language.⁴¹ Cixous avoids a complete breakdown of language, and therefore identity, through the strategic use of silences, which act as a thread connecting all the diverse parts of her complex identity.

Woven into her questions of language are memories of anti-Semitism she experiences in French; via the anecdote above that recounts humiliation spoken to her in the very language she wished to use to write her identity, Cixous decodes the origins of her complicated relationship to French. This passage situates Cixous’s personal identity struggle within the larger context of the treatment of the Jews in World War II France, as well as colonial *and* revolutionary Algeria. As Cixous explains her struggle, “Tout de moi se liguait pour m’interdire l’écriture : l’Histoire, mon histoire, mon origine, mon genre, ” she evokes not only the personal experiences, such as the time when her father was unable to work, or the imprisonment of her mother and brother, but larger communal experiences of the Jewish people under the French Vichy government, and the subsequent expulsion of pied-noirs, or Algerians of French descent, at the arrival of Algerian independence in 1962 (21). This history of exclusion, in which Jews did not belong to either France or Algeria, occurred in many ways under a cloak of silence.⁴² The causes and repercussions

⁴¹ “I would suggest that both Djébar and Cixous play with words and rhetorical figures in ways that emphasize these divisions in identity. In other words, the divisions that are a central subject in the work of these two writers are at the same time political, social, and psychological. The socio-historical backgrounds of the two seem to have produced in them an extreme awareness of the fractures that are within all human identities and which can become particularly visible in the act of self-representation.” (Corbin 814).

⁴² “The Crémieux Decree was passed in Algeria in October 1870 granting French citizenship to Algerian Jews but not to Muslims... [...]. This worsened in the coming century with the rise of the Nazi Party in the years leading to World War II, and of the Algerian Jews who had settled in

of this silence have been discussed in what Henry Rousseau termed the “le Syndrome Vichy” in post-World War II France, a concept that Anne Donadey adapts into the “Algeria Syndrome” in the aftermath of the Algerian Revolution. In part, both Rousseau and Donadey look at the lack of literary production, or silence, immediately following the traumatic event, and the subsequent proliferation of literature that addresses the violence decades later. Institutionalized silencing of French-speaking Jews was part of the fabric of Cixous’s sociocultural past, and as such, it becomes imperative for Cixous to answer the challenge of writing her identity, and to do so in the French language.

Similarly to H  l  ne Cixous, Ananda Devi explicitly recognizes the importance of silence to her writing and how it is imbricated in the motivation and method of her entire oeuvre. *Les hommes qui me parlent* begins with an argument between Devi, her son and her husband; as Devi escapes and seeks solace in a hotel room, she begins to write through her thoughts and feelings. The manuscript before the reader is born out of the separation and silence that results from her family dispute. The text jumps back and forth between the present-day, first-person ruminations by Devi’s about her family situation, reflections on her literary influences, and memories of formative experiences from her past. Throughout the tale of her family crisis, she alludes to many writers, well-known and obscure, and discusses how their words have shaped her life. Despite the title, the overall focus of *Les hommes* narrative is not on Devi’s relationship with men, but rather

France, an estimated 3,000 were deported. The Cr  mieux Decree was abolished in October 1940 under the Vichy government, and the same anti-Jewish laws promulgated in France were imposed in Algeria. Notably, some of the Algerian Jews received assistance from their Muslim neighbors. The Decree was reinstated in 1943 through a combination of Jewish lobbying and American diplomatic efforts and remained in effect until the 1962 Algerian independence, at which point nearly the entire Algerian Jewish population relocated to France.” *The Cr  mieux Decree*. <https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/faq/cr%C3%A9mieux-decree>. Accessed 8 Sept. 2018.

on her relationship with herself, her relationship with writing, and her identity as a writer. These developments become possible thanks to Devi's solitude and surrounding silence.

This solitude that allows Devi to explore her identity through writing is both generative and constrictive. Towards the beginning of *Les hommes*, Devi links creative development to a fertile silence through the imagery of newly planted soil covered in straw. Devi begins the chapter by quoting a selection from Albert Camus' preface to *L'envers et l'endroit*. She then repeats one sentence, and elaborates on the idea: "L'artiste, couvert de chaumes, est mûr pour le silence. *Il se mure aussi dans le silence*" (Devi's elaboration, 58). Devi plays with the homonyms "mûr" and "mure," conflating the notions of ripening and blackberries with that of walling oneself in and walls. This slippage evokes Derrida's theorizations on the "différance" of words, and the constant search for the meaning of those words in the text. Silence is multifaceted for Devi; it nourishes artistic production, and sequesters the artist within its walls. Devi associates not only physical growth with silence, but also the psychosocial development of her characters by way of the interaction between language and silence.

In the previous citation, Devi borrows from a well-known author and then deploys homonyms in order to create various contrasting denotations of the word silence. She proffered a similar commentary in an interview with Alessandro Corio in 2005. Devi stated that the "silence qui est dans tous mes personnages c'est lui que je tente d'apprivoiser paradoxalement par le biais de la langue" (153). For Devi, an inherent silence inhabits all of her characters, making them wild and uncontrollable. She then uses language to tame the silence within her characters; the verb "apprivoiser" attributes a conscious effort towards forging a connection between silence and language, thus associating productive work with silence. Throughout Devi's oeuvre, and in

particular in *Les hommes qui me parlent*, silence maintains an active presence from start to finish, constantly interacting with language to cultivate the imagery of her past.

As Devi recounts pivotal childhood memories in *Les hommes qui me parlent*, she also recognizes the catalytic role of silence in her creative production. As a young girl in newly independent Mauritius, Devi would ride around the capital city of Port Louis with her father and wait in the car as her father ran errands. From this vantage point, she observed that the political freedom of her island nation, acquired officially in 1968, did not necessarily mean a life free of oppression and struggle for all of its citizens.⁴³ She recalls:

Mais, dans la Beetle, d'autres images sont venues contredire ce beau conte. Port-Louis était là où on voyait le reste. Le vrai, l'intransigeant, l'incontournable réalité d'un pays sous-développé comme on le disait à l'époque sans crainte du politiquement incorrect, le vrai, le fou, le cru, l'éprouvante et émouvante réalité de ceux qui devaient lutter pour chaque souffle, chaque plainte, chaque ahanement que leur tirait la vie. Ce qui m'est apparu le plus clairement, c'était leur silence.

Peut-être, étant silencieuse, étais-je plus apte à entendre ce qui ne se disait pas. (37-38)

These experiences of observing the variety of ethnic and religious communities that made up the Mauritian population, as well as the juxtaposition of her wealth and their destitution, provided Devi with some of the material that would inspire her writing oeuvre. Devi recognizes not only the silence of the Mauritian citizens who were living in abhorrent conditions, but also how her own

⁴³ On an island where ethnicity, language and religion are extremely significant identitarian factors, the people have maintained strong economic and cultural ties with regions of the world that have played a role in peopling and governing it. Mauritius, as an independent nation today has inherited two sets of colonial cultures—French up to 1810 and then British until its independence in 1968—which explains its strong affiliation both to the Commonwealth and the Francophonie (Ravi, *Rainbow Colors 2*).

silence, which was in part a manifestation of her timidity and introverted nature, allowed her to be aware of, to hear, and even to empathize with the situations of the people(s) who had no voice. The ability to “entendre” what was *not* being said about inequalities in Mauritius then motivated Devi to share their stories, and eventually, hers.

In addition to allowing her to listen and to hear the stories that exist in the fertile ground of her imagination, silence is interwoven into the writing process and writing product for Devi. As a result of her observations in newly independent Mauritius, she questions the purpose of speech, and those who use it to exert power and renounce silence: “La parole est-elle utilisée pour autre chose que la persuasion?” (84) Through her writing, Devi offers an alternative approach, one that is accessible to both the strong and the weak: “En attendant, je choisis le pouvoir du silence. Je crois au pouvoir des origines” (84).⁴⁴ Following a break on the page, Devi evaluates and analyzes her declaration. She explains : “J’ai écrit cette dernière phrase il y a quelques jours. Je ne sais plus ce que je voulais dire par là. Les origines ? Lesquelles ? Géographiques? Culturelles? Ethniques? Non, l’origine à laquelle je pense, c’est l’impulsion première d’écrire.” (84) Devi first asserts her belief in the power of silence and origins, and then takes the reader step by step as she tries to understand her own message, that has momentarily fallen into silence. She recognizes and includes that days of silence have passed between the writing of the sentence “Je crois au pouvoir des origines,” and then writes through various possible meanings until she arrives at the conclusion that the original power comes from the (silent) moment when one is first compelled to write.

⁴⁴ “Ils parlent. Mais quelle langue parlent-ils donc tous ? Une logorrhée de mots, comme s’il leur fallait toujours renier le silence. Le langage est-il la bénédiction de l’homme ou le contraire ? Je regarde les politiques parler à la télé. Sans les mots, quel serait leur pouvoir ? La politique est née de la parole. [...] Mais s’il nous est donné le droit à la parole et aux mots, c’est peut-être que nous pouvons par là – nous, les faibles – acquérir une force autre. Je crois au pouvoir du silence” (Devi 46).

For Devi, “l’impulsion première d’écrire” comes when she is fifteen years old. At this age, an adolescent Devi became involved with a lover who did not fit her family’s expectations, and through the displeasure shown by those closest to her, Devi experienced first-hand the hypocrisy of racism.⁴⁵ Alienated from and disenchanted by her society, Devi sought refuge in poetry. She reflects:

Amplifiée par une réalité jusque-là à peine perçue, ma petite histoire a pris une dimension autre. Mes poèmes de l’époque, écrits de mon écriture ronde, ont transformé ce jeune homme en fiction poétique. Mon regard voyait des contes à la place des visages, des secrets dans le charme d’un sourire, des tristesses bourgeonnant des chemins empruntés. Cette expérience est devenue un acte littéraire qui a construit, dans la tête de la fille de quinze ans, un univers de mots, et peut-être aussi semé le sens de la transgression. (28)

With her very first poem, then, Devi started her autobiographical oeuvre by fictionalizing a part of her personal history. This passage in *Les hommes* indicates Devi’s awareness of the healing power of the written word, and how it allowed her to deal with a traumatic adolescent event. This passage also acts as metacommentary through which Devi writes about a memory of writing as part of her self-discovery. In her study of the symbolism in Devi’s oeuvre, Véronique Bragard highlights the cathartic potential of memory: “Cependant, au travers du processus cathartique du souvenir et de l’oubli toujours présent dans ses ouvrages, l’écrivaine mauricienne nous invite à admirer la force qui se dégage de l’être humain bien décider à donner sens à son existence” (“Cris des femmes” 74). Through this beginning act of writing, Devi creates a literary identity to manage and process

⁴⁵ “Malgré ta timidité et ton air d’enfant sage, ton premier amour a un goût de scandale. Ce jeune homme fait partie des interdits que ta société cultive avec tant de ferveur : il n’est pas du bon coloris—ni communautaire, ni racial, ni religieux, ni économique et encore moins biologique. Pas bon teint du tout” (Devi 25-26).

her life as a young Indo-Mauritian woman, one that continues to develop in *Les hommes*.

Devi experiences an awareness as to the cathartic nature of writing, first as a young woman, and how it's necessary for her survival as an adult in crisis. She analogizes silence with fertile soil, requisite for her writing to flower. Silence gives her access to the diversity of her homeland, and allows her to hear, then share the silenced stories of her compatriots. With *Les hommes*, she returns to this state of silence and is thus begins to finally tell her own silenced story. Whereas Devi experiences this in solitude, Cixous needs silence that accompanies conversations with her brother Pierre in order to recollect her childhood. These nostalgic forays into the past work in conjunction with Cixous's demonstration of cyclical writing, which includes repetition as well as missing writing. She manipulates language and silence to help tell her most authentic story; such stories must incorporate all the multi-lingual, -ethnic, -cultural influences that shaped her identity as a young girl in Algeria. Silence begins the writing and self-identification process for both Cixous and Devi. As such, both authors include material silences in the text to represent its essential nature and presence.

Le quoi: The Matter of Silence

The respective ontological quests that both authors undertake, by way of the writing process, find their origins in silence. This is evidenced in Cixous's and Devi's texts, as well as in their reflections on their writing and the writing process. In addition, both writers persistently underscore the importance of silence in their writing via the ways in which silences permeate the format, typography, syntax and symbolism of their respective narratives. These practices set up a framework in which blank pages carry meaning, mistyped words signal interpersonal turmoil, neologisms communicate conflictual emotions, and iconic female garments represent personal

reflections about and through writing. As these authors explore the relationship between gender and identity, as well as the development of identity through the autobiographical genre, they discuss, both directly and indirectly, the materiality of silences in the writing and text. This section of the chapter will analyze the material silences found throughout both texts in order to decipher the concrete representations of the unsaid and how that helps share the authors' voices.

One of the most visible forms of silence comes in the form of the blank space or page. In *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, there are six blank pages (38, 70, 84, 116, 136, 158) and six partially blank pages (50, 69, 115, 135, 146, 157, 168). Prior to appearance of completely or partially blank pages in the text, Cixous presents content which focuses on memories that define her conflicted relationship with her homeland of Algeria. Blank pages are even more prevalent in Devi's text than they are in Cixous's, and they accentuate the act of writing and its imbrications with identity formation and representation. Within *Les hommes qui me parlent*, one can find seven mostly or completely blank pages and twenty partially (half or less) blank.⁴⁶ The blank pages function in a similar fashion to blank spaces and margins; they can act as a method by which to highlight the information that precedes them. In the spirit of Derrida's efforts to view the gaps as the frame, I interpret the blank pages not as empty space, but the meaningful structure of the narrative ("The Parergon" 9).

Some may argue, and legitimately so, that to focus on the text preceding a partially blank or fully blank page may initially seem imprudent given the fact that most printed texts include blank pages to mark the beginning and ending of chapters. However, the premise with which Cixous begins *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage* suggests that blank pages may serve as a trace of

⁴⁶ Completely blank pages can be found on pages 45, 70, 77, 80, 96, 118, 128, and partially (half or less) blank pages can be found on pages 35, 39, 48-9, 52, 54, 57, 61, 64, 66, 67, 83, 86, 89, 93, 101, 105, 113, 116, 121 in the 2011 Gallimard edition of *Les hommes qui me parlent*.

previously written missing pages, rather than simply as pages without words and absent of meaning. As discussed in the previous section, Cixous commences her “deeply personal work of fiction” with a fragment she recalls from memory, a portion of a text supposedly written in the middle of the night and then misplaced (Rice, *Polygraphies* 29). Moreover, Cixous had already explicitly recognized the need for and importance of such textual pauses prior to writing *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*. In the previously mentioned interview with Mireille Calle-Gruber, Cixous insists that silence is required to hear the “vibrations” of a text (*Photos de Racine* 77). She lauds the poetic genre for its ability to incorporate silence into the narrative, and comments on the lack of silence in prose literature:

Pour que nous entendions les vibrations, il faut qu'il y ait du silence. La poésie travaille avec le silence: elle écrit un vers, suivi d'un silence, une strophe, entourée de silence. Autrement dit, il y a le temps d'entendre toutes les vibrations. Quant à la prose, une des différences avec la poésie, c'est justement qu'il n'y a pas de silences. La plupart du temps, les pages ne laissent que peu de place aux silences, ruptures, blancs. Idéalement, je préférerais écrire mes textes comme je les entends: c'est-à-dire comme poésie. Je les écrirais donc en colonne: à ce moment-là, il y aurait de l'espace blanc qui permettrait à la lecture d'entendre les vibrations des phrases. Si je ne le fais pas c'est que le volume du livre serait multiplié par quatre; ce serait un trop long poème. (75)

In her theorizations on the reading and writing process, Cixous specifies the forms in which she views silence physically on the pages, in the separations of lines or paragraphs, and in blank spaces. The blank space of the margin next to the column of words in a poem, according to Cixous, allows the reader to read and understand the “vibrations des phrases.” By using the word “vibration,” Cixous posits that language is not static; when accompanied by the aforementioned material

silences on the page, language reveals itself to be dynamic and more enriching than any image or idea that a single word might initially evoke for a reader. The constraints of publishing, however, limit Cixous's ability to reproduce this spaced-out version of her text for the reader. Calle-Gruber, Cixous's interlocutor in *Photos de racines*, notes that the blank spaces/pages in Cixous's writing serve to accentuate the writing *and* its message(s).⁴⁷ Cixous's view valorizes not only the space that the words take up on the page, but also the surrounding area that allows the reader to understand the significance of the chosen words. Alison Rice builds on Calle-Gruber's interview in order to discuss the role of silence in Cixous's oeuvre in her book *Time Signatures*. Rice approaches silence as a musical rest within the text, and notes that these rhythmic breaks are created in part by blank pages (211). By underscoring Cixous's own reflections on her writing which explicitly states her will to include the aesthetic of silence and thus poeticize her prose, Rice iterates the complexity of Cixous approach to writing, and legitimizes an analysis of the text followed by blank pages. Not only do the words carry meaning, but they also create meaningful movement on the page.

One such example comes on page thirty-eight of *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, where a completely blank page follows a passage describing a pivotal childhood memory. Before recounting the story, Cixous heightens the significance of the object in question by capitalizing the first letter, making it a proper noun: "le Vélo." Calle-Gruber views the capitalization as a gesture which imbues force into the named object, personifying it into a character (*Photos des Racines* 62). The infamous childhood bicycle, a long desired vehicle for both Cixous and her brother Pierre, is a girl's bicycle purchased by her mother as a birthday gift for her brother. This

⁴⁷ "Quant au blanc, au silence qui fait vibrer: le manque d'espace blanc est l'infirmité du roman. Toi, tu as des mètres, au sens poétique de la mesure: les aliénas mettent du blanc dans le texte, l'écriture fait colonne, fait voie, fait le passage" (Cixous qtd. in M. C-G. 76).

memory of “le Vélo” garners such importance because it was a vehicle meant for her as well, but ends up being an object that separates her from her brother. As Cixous and her brother recount their childhood memories, Pierre accuses young Cixous of never really knowing Algeria, a deficit to which they both attribute to the arrival of “le Vélo.” He tells her:

Toi, dès qu’il y a eu le Vélo, je t’ai vue le premier jour du vélo rentrer plus profondément encore dans la maison au fond de ta chambre que tu ne quittais presque jamais, te creuser un terrier ou une tanière si tu préfères dans les quelques livres que tu avais, ... (25)

Though momentarily insulted by the gift of a girl’s bicycle, Pierre eventually uses it to explore their neighborhood. Cixous also recognizes this moment as one which definitively separated her from her brother as a companion. She later reflects:

Ce vélo nous a vraiment séparés, pensai-je, jusque-là nous ne faisons qu’un frère avec sœur intérieure et inversement maintenant je n’étais plus que sœur sans frère intérieur, et comme le dit mon frère je m’enfonçai de mon côté dans mes rêveries solitaires. (53)

The bicycle forged a physical separation between the siblings when Pierre began using it to explore their neighborhood and young Cixous remained at home. It also marked an emotional parting of ways, one in which young Cixous retreated to the sanctuary of her books in order to survive.⁴⁸ Left behind, Cixous withdraws into her room and her books. “Le Vélo” thus becomes a vehicle through which Cixous experiences a gendered Algeria, one in which her brother was able to circulate throughout the city while she confined herself to the home. This spatial separation,

⁴⁸ “Je lisais au Clos-Salembier parce qu’il était absolument impossible de survivre sans livre, c’est-à-dire de vivre sans lumière, sans esprit, sans réalité sans sommeil sans paix sans pain puisque tout ce qui se passait devant et derrière le portail enchaîné était cri folie idiotie ténèbre lancements de pierre et de terre” (Cixous 82-83).

represented concretely on the page via blank spaces, blank pages, and ellipses, repeats abstractly throughout the narrative as a characteristic of the settings of Cixous's childhood memories.

Cixous addresses the complex nature of this separation from her brother again later in the text when referring to the gate of their home as an access point to the outside world for her brother, while it remains a method of confinement to the home for her. She writes:

Entre nous le portail: Nous? Je veux dire que ce nous autres que le portail s'est mis à séparéunir en ces petites agonies quotidiennes qui sont pour nous-même—mon frere-ce-qui-reste-du-Chien-et-moi-l'esprit-ou-le-genie-du-Clos-Salembier—et pour moi le résumé de ma Désalgérie. (69)

In addition to the blank spaces and pages, Cixous creates neologisms such as “séparéunir,” “Désalgérie,” and “Malgérien” that underscore her inner turmoil as a child. The first word, “séparéunir,” combines the verbs *séparer* /to separate, and *réunir* /to reunite. It is used to describe the actions of the iron doorway or gate to her home that separated her from and then subsequently reunited her with her brother every time he used the bicycle. By combining two antonyms into one word, Cixous highlights not only the dual role of the physical gate, but also the conflicting perspectives of same memory. Just as the gate let her brother out into the public space, so did it also keep her confined in the private space; one could also understand that the gate let the brother back into to the private space, and protected Cixous from the public space. The opposing meanings of the two words which Cixous combines to form the neologism “séparéunir” allow for multiple interpretations. It exemplifies a reappropriation and manipulation of language in order to adequately express both physiological and psychological movement. The second neologism, “Désalgérie,” adjoins the prefix “dé-” to the noun “Algérie,” which supposes some kind of

separation, opposition or going away from her mother country.⁴⁹ The noun is also preceded by the possessive adjective “ma”, which adds another layer of syntactical implications; with the combination of the two words “ma Désalgie,” Cixous once again creates a paradox of possessing a disintegrating or non-existent country. The blank space on page seventy gives the reader time to reflect on Cixous’s creative syntax as she compares her childhood experience in Algeria with that of her brother’s (see Figure 1).

⁴⁹ dé- : Préfixe (du préfixe latin *dis-*) entrant dans la composition de nombreux mots pour exprimer la cessation d'un état ou d'une action, ou l'état, l'action inverses : *défaire, dessouder, désintéresser*.
Read more at <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/d%C3%A9-/21722#YtOxaGA2sFOtZJJd.99>

les plus secrets de nos parents dis-je, venus secrets à eux-mêmes naturellement, car autrement ils ne se seraient jamais si parfaitement établis. L'un veut la légende et mouir, l'un veut la liberté sans l'avoir jamais demandée. Nous le savons, nous le savions, *dis-je* dis-je. Mais mon frère me demande d'employer la première personne. Dans le combat entre mes parents, combat jamais reconnu, dont mon frère Le Chien et moi nous étions les otages les plus ardents, chacun l'a emporté selon son âme et sa destination. Nous, venant d'Oran, mon frère et moi, nous nous attendions à trouver les arbres dans la villa, insistai-je. Tu rêves pour deux dit mon frère. Mais il ne demande pas la suppression du rêve.

Ce qui nous a fait pour le premier soir dit ma mère c'est le bruit infernal sur le vénéral. Tompère a pris un des arbres. En fin de compte c'étaient les chats sur les feuilles séchées.

Où a tout de suite eu des cambisoleurs la deuxième nuit. Le premier jour Omi et moi avons mis des draps sur une corde devant la cuisine et au matin ils n'étaient plus là.

Après cela ne s'est pas renouvelé, la troisième nuit tompère ayant été appelé pour une urgence dans le Ravin de la Femme Sauvage, pourtant il n'était plus généraliste. Ensuite tout était bien.

Les chats crevés, tu te rappelles, dis-je. Chaque fois le chat crevé, le chat du mois. Une puanteur lorsque nous réveillait. Une explosion. Mais le voisin se dégr-

chait d'enfouir le chat crevé dans le jardin et aide le mort recouvert de notre terre à puanteur s'arrêta comme un cri coupé.

Le carot d'auit du jardin, celui des dabbias et des chrysanthèmes, dis-je, rêves, haïsons vents, petits joû, dit mon frère, ce carot plein de chats crevés. Les pommes de terre, tomates, radis, poivrons, courgettes, aubergines, étaient de l'autre côté.

À d'auite le portail, à d'auite de la Grande Allée.

Entre nous le portail. Nous ? Je veux dire ce nous autres que le portail s'est mis à séparer en ces petites agonies quotidiennes qui sont pour nous-mêmes – mon frère-co-qui-reste-du-Chien-et-moi-l'espis-ou-le-général-du-Clos-Salembier – et pour moi le réamé de ma D'auite.

Au début dit ma mère j'avais cru que nous habitions à côté du Rabbin de la Femme Sauvage, encore un hasard sans explication.

Le vélo et la cissou sont les signes du Clos-Salembier pensé-je. À présent que ma pensée remonte au Clos-Salembier où je ne suis pas revenue depuis quarante ans et où je ne reviendrai jamais, pensé-je, qui vois-je briller d'un éclat mélancolique dans le ciel d'un noir laissant au-dessus du jardin ? Le Vélo et Le Chien. Je suis partie il y a quarante ans et même en pensée je n'y retourne plus, pensé-je assise sur le balcon de la maison qui a succédé à la maison du Clos-Salembier et sous d'un coup je m'aperçois après quarante années que ma maison me rappelle la maison du Clos-Salembier c'est la vénéral, c'est la même allée que la Grande Allée, c'est le portail, je ne l'avais jamais remarqué, c'est exactement la même mais sans le Chien sans le Vélo sans père sans mère sans enfants, c'est l'ombre d'elle-même et je ne l'avais jamais remarqué. J'étais partie décidée à ne plus jamais y revenir, pensai-je, mais le revenir n'est pas ce que l'on croit, ni la mort, ni l'importance. À présent, à peine ma pensée s'en-dit soumise accidentellement vers l'Algérie, à cause de ce terrible accident de papier qu'assieds ils sont là : Le Chien et Le Vélo, intacts, moins plus vivants que jamais. Toujours à l'endroit de vie et de mort.

Figure 1

Scholars Laurie Corbin and Morag Shiach have also interrogated Cixous's innovative linguistics and the ways in which she adjusts vocabulary to better suit her message. Corbin understands this "play with words and rhetorical figures" as a means to "emphasize... divisions in identity" (814). Cixous admits to these "divisions" or disconnections throughout *Les rêveries*. Shiach, for her part, underscores Cixous's complex use of language in her writing and Cixous's attention to the material aspects of a text:

Language, for Cixous, is not simply a medium for the expression of ideas and images which have their origins elsewhere. Rather, language is a material form, where signifiers, and particularly sounds, create meanings that proliferate, exceed the resources of the descriptive, offer recognitions and pleasure. (69-70)

The significance of the "material form" highlighted by Shiach then suggests that structure and paratextual elements that surround that language used in Cixous' text also play an essential role in creating "meanings that proliferate." Not only is the placement and manipulation of words an integral part of the message, but also the placement of the paragraphs within the chapter and on the page. And without the blank page that follows, which creates a concrete, visible silence within the text, the reader has less space to process the nuances, or as Cixous would say, to "hear the vibrations," of Cixous's stylistic language.

Devi, too, delves into the materiality of language via the printed words on the page. Whereas Cixous creates neologisms to iterate her conflicted identity, Devi manipulates the typography to express ideas that language cannot. Towards the end of *Les Hommes qui me parlent*, Devi writes a passage in which the mere consideration of not being a writer leads to a paragraph in which the typed language deteriorates to the point of being nonsensical and incomprehensible (see Figure 2). She writes:

Ils sont aux écoutes, et il y a du monde derrière. Ils vous entourent, vous serment, vous prodiguent leurs faveurs et au moment où vous commencez à leur faire confiance, ciao! ils vous tombent dessus et vous voilà comme Tonton Macoute, à leur service. À plat ventre devant eux, caresseur et domestique, propagateur du pareil au même. On trouve des empreintes digitales de Tonton Macoute sur tous les malheurs de l'homme. Il en a fait des succès littéraires.

« Vous n'avez aucune idée de la difficulté de ma situation. Je pourrais, semblerait-il, ne rien écrire et ne rien publier, par refus du genre, mais ce serait là encore un poème, un aveu de secrète poésie. Il y aurait là romantisme, gesticulation, sensiblerie et aspiration, des attitudes et des poses typiquement littéraires. Ne pas écrire, par principe et par dignité, par objection de conscience, il n'y a pas plus livresque et plus bêtant-lyrique, comme mode d'expression et acte de foi. »

Recopiant les mots de cet homme aux yeux fous, aux yeux d'or, je me mets à transpirer, comme prise de fièvre. Il s'est battu contre l'écriture. Flaubert a rugie écrivant. Céline a excrété sa haine de l'homme comme pour renier tout ce qu'il avait écrit. Joyce a accouché de son dernier livre quasi aveugle et dans un langage incompréhensible.

Tout cela indique leur constatation finale : il est impossible d'écrire.

142

arr et e dot qu'au mnpoms ea, l'esèrot et é'prjo-
gpogagj, ke saasi y faoe.

Soééaite rîgacraobbotaeeêlêkemeasrair oem dore
de ocèrjendalêbe em tpit aa.

Voilà cequ ôécirait lea pseudo.

Un sac d'immités.

Ainsi, il a besoin de moi pour gérer mes mains. Il a besoin de moi pour maîtriser le stylo ou le clavier. J'aurais aimé fermer les yeux et le laisser écrire et voir, pour lui-même, qu'il ne pourrait rien communiquer sans moi. Tu vois, toi qui te prends pour un être supérieur, toi qui me rends folle d'humiliation, toi qui es mon pseudo, tu n'es rien sans moi. Échec et mat.

Sauf, bien sûr, s'il cessait de me parler. S'il me quitte du jour au lendemain et me laissait me démerder dans un monde gris et nu, sans inspiration et sans couleurs. Je marcherais dans un chantier de construction bardé de ferraille et de moellons et de blocs de béton, un monochrome de gris, et les mots autres que ferraille moellons blocs de béton ne me viendraient pas. Aucune histoire ne se glisserait comme des serpents autour de ces choses. Aucune vie n'émergerait comme des insectes aux antennes curieuses, aux mandibules gourmandes. Je m'assierais là, sur une brique instable, je regarderais ce paysage d'anéantissement, et j'oublierais peut-être, comme lui, que je suis vivante.

Ionesco aussi disait cela : il m'est de plus en plus difficile d'écrire.

Pourquoi? Ce mot « pseudo » ne s'applique-t-il pas à tout ce que nous entreprenons?

Quand j'écrivais ma thèse de doctorat à Londres, je me sentais fausse, j'avais l'impression que c'était trop facile, que mon imagination et mon aisance avec la plume faisaient de mon entreprise une sorte d'acte de faussaire. Maintenant, je me demande aussi : serais-je un faussaire de l'écriture?

OK. Admettons. Je suis un faussaire. Rien de ce que j'ai écrit n'était neuf, n'était différent, n'était un pas en avant dans la littérature. Que des régurgitations de ce que j'avais lu avant. Que des mélanges d'émotions et de mots, et de temps en temps une intervention de cette autre chose, de cette autre créature qui me nargue, mon pseudo, qui me donne des pépites sans rien me donner d'autre. Admettons que j'arrête. Pour ne plus avoir à douter.

Et après? Cela ne changera rien au monde.

Si je décidais, comme Romain Gary de ne plus écrire, ou de ne plus utiliser mon alter ego?

Mais là, soudain, j'ai peur. J'essaie de me délivrer du moi physique qui pianote sur le clavier d'ordinateur, mais en m'abandonnant de la sorte, je commence à faire des fautes de rothoglyphes. Cela ne m'arrivait jamais avant. Dans cette seule phrase, tout est mêlé. Je perds l'esprit. J'd n'd aux phuy moi. Une autre qu'il se oque et s

143

Trois semaines et je ne suis pas fatiguée de ma solitude. Au contraire.

C'est bon d'être maître de soi-même.

Ne comprends-tu pas cela, toi qui m'aimes tant?

Chaque être humain a soif, non de la liberté elle-même, mais de sa possibilité. Il n'y a d'autre plaisir que celui de choisir.

La paix ne dure pas. Remous, disputes, faillite. Je n'ai pas fini d'avoir envie de mourir. Je n'ai pas encore appris à être heureuse. Hier, mon fils me dit : tu es partie, mais tu es aussi soucieuse. Pourquoi ne rigoles-tu pas?

Écrire ne me fait pas tellement rigoler, vois-tu. J'ai toujours la bouche qui penche. J'ai toujours les yeux tristes. J'ai toujours le ventre noué. Je suis la même. Pseudo ou pas, je suis toujours celle qui ne sait pas s'apprécier.

145

Figure 2

Devi's thoughts transpose into a jumbled mess of letters, misplaced punctuation, and inadequate spacing. Initially the spelling and punctuation errors do not impede comprehension: the expression "en m'abanonnant" (sic) can easily be interpreted as "en m'abandonnant." Even the sentence "Jd nd xuix pluylmoi" (sic), thanks to the spacing and the brain's ability to predict and organize language, can be understood to mean "Je ne suis plus moi." Once this declaration is made, however, that she is no longer herself, the typography becomes congested and convoluted to the point that even the most erudite reader struggles to glean what the author might be trying to write. As Devi considers excising her writer-self, the paragraph devolves into a syntactic breakdown that culminates in one long (non)word "Soéàiteràgacroabbotaeélklékemeasraitr" (sic) made up of thirty-eight letters and (seemingly) signifying nothing. Notably, the last line becomes incomprehensible due to (in part) the lack of spaces, or material silences, on the page. Not only does Devi demonstrate that writing functions as a means to explore the make-up of her identity, but she also deploys the material typography in such a way as to link her identity as a writer to the coherence of language. In other words, writing makes sense as long as Devi accepts herself as a writer. Through a passage in which the language is destroyed and communication becomes impossible, Devi demonstrates the interdependence between her writing-self and her identity as a whole.

Devi reiterates this inextricable link between her writing and her identity at various moments throughout the text. In a parenthetical note, (to herself and to the reader) Devi addresses the current interpersonal difficulty she is experiencing, as well as her struggle to write about it. In questioning the process, the motivation, the direction of such a personal piece, she is interrogating the direction of her life as well:

(Jusqu'ou aller dans un texte pareil ? Face au clavier, je me parle à moi-même, je livre de moi tout ce que j'ai envie de livrer. Mais tout écrivain pense à un moment donné à la publication. Et c'est là que cette mise à nu de soi, cette confession, ce déballage livresque devient terrifiant ou grotesque. Mais les doigts continuent de poursuivre leur va-et-vient, le cliquetis des ongles sur les touches continue de se faire entendre, l'acte d'écriture se poursuit malgré soi et on se dit, avec résignation, que l'on verra après. Après quoi ? Après.)
([sic] 65-66)

Writing in such a moment of raw emotion, and showing awareness of the vulnerability she will be opening herself up to once this manuscript, this text that she desperately needs to write but finds almost impossible to do, functions allegorically alongside the disruptive conversations and life choices that she is making as she is writing. She fortifies this connection later in the text through the French homonym “livre,” which can represent a conjugation of the verb “livrer / *to deliver, to reveal,*” as well as the noun “le livre/ *book.*” Although she doesn't refer to herself explicitly as a book, she incorporates the verb *livrer*, which when used in the present tense first person singular can be read cursorily as a similar, albeit rudimentary, statement: “je livre / I book.”⁵⁰ Devi's use of French homonyms exemplifies what Kumari Issur recognizes as Devi's manipulation of language in her article on feminist writing from Mauritius, and notes Devi's “travail minutieux sur la langue” contributes to the Mauritian literary aesthetic (116-7).⁵¹ The parenthetical interruption of the narrative represents a turning point for the narrator, one in which she accepts the connection between her identity and that of the book she is (writing).

⁵⁰ <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/livrer/47538?q=livrer#47466> 1/5/2016, 8 :40am

⁵¹ Mauritian literary aesthetic demonstrates the diverse pluralistic island society, incorporating as much violence and discussion of social unrest as it does the paradisiac setting.

This example of Devi's writing requires a Cixousian lens to extrapolate the body-book connection, one that Cixous has iterated explicitly and frequently throughout her career. Decades prior to her explanation of this notion in *Les rêveries*, she began developing it in earlier theoretical writings. With "Le rire de la Méduse" in 1975, Cixous insists that women write about themselves as a means to reclaim their bodies, to make their bodies heard, exclaiming that the text is in fact the body, that the body is the medium and the instrument.⁵² In her 1976 essay "La Venue à l'écriture," Cixous explains the visceral experience of writing:

Ecrire me traverse ! Cela me venait soudain. Un jour j'étais traquée, assiégée, prise. Cela me prenait. J'étais saisie. D'où ? Je n'en savais rien. Je n'en ai jamais rien su. D'une région dans le corps. Je ne sais pas où elle est. « Ecrire » me saisissait, m'agrippait, du côté du diaphragme, entre le ventre et la poitrine, un souffle dilatait mes poumons et je cessais de respirer. (17)

She likens the sudden and uncontrollable urge to write to the involuntary movements regulated by the autonomic nervous system, such as breathing and reflexes. By using words such as *agripper*, and *diaphragme*, she weaves together the notion of writing as breathing; as respiration is essential to life, writing also takes on a vital role. As Cixous develops how her writing process functions, she states: "Je ne « commence » pas par « écrire » : je n'écris pas. La vie fait texte à partir de mon corps. Je suis déjà du texte" (64). Whereas Devi hints at the essential nature of writing to her life, Cixous boldly embodies it. Cixous replicates these claims of the intrinsic book-body link in *Les rêveries* when she recounts the feelings she experiences with regards to writing:

⁵² Commentary based on the following passages in Cixous's essay "Le rire de la Méduse: "Il faut que la femme s'écrive..." (39); "L'écriture est pour toi, tu es pour toi ton corps est à toi, prends-le" (40); "... en s'écrivant, la femme fera retour à ce corps qu'on lui a plus que confisqué..." (43); "Écris-toi: il faut que ton corps se fasse entendre" (43); "Texte, mon corps:" (44); "Il faut que la femme s'écrive par son corps" (48).

C'est comme un livre. Avant de l'écrire il est déjà là, on ne peut pas en parler, il n'est pas là, tout son être est un peu plus loin très près, à quelques jours et quelques mois en même temps absolument pas avant qu'il soit. Il lui arrive de s'annoncer de quelques pages, en voilà un, me dis-je, et je suis totalement bouleversée, prise de vertige, comme si l'esprit du livre s'était engouffré en tourbillonnant dans ma poitrine, est-ce le livre ? en tout cas c'est son souffle extravagant. Dire voilà un livre, je sens un livre m'envahir, je suis prise d'un livre, c'est une folie. Il ne faut pas le dire... Cela n'empêche pas de le sentir. (152-153)

Twenty-five years after theorizing a general need to write and how powerful the urge to write within her was, Cixous continues to be awestruck and physically overwhelmed by the texts within her body. Once again Cixous describes a lack of control, a dizzying invasion, a vertigo that sets in when a book makes itself known. Though Cixous portrays her writing as an instinctual and reflexive act, her use of metonymy, word-play and neologisms demonstrate the work of a very purposeful and controlled process.

Cixous's development of the corporeal relationship to literature resonates in Devi's writing as well. Devi too explores the autonomic reflexivity of writing, and more specifically that of sexual arousal. While the passages above most directly associate writing with breathing, there are several expressions, such as "engouffré" and "m'envahir" that also evoke the act of orgasm. Devi echoes Cixous's analogy as she herself describes the physical reflex of sexual climax through the manipulation of language. Using letters of the alphabet as corporeal metonyms, Devi plays with the two meanings of the French word "langue," *language* and *tongue*:

L'ange écrivait des livres qui donnaient envie de mourir. Le diable écrira-t-elle des livres qui donneront envie de vivre ? Quitte à mentir, pourquoi ne pas mentir beau, mentir doux, attirer souplement, charnellement, voluptueusement, le lecteur au cœur d'une fausse féerie?

Et maintenant, le diable vous emmènera-t-elle au lit avec des mots de nuit, des mots de caresses, des mots de désir, des mots d'extase ? Vous dira-t-elle : regarde la plus belle des choses, un corps de femme en attente, vêtue d'un sourire endormi et d'un voile de rêves chuchotés ? Suis du doigt les courbes ardentes, vois, il y est écrit des mots, des lettres, des pentes, des sinuosités, des anfractuosités, un m, un u, deux o, va vers eux et prononce les lettres et les mots en désordre avec désinvolture ou dans un langage inconnu, celui effleuré et palpitant du corps, suis son m de ta bouche, épouse son u de ton i, ouvre l'o plus large qu'un sourire, explore ce qui se trouve de l'autre côté, de l'autre côté des lettres se trouve une verve vorace et chaude, volage et vive, les lettres vont bientôt crier si tu continues à les former de ta bouche et les mots vont bientôt brûler, les phrases vont jaillir en une source blanche et translucide, le livre deviendra un séisme qui fera trembler tout ton corps, et à la fin, à la fin, ce qui naîtra, neuve et épicée, de notre rencontre, sera la langue. (210-211)

This passage ends Devi's narrative of self-reflection; she began *Les hommes* by wondering if she could transform herself into a monster, and once she has analyzed the failures of her constant attempts to be a perfect angel, she allows herself to venture to the other side and become the devil. In addition to conjuring a vision of a book as a naked and aroused body, Devi also alludes to the historical reception of the novel form and its subversive potential to the fabric of society. The ending of *Les hommes* represents in many ways the culmination of Devi's reappropriation of the erotic female body, a project begun earlier with *Indian Tango*.

What these women are really punctiliously describing is their self-creation through the act of writing. The compulsion to type on the keyboard without thinking or create words to express an existence in between languages develops into a life of its own, the identity that had been waiting in the body all along. Lionnet recognizes this relationship between genre, writing, and the body

when she concludes her book *Autobiographical Voices* by writing: “Indeed what we can learn from autobiographical writings is a new way of listening for the relational voice of the self, the self is us “of woman born,” which becomes progressively alienated in language when culture, ethnicity, and historical contradictions inscribe their identifying codes on our bodies” (248). With such strong connections to the nascent quality of silence, and such attention to the materiality of silence, it is no surprise that each writers considers herself part of her books.

Not only do both of these women manipulate the material structure of the text in order to underscore various aspects of the narrative and to show how writing plays an essential role in how they understand their own respective identities, but they also incorporate discussions about the symbolism of iconic garments within their respective cultures: the veil and the sari. The cultural capital silently intertwined in the threads of these two vestments differs significantly in appearance; whereas the Muslim veil worn in Algeria is often white and can cover all but the woman’s eyes, the sari worn by Indo-Mauritian women comes in bright colors and envelops primarily the woman’s torso and shoulders. The covering of the woman’s body becomes an expression of modesty as well as an indication of uncontrollable sexuality, a symbol of submission *and* a tool for rebellion. Positioned at critical moments during both Cixous’s and Devi’s narratives, the veil and the sari allow these women writers to reflect on their personal views of gender and identity. Still, both garments belong to women, and have become metonymical devices with which represent exoticism and sexism within their respective societies, and perhaps more prevalently in literary depictions of Algeria and Mauritius read in the Western world. Some versions of Muslim veil, including the niqab and burka, cover the mouth and the entire face respectively, visibly silencing the women that wear them. The sari, wrapped around the torso and shoulder of a woman,

covering much of the upper body while at the same time revealing some parts. Both create a visual tableau of a garment that ties a woman up in some way. As a result, we the readers are then forced to question broader understandings of women's identity in Algerian and Mauritian cultures, and how clothing shapes this knowledge.

In Frantz Fanon's 1959 essay "L'Algérie dévoilée," he examines the objectification of the veiled Algerian women by the colonizer in Algeria during the 1950s, the French colonial propaganda to unveil the female population, as well as the manipulation of the French colonizer by both veiled and unveiled Algerian women. According to Fanon, a veiled Algerian woman is both weak and strong; an unveiled Algerian woman is timid as well as ostentatious. Towards the end of the *Les rêveries*, Cixous describes a horrible accident in which a young Muslim girl's headscarf gets caught on an amusement park ride, resulting in the dissection of her body. This anecdote additionally posits a bifurcation of the self in the abstract; the violent event did not happen directly to Cixous's body, and yet the trauma of witnessing such an occurrence dramatically affects her. It is once again an instance where Cixous feels divided; she is not the young woman who was literally torn apart because her veil gets stuck in an amusement park ride, but she survives the incident as a young girl who now feels figuratively veiled and cut in two. Cixous remarks: "Un affreux sentiment de délivrance me perce. J'ai l'existence coupée en deux. [...] Depuis l'accident quelque chose en moi reste voilé" (145-6). Cixous uses the image of the head scarf as a metaphor for the now hidden, silenced part of identity. This synesthetic rhetorical gesture allows the reader to visualize the silenced memory of the traumatic accident through the image of a veiled Cixous. The accident makes Cixous aware of her divided identity: as a non-Muslim non-Arab, the metaphorical appropriation of the veil symbolizes Cixous's personal conflict of belonging and not belonging to Algeria. For Cixous, being "veiled" connects her to her native land, while at the same time

separating her from her past childhood innocence. With the anecdote about the young Muslim woman dissected by her veil in *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, Cixous returns to the image of destruction to metaphoricize her identity as a young Jewish woman in colonial Algeria, and the birth of her writing-self within the silent space of her reaction to witnessing such an event. Though Cixous herself does not wear an actual veil, it still plays a central role in her discussion of identity formation. The anecdote's presence in the text also suggests, however, that the part of Algeria that remains in Cixous's consciousness is that of a country itself torn between colonial Catholic French and independent Muslim Algerian identities.

While the veil in Cixous's text leads to annihilation, division, and obfuscation, the sari chez Devi provides a protective barrier behind which she is able to reconcile her many selves. As the narrative of *Les hommes* progresses, Devi finds herself in a new apartment away from her husband and son. Though dejected by the separation from her family, she tries to make the space feel like a home. Devi repurposes old saris in order to decorate the bare apartment, an act which immediately breathes a new energy into the writer:

Je transformerai mes vieux saris en rideaux pour cette maison—a gauzy and radiant fabric.
L'espace au milieu du séjour restera libre pour que je puisse danser. Cette soudaine liberté
me fait trembler. Ma peau vibre. Une bouffée de sensations qui se transforment en
sensualité m'envahit. J'ai cinquante-trois ans et la peau douce de ma reconquête de la vie.
(120)

Devi may have in the past seen the wearing of the sari as part and parcel to the exoticist image of her writer-self as encouraged by her publishers, but it now performs a cocoon-like role that will

allow her to develop and grow into her next stage of being.⁵³ Rather than limit her movement, as a wrapped sari can sometimes do, the sari curtains become a protective fabric within which Devi can move and explore her individual identity.

In her article “Cinq mètres d’ordre et de sagesse,” Françoise Lionnet develops the various meanings of the motif of the sari, and the implications and applications within Devi’s narratives. Lionnet recognizes the many layers on which Devi’s writing operates throughout her oeuvre, and underscores Devi’s poetic aesthetic and the self-reflexive voice found therein. The use of the sari in *Les hommes qui me parlent* confirms Devi’s engagement with and subversion of the sari’s symbolism. Rather than reiterate the sexualizing and objectifying nature that the sari can possess, Devi deploys the sari as a means to self-realization. She writes:

Réagencer mon temps, ma vie, moi. Reprendre le chemin de la connaissance. Savoir ce que je veux, ce que j’aime, ce qui me plaît. Le sari jaune masquant la fenêtre de ma chambre crée de surprenants reflets. Mes saris transformés en rideaux... Est-ce symbolique? (121-122)

Devi underscores her own agency through her ability to repurpose her old saris. In addition, she continues to maintain a constant state of questioning, a space open to new possibilities rather than the re-creation of a hierarchical hegemonic space where some answers are right and powerful, and others are not. Devi’s sari curtains protect her from the outside world, make her feel safe and comfortable, creating an environment in which she can write her way through this pivotal moment in her life. It also serves as a reminder to Devi of the position she finds herself in, how she has acted in the past, and how she wishes to deal with life in the future. In stark opposition to Cixous’s

⁵³ Devi, Ananda. Class Lecture French 207 Seminar with Françoise Lionnet Royce Hall. UCLA, 10/21/2010.

violent “veil” dissection, Devi deploys the iconic Indian feminine apparel to explore its role in her identity reformation. As curtains, the saris protect Devi from the outside world, and allow her to focus on how she sees herself. Much in the same way that Lionnet reads the sari as a leitmotif connecting the novels within Devi’s oeuvre up until 2010, the sari curtains envelop all the versions of Devi’s person and make her feel whole again. *Les hommes qui me parlent* maintains the symbolism with which the sari “reveals while it conceals” and “makes silence visible,” inspiring questions about the relationship between the clothing on a woman’s body, and by extension, the non-verbal display of autonomy (Lionnet, “Cinq mètres” 24-25).

The sari and the veil manifest the most concrete symbols of material silence for Devi and Cixous respectively, and help develop the interwoven book/body concept, which both authors use to demonstrate how integral writing is to their existence. Both writers are meticulous in their word choice, though to different ends. Whereas Cixous’s neologisms demonstrate a playful, confident deployment of language, Devi’s approach shows a subtler manipulation of language. This difference can be the result of the authors’ respective experience and age, as well as individual aesthetic. Moreover, neither author limits herself to use of the commonplace meaning derived from vocabulary, syntax and understood grammatical structures in order to create meaning; they both incorporate blank pages, spaces, and typography as a means. These multivalent approaches then proliferate the opportunity to explore the meanings of the autobiographical genre and the female gender.

Le seuil de moi: Threshold of the Self

As I hope to have demonstrated, the writing process for both H el ene Cixous and Ananda Devi is surrounded by and constantly entangled with silence, and is essential to the creation and

dissemination of their respective stories. By tracing the silences throughout the text, including the blank pages, the moments when the word silence appears, and the reference to silent moments, I show how Cixous and Devi explore the development of identity, the writing process, and the coming into being through the writing process itself. The silences allow for universal understanding while at the same time maintaining the specificities as authors from former French colonies. While unique in detail, both Cixous and Devi have included characteristics to the autobiographical genre, one which serves not to simply catalog past events and memories, but rather one that catalogs the process of identity formation through autobiographical writing.

When taking into consideration Cixous's and Devi's careful deployment of silences, *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage* and *Les hommes qui me parlent* exemplify the trajectory Lionnet prescribes with regards to autobiographical texts and women writers:

Listening to "confidences" (reading autobiographical novels) propels the hearer into a dialogical encounter: one that can only empower her to speak, to write.

But being empowered to write is but the beginning. The female subject must now learn to create new images and to engage in a dialogue with the more familiar ones of literary history. And her new images have to be vivid enough to superimpose themselves on the old myths they mean to transform and sublimate. (PR 215)⁵⁴

Cixous reworks Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, echoed in the title of the text and which includes the varied perspectives of a young Jewish woman of German descent growing up in colonial French Algeria (53). She makes Montaigne's claim her own; he was the material of his book, her skin was the book (*Les rêveries* 72, 93, 125). Devi, for her part, reaches farther back

⁵⁴ Lionnet's commentary refers specifically to Marie-Thérèse Humbert's *A l'autre bout de moi*, but can largely refer to the need within Mauritian and Francophone literary traditions to break silences and share stories.

into the literary canon and rewords Descartes famous proposition “Je pense donc je suis” into “J’écis, donc je mens,” bringing into question the philosophy of human existence as well as the relationship between the author and genre/writing (*Les hommes* 110). One of the more standout sections in *Les hommes* begins with a comparison to Romain Gary; the mere thought of giving up writing as he contemplated turns Devi’s text into nonsense (85). Devi’s textual deterioration, discussed earlier in this chapter, occurs with the knowledge that Gary did not actually stop writing, but rather published under a pseudonym, and subsequently won the Prix Goncourt for an unprecedented second time.⁵⁵ These literary allusions on the part of both authors, understated and unexplained, “make their texts a *métissage* of voices and textures,” and silently weave their stories into the fabric of French language literature (Lionnet, *AV* 95).

Emblematic of the unifying diversity of Francophone women writers, Cixous and Devi demonstrate the intersection and overlap of a variety of writing tactics. They are similar in their use of intertextuality, play with language and syntax, self-reflexive and self-aware writing; these qualities show the reader the thought processes of the authors, relating the constant questioning and instability of identity that Francophone women face. Cixous and Devi highlight their own experiences, lived, imagined and read. Both incorporate childhood experiences which shed light on the environment in which they grew up. Both discuss their literary influences and having the compulsion to write. Both reflect on feelings of isolation and mutism, and how they access their voices through writing.

The differences lie in their perspectives. In *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, Cixous frames childhood anecdotes with reflections on the writing process, and how her writing identity came to be. The memories are framed within considerations about the process of writing and its

⁵⁵ See pages 84 & 85 of this dissertation.

role in her personal development. Devi approaches the exploration of her writing identity from a different standpoint in *Les hommes qui me parlent*; a personal dilemma leads her to reflect on her life up until a life-changing argument. The writing that becomes the text functions as a way to deal with the interpersonal issues at hand, both between Devi and her family, but also Devi and herself. By cataloguing of past personal and literary experiences, Devi considers who and what she truly is, and who and what she would like to be. Even with all the differences, both *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage* and *Les hommes qui me parlent* provide opportunities for the authors to talk about themselves in ways that they had not explicitly done before. Through their respective texts, Cixous and Devi develop their notion of an alternate “writer” identity, one that consumes them during the moments leading up to the act of writing (Cixous 17; Devi 9-10, 40, 119). During these times, the writer-self is all-encompassing and yet somehow concurrently separate from the respective identities of Hélène Cixous and Ananda Devi.

The space that silence creates within Cixous’s and Devi’s respective texts functions as a threshold upon which they confirm and reaffirm their multiple subjectivities. The threshold created by silences acts as a revolving door, one in which fully formed, though maybe as-yet unrecognized identities, come back to the text, in-turn inspiring more writing and more self-exploration. This threshold can be physically seen in the blank spaces on the printed page, material representations of the metaphysical space in which the authors and readers gather in discovery. This passageway is not one direction, nor is it chronological. As such, this *seuil de moi*, constructed as a result of the generative silences, abstract and material, in the work of these Francophone women writers, provides space where one can write in order to discover one’s identity.

For both of Hélène Cixous and Ananda Devi, silence is the beginning of writing, a constant presence in the writing process and an instrument to express their voices, all the while acting as an aide-mémoire of oppression and subjugation suffered by women in the past. They have found a way of navigating what Brozgal calls the “methodological gridlock” of Francophone postcolonial literature through its deconstruction and reconfiguration of the autobiographical by highlighting the ever-presence of the author *and* her interaction with the reader throughout the text (Brozgal 55-56).⁵⁶ These textual interactions can only result in an authentic reading experience, one that is tangled up with fiction, thus contesting the very idea that they are autobiographical or “foundational” (Brozgal 56). Rather, they celebrate the notion that “self-writing becomes self-invention,” for both author and reader (Lionnet, AV 33). In recognizing the quiet that inspires writing and the valorization of the act of writing, Cixous and Devi demonstrate the productive significance of silence in Francophone women’s autobiography.

⁵⁶ Lia Brozgal uses this terminology specifically in reference to Albert Memmi work, and more generally Maghrebi literature in *Against Autobiography*. However, I believe it can justifiably apply to francophone autobiography in general. She writes: “...the story of Maghrebi literature trapped in the “ghetto of autobiography” finds its origins in three conflicting critical trends existing in a state of methodological gridlock: the denial of the possibility of authentic francophone postcolonial autobiography; the assertion that autobiography—and not fiction—is the sole literary genre that the francophone postcolonial subject is capable of producing; and the premise that autobiography serves as a foundational genre in the domain of francophone postcolonial literature” (55-6).

CHAPTER THREE

Mouvement du silence:

Journeys through Silence with Leïla Sebbar and Shenaz Patel

As a continuation of my project to make connections between Algerian and Mauritian female Francophone literatures, and to show how they are influenced both by their respective country's varied and complex colonial heritage(s), this chapter will analyze and compare two texts that address interpersonal and historical silences. In *La Seine était rouge* (1999), Sebbar presents the story of an adolescent girl of Algerian origin living in Paris in the 1990s, who seeks to understand what happened the night of the Algerian protest on October 17th, 1961. Through transmission of the polyphonic narrative, Sebbar questions the silence surrounding the violent events on French soil during the Algerian War, and she does this through her deployment and manipulation of silence within the text. Similarly, Shenaz Patel incorporates various forms of silence in her story in order to reveal the negative effects of forced deportation, as well as to help those involved reconcile with their pasts. Patel's novel, *Le Silence des Chagos* (2005), recounts through various perspectives the deportation of the Chagossian population from their island homes to Mauritius in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a result of government deals which secured Mauritian independence from Great Britain in 1968. Both texts address real-life historical tragedies that were kept from widespread knowledge in order to cover-up the mistreatment of and discrimination of the state. For Leïla Sebbar and Shenaz Patel, silence plays an integral role in the unveiling and preservation of their respective narratives.

Given the unspoken nature of these two events, however, why might it be productive to look at silence in these two novels? As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, Dale

Spender's 1980 book *Man Made Language* reminds us that "One of the first steps which feminists took in constructing their meaning was to document the absence/silence of women, for – paradoxically perhaps – this was one means of making females visible" (65). As a continuation, then, of the legacy of the feminist movement, I engage in the 'perhaps paradoxical' task of peeling back the layers of silence in *La Seine était rouge* and *Le Silence des Chagos*.⁵⁷ Through their writing, Sebbar and Patel nuance and complicate the official accounts of the devastating events that took place in France and Diego Garcia, respectively. Through the comparison and analysis of Sebbar's and Patel's texts, I aim to 'construct meaning' by recognizing and interpreting their use of silence.

Without denying Adrienne Rich's claims regarding the erasure of women's literary and societal contributions, nor the equation of silence with oppression, what interests me here is the possibility that the prevalence of silence in these literary works functions as a productive aspect in the literary representation of women and their experiences.⁵⁸ While descriptions of silenced women reminds us of a disregarded past, I contend that it is possible and necessary to view silence as a productive narrative tool. Several critics have already brought attention to the ways in which female characters use silence to exhibit their agency.⁵⁹ In Françoise Lionnet's book *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*, she analyzes Guadeloupian author Myriam Warner Vieyra's novel *Juletane* for the ways in which it deploys silence as "retreat" and "escape" for the

⁵⁷ The primary texts will be most often referred to by shortened version of the titles, *La Seine* and *Le Silence*.

⁵⁸ See the discussion in the introduction to this dissertation, as well as in the collection of Adrienne Rich's essays from 1966-1978, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, pp.11 & 204.

⁵⁹ Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin's anthology *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism* (1994) includes a collection cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural essays treating this topic.

female protagonists, a condition that protects them (115). In this example, even though the character is placed in a psychiatric hospital, she still exerts control through her refusal to speak. Magali Compan, in her article on Patel's 2003 novel *Sensitive*, cites violence, murder, and subsequent written confession in French in her personal journal ("le récit non-verbal), as acts of resilience in the protagonist Fi's adverse world (142-3). *Sensitive* represents the journal of a young girl named Fi who recounts the events in her life to an imaginary friend Bondié. In this journal, Fi discusses her life leading up to a suicide attempt. Compan also understands, however, that mutism (the inability to speak) and the limits of language impede the movement of such defense mechanisms. Compan's analysis underscores the multivalent and sometimes contradictory aspects of silence, for "le récit non-verbal" is considered a defense mechanism, whereas "mutisme" is considered to be an obstruction of said mechanism.⁶⁰ Rather than being an oppressive force, silence becomes an incipient energy that leads to self-expression. For both Sebbar and Patel, silence takes on many forms, all of which make up what I refer to as *productive silence*.⁶¹

This analysis proposes that silence performs a communicative function, both between the characters as well as between the author and the reader. Silence is particularly pertinent when considering the traumas of the massacre of peaceful protestors in Paris, and the forced displacement of three thousand people from their home on the Chagossian Islands, the details of which received little media attention that often misinformed the public. By analyzing the

⁶⁰ "Il nous est donné ici possible de comprendre l'écriture, la langue française, le récit non-verbal, la violence, et finalement le meurtre comme actes de résilience face à l'adversité du monde dans lequel Fi évolue. En tant que témoignage cryptique, traduisant la nécessité de raconter l'indicible, chacune de ces formes d'expression devient un système de défense précieux et un fragile mécanisme de résistance. Exclusion, incarcération, mutisme, limite de la langue, indifférence : nombreux sont, cependant, les grains de sable qui viennent enrayer le mouvement fluide des rouages de ces mécanismes" (Compan 142-3).

⁶¹ Please see detailed description in Chapter One of this dissertation.

manifestation of silence in the para-text, the structure of the text, as well as within the content of the narrative itself, we will see how Sebbar and Patel rework silence in a paradoxical fashion, in order to render silence an attribute and not simply a default status of oppressed peoples. This chapter will examine how to *entendre*, to hear and to understand, silence in both *La Seine était rouge* and *Le Silence des Chagos*.

Débuts: Beginnings and Silence

The choice to address silenced stories from their respective national histories is just the first and most obvious aspect of silence in Sebbar's and Patel's historically-based novels. The role of silence becomes established for both authors from the very outset of their respective narratives. Through the titles, sub-titles, para-text and introductions to the characters, Sebbar and Patel demonstrate the integral and incipient nature of silence within their texts.

The impetus to acknowledge the significance of silence comes firstly from the authors themselves. In an interview with Rohini Bannerjee, Patel explains that “la littérature peut être un autre moyen de parler de l’actualité, en allant plus loin, notamment dans l’aspect humain qui est parfois négligé,” and through this medium she is able to “donner la parole autres” and “ tenter de dire l’indicible ” (199–200). The silence that compels Sebbar's oeuvre stems from her family background. Sebbar was born in 1941 in Algeria to an Algerian father and French mother, relocating to France in the late 1950s during the middle of the war. In Anne Donadey's book comparing Sebbar and Assia Djebar's novels, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds*, she notes that Sebbar's compulsion to write finds its origins in not being able to speak her father's mother tongue, Arabic: “... she has said that it was the deprivation of her father's language and country that compelled her to write” (xix). Sebbar's inability to speak Arabic,

together with the general taboo of discussing the Algerian War, situate Sebbar's texts in several layers of silence.

Sebbar's historically based novel, *La Seine était rouge*, recounts the life of a young French girl of Algerian origin, Amel, who hears for the first time about her family's experiences during what Jean-Luc Einaudi termed the "Battle of Paris." On the evening of October 17th, 1961, an initially peaceful protest of 30,000 Algerians in the streets of Paris ended in the deaths of 200-300 people, facts that were misrepresented in the French media in the days and months following the October 1961 protest (Einaudi 215-321).⁶² The novel begins with a conversation between the teenage protagonist and her grandmother Lalla. Amel feels alienated from her mother, Noria, and her grandmother, because they often speak in Arabic, and Amel does not understand. Whenever Amel asks what her mother and grandmother are talking about, both women refuse to share and always reply that they will tell Amel "au jour dit" (16, 19). As a result of this deferral, Amel decides to run away from her home in Nanterre, a Parisian suburb. She then seeks refuge with her friends Louis and Omer, the sons of her mother's friends. It turns out that Louis has made a film about the events of the 17th of October, 1961, one in which Noria, despite her silence on the subject with regards to her daughter, bears witness to her experiences on that night. It is thus through the viewing of Louis's documentary that Amel first hears what happened to her mother during the protests in Paris. Overwhelmed by this discovery, and in search of a means to more intimately understand her family's experiences, Amel and Omer create a modern version of the 1961 protest

⁶² There is serious debate among scholars of the October 17th, 1961 protests in Paris as to the actual number of deaths that occurred, as well as to the use of the term "massacre." Jim House and Neil MacMaster's book *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (2006) catalogs the scholarship that deals specifically with protest, including work by Michel Levine, Ali Haroun, Maurice Papon, Jean-Luc Einaudi, Jean-Paul Brunet, Sylvie Thénault, Brigitte Gaïti, the Dieudonné Mandelkern, Jean Geronimi, as well as their own 2002 research (6-10).

by retracing the steps of the protesters and visiting the monuments throughout Paris where they gathered one that rainy evening in 1961. Within the narrative, Sebbar juxtaposes chapters that recount Amel and Omer's 'monumental' voyage around the city with chapters of witness testimonies about the 1961 protest that appear in Louis' documentary. Narrative voice and time change constantly, going from third-person omniscient to reported speech in the first-person, from the present to the past. The story ends with a reunion of the three friends, Amel, Omer and Louis, in Egypt, where they discuss their future creative and commemorative plans.

Prior to *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar published several novels addressing complex identities such as her own, including the *Shérazade* trilogy and *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique* (1984).⁶³ Donadey uses Henry Rousso's concept of the France's "Vichy Syndrome" as a model for what she terms France's "Algeria syndrome," and situates both Sebbar's and Djébar's writings into the four phases of literary production following the Algerian War.⁶⁴ For Donadey, Sebbar's texts from the 1980s "critically interrogated the continuing second phase of France's Algeria syndrome," and represented the repression, or silencing, of the trauma of the Algerian War (23-24). With Sebbar's 1999 text *La Seine était rouge*, "she participated in its third phase, that of historical rewriting," and

⁶³ *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982) ; *Les carnets de Shérazade* (1985) ; *Le Fou de Shérazade* (1991).

⁶⁴ "Historian Henry Rousso, in his book *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, used a similar argument regarding World War II. He argued that World War II is one of the "crises profondes de l'unité et de l'identité françaises" [deep crises in French unity and identity] (14); it is of the same magnitude as the French Revolution, the Dreyfus affair, and the Algerian war—each of which crises comes to be partially replayed in the subsequent one. He divided what he calls the "Vichy syndrome" into four phases, charting a movement from amnesia to obsession: the first phase is one of interrupted mourning (1944-54); the second (1954-71), one of repression (forgetting and amnesia), with a repetition of the trauma due to the Algerian war; the third (1971-74), a short phase of the return of the repressed and a shattering of established myths about the war; and finally, the last phase (in which we are still engaged), is one of obsession (20-21)." (Donadey 6-7)

created a short and rich text dedicated to representing and understanding the silences surrounding the violent 1961 protest (23-24).

Though the end of *La Seine était rouge* eventually culminates in renewed communication and memorialization, much of the text underscores the silence surrounding the October 17th protests. Karin Schwerdtner's article analyzes the various methods of transmission that Sebbar uses in the narrative to highlight the occult status of the event, and the silence and forgetting that accompanied it (1). Sebbar develops a motif of silence through the testimonies, inscriptions and audiovisual images; this demonstrates the immediate effect of silence following the 1961 protests, as well as the "long silence" that ensued for the next generation (3). The absence of discourse and dialogue at the start of the novel is then replaced by the compulsion to write new stories about war and conquest. This trajectory is emblematic of Sebbar's female characters according to Mary McCullough, who recognizes that they "refuse to be silenced" and thus "confer a legacy on their listeners" (121).

Similarly, Shenaz Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos* incorporates another example of an under-discussed historical event. Thousands of miles away and a decade later, the people of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean found themselves victim of the international treaty process that helped Mauritius gain its independence, the United Kingdom earn money, and the United States gain a military presence in a strategic part of the world. Without say or consent, an entire population was removed from their archipelagic home and forced to live in Mauritius. As a result, the United States would be able to completely occupy the islands to serve military and recreational purposes. The removal of the Chagossian people culminated in a 72-hour evacuation which ended in the burning and killing of hundreds of pet dogs who were not allowed to make the trip to Port Louis.

The deportation of the Chagossian people serves as the background and connecting element for a group of characters trying to understand their familial origins in *Le Silence des Chagos*. The narrative is told from several points of view, and jumps back and forth from the 1950s to the 1990s. One of the primary protagonists, Charlésia, is a Chagossian woman who becomes trapped on the island of Mauritius after arriving for a family health crisis. Raymonde's story recounts the forced evacuation of the Chagossian population in 1973, and the voyage that followed to Mauritius. On the journey to Mauritius, Raymonde gives birth to her son Désiré. His story is one of lost identity, and like Amel, Désiré sets off on a quest to rediscover his roots. The text culminates in an exchange between two main characters about what life was like on the Chagossian Islands prior to deportation in 1973.

Patel's narrative includes numerous perspectives of the evacuation, in addition to those of the protagonists mentioned above; this includes that of the British administrators charged with enforcing and informing the evacuation, as well as the boat that delivered many of the Chagossian evacuees. In Véronique Bragard's article "Murmuring Vessels: Relocating Chagossian Memory and Testimony in Shenaz Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos*," she reiterates that some of Patel's characters, are modeled after real people.⁶⁵ Patel's story weaves together the causes and effects of the treaty between Great Britain and Mauritius; in exchange for independence, Mauritius lost control of the Chagossian Islands, and took in its forcibly displaced population. Through the lives of characters with varying backgrounds, Patel explores the damage caused by silence while at the

⁶⁵ "As early as 1975, world-wide opinion was roused as to the plight of the Chagossians. Chagossian islanders have had to fight against the voices that claimed the territory was uninhabited or that they were only temporary workers. Charlésia, the character of Patel's novel, most evidently refers to Charlésia Alexis, who actively participated in the demonstrations of 1981 (several hundred Chagossian women sat and sang in front of the British High Commission in Port Louis) and hunger strikes that eventually led to 'talks' but also to Charlésia Alexis's brutal arrest" (Bragard, "Murmuring Vessels" 135).

same time making their stories heard, or as Kumari Issur poetically surmises in her review of Mauritian novels: “[Patel] donne voix à leurs amertumes en romançant le récit des faits réels recueillis auprès de certains d’entre eux” (117).

Not only does Patel voice the silences of the Chagossian deportees, but she also speaks the silence of the islands. This gesture begins with the title: *Le Silence des Chagos*. Guillemette Jeudi de Grissac reads the title as both an indication of the silenced voices of the Chagossian people, as well as an interpellation to authorities and readers alike to seek out and listen to their stories (504-505).⁶⁶ It also anthropomorphizes the islands by giving “les Chagos” the capacity to possess “le silence.” The rhetorical device emphasizes the centrality of the islands to the narrative, as well as the preeminence of silence as a motif in Patel’s novel.

Separated by blank pages, Patel begins telling the story of *Le Silence* by dedicating it to several people who served as models for the protagonists of the narrative. In the center of a mostly blank page, Patel writes:

À Charlésia, Raymonde et Désiré,
qui m’ont confié leur histoire.
À tous les Chagossiens, déracinés et déportés,
de leur île, au profit du « monde libre »...(7)

From the beginning of the narrative, the reader becomes aware (if she wasn’t already) that this group of people called “Chagossiens” had been taken away from their island home. The dedication

⁶⁶ “A l’inverse, le titre de l’œuvre la plus récente, *Le Silence des Chagos*, évoque l’impossibilité de faire entendre la voix. La polysémie du titre permet une lecture renvoyant à la fois à un fait naturel et général : il y a un silence spécifique aux îles de ce type ; à un emploi métaphorique annonçant le synopsis : Les Chagossiens ne peuvent faire entendre leur voix. Enfin ce titre interpelle les autorités responsables ainsi que les lecteurs : faudra-t-il encore longtemps faire silence sur la question des Chagos ? Il révèle aussi l’enjeu du livre : rompre le silence” (Jeudi de Grissac 504-5).

is then followed by a lyrical description of the Chagossian Islands, comparing them to drops of rain, evoking not only its geographical make-up, but also according an ephemeral quality to the islands and their people. Following this description of the Chagossian islands, Patel describes two children; one, in Afghanistan, watches his mother get wounded by bomb that drops from the sky; the other, in Mauritius, waits for hours with his mother at Port Louis, surrounded by tourists, as she stares off in the direction of Diego Garcia (10-11).

The last segment of the beginning resembles an archipelago; it contains several verses of a Chagossian song, in Kreol and French, sung by those exiled to Mauritius. It is identified at the bottom as an “Extrait de *Pays natal*, chanson composée et chantée par les Chagossiens en exil à Maurice” (13). On a mostly blank page in the right-center, it reads:

Létan mo ti viv dan Diégo

Mo ti kouma payanké dan lézer

Dépi mo apé viv dan Moris

Mo amenn lavi kotomidor

Quand je vivais à Diégo

J'étais comme un paille-en-queue dans les cieux

Depuis que je vis à Maurice

Je mène une vie de bâton de chaise (13)

There are several remarkable aspects to the small portion of “Pays natal” including at the beginning of Patel’s narrative. At first glance, the positioning of the selection resembles that of a dedication. Secondly, the song lyrics appear first in italic font in Kreol, the language in which they were sung, followed by the French translation in regular type; the excerpt serves as the first of example of the

intermingling of Kreol and French that Patel deploys throughout the text. Lastly, the song compares life on the Chagossian island of Diego Garcia to that of a tropical bird, and life after deportation to Mauritius to one of disorder and chaos.⁶⁷ The simile of the second verse evokes the freedom of a bird flying in the sky, while the metaphor from the fourth verse compares the exiled Chagossian to a servant who carries a master around in a chair, alternately busy and in a state of perpetual waiting, always at someone else's behest. Through the combination of the title, the dedication, the untitled preface, and the song excerpt, Patel presents the central conflicts that her novel will address: the deportation of the Chagossian people to Mauritius in the early 1970s, the parent-child relationships that struggle in the aftermath, and the legacy of suffering in silence that continues today as a result.

Like Patel, Sebbar's novel also traces the long-term effects of a traumatic past event, and how its lack of recognition can affect the younger generation in the present. At the outset of the *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar hints at the role of silence in the narrative with the subtitle, "Paris, octobre 1961". Thanks in great part to scholarship addressing the 1961 protest in Paris, many readers recognize the place and time as a metonym for the violent massacre of Algerians in Paris, an episode of French History. For those knowledgeable about the protest in Paris, it also serves as a reminder of the silence surrounding this occurrence during the Algerian War; both massacre and violent North African revolution were topics silenced in French discourse. Jim House and Neil MacMaster's 2006 book *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* explores the protest-turned-massacre in great detail, and they note that even the French government's recognition of

⁶⁷ Analysis based on French translation of song, and definition of idiomatic expression found at : <http://www.linternaute.fr/expression/langue-francaise/6545/mener-une-vie-de-baton-de-chaise/>

the event maintains an element of silence with regards to its culpability in the killing of hundreds of peaceful protestors (319).

To remedy the absence of actual tombstones, Sebbar begins *La Seine* by dedicating the text to the victims as well as those who had worked toward the memorialization and recognition of that night.⁶⁸ She writes:

Aux victimes algériennes d’octobre 1961 à Paris.

Au Comité Maurice-Audin

À Didier Daeninckx,

Jean-Luc Einaudi,

Elie Kagan,

Nacer Kettane,

Mehdi Lallaoui,

François Maspéro,

Georges Mattei,

Jacques Panijel,

Paulette Péju,

Anne Tristan. (9)

Similar to the obscurity of the subtitle, this list may not be familiar to the reader; at the time *La Seine était rouge* was first published in 1999, coverage of the events on the night of October 17th, 1961 had only recently been renewed in the French press. This was a result of two lawsuits: the

⁶⁸ A small placard was dedicated in 2001 by Parisian Mayor Bertrand Delanoë after the initial publication of Sebbar’s novel (Rice, “Rehearsing October 17,1961” 100).

1997 lawsuit against Maurice Papon for crimes against humanity during World War II, and the subsequent lawsuit against Jean-Luc Einaudi by Papon in 1999 (Einaudi 356-360). As a result of testimonies in these trials, Papon's role in "la Bataille de Paris" became public knowledge. Though the events surrounding the 1961 protest in Paris had begun to gain wider attention, the names in Sebbar's dedication still represented the select group who had long been lobbying for recognition of the massacre on French soil.

These paratextual elements support and maintain the critical role of silence in the narrative that is highlighted in the first line of *La Seine*: "Sa mère ne lui a rien dit, ni la mère de sa mère" (15). By including Amel, her mother and her grandmother in the same sentence, Sebbar underscores the motif of inherited silence. Anne Donadey observes the "intergenerational silence" and notes that "the personal silence echoes the general lack of public discourse about the Algerian War in France" (30). The absence of punctuation, in conjunction with use of common nouns and pronouns, generates an initial ambiguity that indicates that silence is at once specific to Amel's family, and also representative of a more general public silence. Moreover, the sentence itself is separated by a space from the following paragraph, highlighting the importance of the message, as well as the isolation and alienation that the silence causes. With this first sentence, Sebbar describes silence, depicts silence, and shows the interpersonal, intergenerational, and diegetic impact of silence.

The legacy of the "intergenerational silence" develops throughout the narrative, and culminates when Amel struggles to write her family a postcard to let them know that she is alive and well. She is convinced that her mother and grandmother will not understand, and that it is better to try to explain once she returns from her travels:

J'arriverai jamais. Ils me croiront pas. Ils penseront que je suis folle, ils comprendront pas. Je veux pas expliquer... Je leur dirai, quand je reviendrai. On pourra parler enfin. Je dirai que « le jour dit » est arrivé, que je l'ai vécu, j'ai appris la vérité, pas toute la vérité, que ce jour n'a pas été un jour de malheur comme le prédisait Lalla... En attendant, qu'est-ce que j'écris ? (115)

Maintaining the silence surrounding the experiences on the night of October 17th has now left Amel without the tools to communicate her own experience and understanding of the 1961 protests. She finally understands the notion of “au jour dit,” for she is unable to explain to her family what she has been going through, and how she plans to continue the process of understanding by travelling with Omer.

La mise en page silencieuse : Silent Design

Despite this driving force to break the silences surrounding the events of the October 17th protests, Sebbar nonetheless instills silence into her novel as a structural form. One material manifestation of silence as absence appears in the layout of the text. The chapters themselves are very short: between one and five pages. The entire text is only one hundred and twenty-five pages, twenty-three of which are blank; there is a substantial amount of pages where the reader doesn't read, or doesn't *hear*, anything. The act of reading the story for the reader thus becomes an imitation of Amel's experience in learning about the 1961 protests. On the one hand, looking at blank page after blank page recalls the absence of the story each time Amel's mother refuses to tell it, responding only with “au jour dit”. On the other hand, the empty pages represent the empty space on the monuments that Amel and Omer spray-paint in order to include Algerians in the memorialization of French history. Jonathan Lewis' article “Filling in the Blanks,” provides an

astute synthesis of research published on memory in Sebbar's text. He concurs with Michael Rothberg, Michel Laronde, and Anne Donadey that the "gaps and blanks" in *La Seine était rouge* demonstrate a refusal to recreate an artificial seamless narrative, a demonstration of the process of remembering, and a reappropriation of the dominant colonial narrative (309-310).⁶⁹ Lewis goes on to comment that the diverse memories within the text serve to emphasize "the silence and amnesia characteristic of this past" (313). Laïla Amine understands the blank pages present in *La Seine était rouge* as a denotation of "missing accounts and the impossibility of accessing the full story" (189). That these events were initially obfuscated in the media – not forgotten, but purposefully hidden – magnified the trauma of these events, thus increasing the difficulty with which witnesses and participants had in remembering them.⁷⁰ Sebbar's use of material silence becomes a necessary aesthetic gesture for such narratives; the blank pages preserve a space of alternative meaning-making imbued with a recognition of the ineffability of the traumatic events

⁶⁹ "By discussing the ways in which Sebbar literally uses gaps and blanks in the text, the article substantiates Rothberg's observation that the novel refuses "to reconstruct a seamless narrative out of the mixed chronology of individual memory", highlighting instead the 'artificiality' of such a reconstruction of the past (Rothberg 299)" (Lewis 299).

"Furthermore, Sebbar's use of gaps and blanks reflects Laronde's notion that the recovery of memory "passe nécessairement par un hiatus", denoting both continuity and interruption or, as Laronde put it, "une continuité interrompue" (Laronde 146–7, original italics). Indeed, Laronde insists on memory's deficiency and its inability to provide a definitive truth, and a central premise of this article will be to demonstrate how, after introducing the gaps and blanks inherent to remembering the past, Sebbar goes on to fill these not with definitive truth, but with further silence and incompleteness. In this way, the article reiterates the significance of *La Seine était rouge* in its contribution to the re-appropriation of the dominant, colonial narrative as it highlights the difficulty of rewriting "une histoire détournée, violente", a history that can only be reconstructed "d'une manière fragmentée, insistant sur les blancs de l'histoire coloniale" (Donadey 187)" (Lewis 309-310).

⁷⁰ For more details as to the ways in which the French government hindered the dissemination of information regarding the night of the 17th October, 1961, please refer to Jean-Luc Einaudi's *La bataille de Paris* (1991).

of October 17th, 1961. Moreover, the preserved space within the printed space offers itself to the revelation of future versions and witnessing in the future.

In addition to the blank pages present in Sebbar's text, she also manipulates punctuation in order to emphasize various silences. Sebbar uses ellipses on 90% of the pages with text. The ellipses are used to indicate hesitations, or in other words, moments of silence. Foremost, the ellipses represent the natural cadence of French speakers, creating a realistic representation of dialogue in French. Still another reason must lie in the content of the conversations, and the fact that recounting traumatic events can bring up painful memories and emotions, making it difficult to speak. Ellipses also represent an autocensureship of these painful memories; Noria, Amel's mother, does not wish to submit her daughter to "ce qui fait mal" (13). Schwerdtner believes that this punctuation functions as hyphen or bridge between the present and the past.⁷¹ Through this punctuation, Sebbar creates a visual and material silence within the text through the absence of words. In this way, she writes silence.

Sebbar also writes silence by using the word itself, and through witnesses who address the immediate aftermath of October 17th. Louis's documentary on the rainy fall 1961 protest brings together a variety of testimonies in which all of the witnesses mention keeping some kind of silence. Noria mentions not speaking about certain topics: "On n'en parle pas"; "Il n'a pas répondu à mes questions"; "Elles pleuraient en silence" (33, 42, 81). A bar owner wonders: "Et nous, là-bas on a rien su. C'est bizarre. Comment ça se fait?" (94). A Parisian police officer at the time of the 1961 protest confesses to witnessing his fellow police officers attacking innocent protesters;

⁷¹ "En effet, si l'on considère que souvenirs d'un passé violent et observations dans et sur le présent se succèdent en alternance, les pauses que signalent les points de suspension fonctionnent comme un trait d'union, voire comme un pont jeté entre "ce qui a eu lieu et aujourd'hui" [Sebbar quoted in Bourgeois interview, 2003]" (Schwerdtner 8).

he recognizes that even though there was an effort made to hide the violence that was perpetrated: “On finit toujours par savoir” (122). Using brief vignettes, Sebbar brings together a variety of perspectives on what happened in Paris on October 17th, 1961. Seen together, these witness testimonies reiterate the silence that surrounded the “Bataille de Paris,” as well as the multiple, differing and conflicting loyalties of all those involved. Such an approach to the remembering of October 17th, 1961 aligns with Michael Rothberg’s concept of “multidirectional memory,” which has the “ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones” (5). In addition to underscoring the silence surrounding the tragedies of that night, the multiple perspectives prove that the memories of these events are “as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (3). Silence then serves as a tool with which to commemorate such an event. Moreover, Sebbar’s use of the multiple testimonies in the documentary, like the blank pages, make way for future silences to be broken and room for more perspectives to be added to the collective memory of October 17th, 1961.

While Sebbar deploys Louis’s documentary as a vehicle for presenting a myriad of accounts of October 17th, 1961, several critics have also used what might be termed ‘media metaphors’ to analyze the layering of stories within Sebbar’s text. In her article “Double Exposure: The Family Album and Alternate Memories in *The Seine was Red*,” Laila Amine uses the metaphor of double-exposure in photography and how this process works to examine Sebbar’s narrative, proposing that the second generation adds images (graffiti) to the “photos” collected from the past. This method is reminiscent to the approach taken by Anne Donadey, who focuses on the palimpsestic nature with which history shines through the images of the present. Dawn Fulton also explores the intersection of past and present in Sebbar’s text by explaining the voyage of the three young characters as a transposition of Patrick Chamoiseau and Édouard Glissant’s

notion of “anti-chronologies on to the Parisian landscape” (31).⁷² Fulton reads the monuments as objects that “crystallise” “a singular meaning” to France’s national identity, and thus the actions of Amel, Omer and Louis become a method of creolizing and diversifying this identity to more appropriately represent its population. All three critics underscore how Sebbar’s novel recognizes the intergenerational complexity of people, emotions, and personal realities connected to October 17th, 1961.

The blank pages in Patel’s text are not as common or consistent in the pattern of their appearance as the blank pages in *La Seine*, and thus operate to highlight certain aspects of the narrative. Mostly blank pages precede and follow the sections in the book which describe Charlésia’s life on Diego Garcia before she was stranded in Mauritius after a trip there to heal her ailing husband (37, 38, 40, 51, 52). The blank and mostly blank pages that appear every ten to fifteen pages in the text also serve to reinforce the importance of the information that does appear on the page.

Some of the content Patel chose to reproduce in print includes excerpts from songs, communiqués, and other related stories. As a result of these editorial decisions, Patel decentralizes authority and develops a diverse array of perspectives on the Chagossian deportation. The multiple genres included in the novel also iterate the variety of responses to decisions made for and about the Chagossian people. The institutional silence affected not only the powerless Chagossian

⁷² “Like Glissant’s chronology of European discourse, the monuments that crystallise France’s national identity impose a singular meaning onto the moments they commemorate, while the traces of existences that diverge from this narrative are purged and silenced. Amel, Omer and Louis thus transpose the process of excavation and inscription undertaken by Chamoiseau and Glissant in their anti-chronologies to the Parisian landscape, searching for Amel’s mother’s vanished shantytown in Nanterre and recovering the presence of thousands of Algerians detained in the Palais des Sports before it was ‘disinfected’ in preparation for a concert on October 20, 1961” (Fulton 31).

population, but also those operating within the system. For example, the captain who delivered goods to the Chagos Islands every few months was kept unaware of the details and repercussions of the deportation. Through the perspective of one of the captains, the reader learns just how limited information was:

Leur dire? Que veut-il donc qu'il leur dise? Lui-même n'a pas reçu d'informations claires. Il a cru comprendre que la compagnie cesserait ses activités, et qu'il fallait, en prévision de cette fermeture, tenter de les envoyer graduellement à Maurice, sans les alerter. Leur expliquer? Encore fallait-il qu'il arrive à comprendre. De toute façon, son contrat à la tête d'île expire dans quelques mois. Il aime autant ne pas être qui devra leur annoncer la nouvelle. (59-60)

During this moment Patel explores the institutional or administrative silence surrounding the evacuation and deportation of the native population of Diego Garcia. Part of the silence developed from a lack of clarity on the part of those leading and controlling business and government in Mauritius. Part of it stemmed from a very individualistic approach to one's work; those in charge of administering the orders were not those in charge of giving the orders, and thus were not compelled to act. Patel's inclusion of the captain's self-protective indifference, as well as various genres and perspectives in the text, are emblematic of what Namrata Poddar calls a reconfiguration of "the *ici-ailleurs*, utopia-dystopia or the urban-rustic dyad to foreground inter-island realities and the re-creation of (neo)colonial, spatial hierarchies within the space of an archipelago" (42-3). *Le Silence* shows the diversity amongst the Indian Ocean region of Mauritius and the Chagos Islands. The excerpts of songs, poems and decrees decry the negative realities of these island communities, as well as the positive. They also explain the unspoken method by which systems of oppression were able to remain in "paradise" even after Mauritian independence was achieved.

The official handling of the Chagossian deportation takes on a personal tone through the perspectives of the three main protagonists, Raymonde, Désiré, and Charlésia. Patel reinforces the silence surrounding the displacement of the Chagossian population by incorporating descriptions of silence and conversations rich with pauses. In the following passage, which occurs early in the text, Charlésia is told that she will not be returning to her home. The revelation comes, however, after two previous inquiries and a month of waiting to return to her home (28). The officials at the port wrestle with how to inform a desperate woman that she can't go back to where she was born:

–Il faut lui dire.

Un immense silence descend sur la tête de Charlésia. Il se pose d'un coup, sur sa poitrine, qui se contracte sans qu'elle arrive à en maîtriser le mouvement. Une autre voix s'élève à côté d'elle.

–T'as qu'à lui dire toi-même.

L'homme hésite. Il tournicote son stylo entre ses doigts épais aux ongles carrés.

–Je vais demander au patron. (29)

The officers, who have been dismissive and irreverent towards Charlésia up until this point, do not want to be the ones to inform her that she won't be going back to the Chagos Islands. Charlésia is overcome by silence in anticipation of what the officials have to tell her. Within the officials' conversation, in which they discuss telling Charlésia the truth but still abstain, Patel includes a passage and description of silence. In this passage, silence represents the heaviness of unwanted news that presses down on Charlésia's chest and makes it difficult for her to breathe. Because of the officials' hesitation, the unsaid weighs on Charlésia. The correlation between silence and a heavy weight shows the consequences of the lack of communication, as well as the significance of the information being withheld. De Grissac concurs that the motif of silence organizes Patel's

text, particularly in the passage when Charlésia is finally told that she will not be returning to her home.⁷³ Through the structure, punctuation and explicit description of silence in Charlésia's exchange with the port authorities, Patel reinforces the silence surrounding the displacement of the Chagossian population.

Patel deploys a similar technique during the description of the *Nordvaer*'s last trip to the Chagos Islands. Using Raymonde's perspective, Patel recounts the surreptitious arrival of the ship. The ship, whose arrival used to bring the joy of renewed supplies, now has arrived to steal the Chagossian people from their home without warning. Patel combines the style of short, one-word sentences as lists and the use of blank spaces to express Raymonde's final moments on Diego Garcia: "Il fallait partir. Là. Maintenant. Tout de suite. C'était un ordre. Sans discussion. Sans appel. Sans raison. Il fallait partir" (94). This short paragraph is then followed by a blank space, separating it from the following paragraph which describes the *Nordvaer* waiting at the pier to make "son dernier voyage" (94-95). The ship's "venue silencieuse, sa venue en traître" has brought betrayal rather than revival. Similar to Charlésia's exchange with the port authorities, silence is associated with deception and disappointment. The material silences represented by the blank spaces highlight the terror and confusion of these moments for the reader.

The character of Désiré provides another perspective on the deportation of the Chagossien population. Born during the voyage from the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, Désiré has no

⁷³ "Dans l'ensemble de l'œuvre, le motif du silence est organisateur du texte, exprimé parfois en termes métaphoriques. Dans le passage qui suit le silence est assimilé à une sorte d'animal pesant : 'un immense silence descend sur la tête de Charlésia. Il se pose d'un coup sur sa poitrine, qui se contracte sans qu'elle arrive à en maîtriser le mouvement' (SC 29). Dans un passage clé du récit, les silences des employés administratifs du port, leur attitude d'évitement, au moment de révéler l'impossible retour des Chagossiens dans leurs îles, sont traduits par des éléments de dialogue très brefs entrecoupés de termes suggérant les bruits menus que le silence laisse entendre" (Jeudi de Grissac 505).

information about the home his family left behind, and the reasons for which they feel so out of place in the new one. A mystery surrounds his birth, and he doesn't understand his nickname "Nordvaer". For Namrata Poddar, in her study of the Mauritian *metroport*, the character of Désiré represents a potential "double-marginalisation" of Chagossian descendants, both "as immigrant-refugee and poor fisherman" (44, 49). When he eventually insists that his mother explain his history to him, silence acts as a precursor, a producer and a protector.

As Raymonde shares the story of Désiré's birth, "De grands pans de silence se posaient sur ses lèvres et ses yeux" (87). This use of silence in the narrative seems to be that of a stifling force, but also perhaps a protective one. Though the memory is painful, Raymonde wants to help her son understand, and yet wants to protect both him and herself from the pain that such knowledge and memories could bring:

Le silence palpait dans la chaleur immobile.

-Alors, c'est Norbert ?

Elle se retourna lentement vers lui. Dans la pénombre, il devinait à peine ses yeux.

-C'est *Nordvaer*.

-*Nordvaer* ?

-C'est un bateau. (85)

The dialogue between mother and son is direct, brief, using short sentences and lacking descriptive adjectives or adverbs. Raymonde continues to explain the day of Désiré's birth, maintaining the use of short sentences, giving only the most basic information necessary.

The structure and brevity of Raymonde and Désiré's conversation fulfills at least two functions. The first, most explicit function, is that it moves the narrative forward and begins to answer some of the questions that Désiré had. The second function is to answer and engage the

reader. As Wolfgang Iser theorized, “gaps” in the reading process provide the reader with “the opportunity... to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections” (193). With this material space, the reader is then able to imitate the actions of Désiré by piecing together the small segments of information given by his mother. The reader then experiences Désiré’s realizations alongside him, “relives” the horror of being forcibly uprooted, and sorts through the shock and conflicting feelings of loss and gain at being born at sea in exile. The page that follows Raymonde’s revelation is mostly blank, leaving the reader the opportunity to debate the merits and struggles such a conversation has had on both characters, as well as to anticipate the revelation of more details about Raymonde’s departure.

The motif of silence and its many manifestations structure and sustain the narratives of *La Seine était rouge* and *Le Silence des Chagos*. Its crucial role gets highlighted all the more when addressing the question of language.

Le langage: Language and Silence

For many Francophone authors addressing postcolonial issues, language figures centrally in the lives of their characters. While French is the language of the written text, it does not always represent the language spoken by the characters. Sebbar and Patel, as part of their exploration and deployment of silences, use Arabic and Mauritian Kreol respectively to address silences that their characters experience as a result of their inability to speak a common language.

Sebbar addresses the issue of language through the relationship of mother and daughter. For Amel, more painful than her mother’s refusal to speak about the past is the knowledge that she could understand if she spoke her mother’s native language. The inability to speak Arabic creates a curious manifestation of silence: she can hear the words of her ancestors, but she cannot comprehend them. This paradoxical or quasi-silence, in which Amel hears phonemes but cannot

make sense of them, increases her alienation. One possible explanation comes from the bilingual nature of many of the characters and the switching between French and Arabic. Jane Hiddleston, in her article “Le Silence de l’écriture,” analyzes the role of Arabic in Sebbar’s writing, as well as that of Assia Djebar. Hiddleston claims that the absence of Arabic within her writing is both emblematic of a lacuna in her personal life, as well as requirement for her creative process.⁷⁴ Sebbar herself admits “that it was the deprivation of her father’s language and country that compelled her to write” (Donadey xix). Similar to the author, Amel sees her ignorance not as protection from horrible memories, but as an act of violence which cuts her off from her mother. It is this pain that initiates Amel’s disappearance. This silence functions as the motivational force which then leads Amel to discover what happened on October 17th, 1961.

It is perhaps to be expected that the linguistic situation in which Noria grew up in Paris differed significantly from that of her daughter. Noria’s parents were born in Algeria, and thus it was completely natural for Arabic to be spoken in the home. As part of the desire to assimilate, Noria would then have been compelled as a young girl and then mother, to use French as much as possible with her family, in order to facilitate their integration into French society. Sebbar addresses this linguistic barrier at the outset of the narrative when Amel accuses her grandmother of mocking her because she doesn’t speak Arabic. Amel expresses feelings of shame and humiliation when she asks her grandmother: “Tu me punis parce que je ne connais pas la langue de ton pays ou si mal que tu te moques de moi?” (15-16). Her grandmother Lalla replies:

⁷⁴ “What is also perhaps surprising about Sebbar’s representation of Arabic and its absence is that her writing turns out to require this absence, it is the very trigger for her creativity. Far from achieving a hybridised poetics of cultural *métissage*, Sebbar actively refuses to learn Arabic and to meld it with her French writing. Her work is structured by the separation between French and Arabic, and any putative overcoming of that separation would deny the context of her upbringing” (Hiddleston, “Le Silence de l’écriture,” 32).

Jamais de la vie, ma fille, jamais je ne te punirai parce que tu n'as pas réussi à parler la langue des Ancêtres, tu as essayé, j'ai essayé avec toi, tu n'as pas dit non, mais tu n'as pas parlé arabe. Ta mère n'avait pas le temps, comme moi, dans la baraque du bidonville... (15-16)

Lalla's response underscores several critical aspects of the immigrant family situation in Paris, as well as the importance of language to a person's culture and history. To begin, she refers to Arabic as the "Ancestors' language," highlighting the connective force of language between generations while simultaneously disavowing her granddaughter of that relationship because she doesn't speak the language (16). Lalla also comments on the lack of time for such language instruction, as well as the unfavorable living conditions of a shack in a shantytown. Due in part to the rapid increase of immigrant arrivals during the post-World War II reconstruction era, as well as the subsequent housing discrimination combined with a general desire to live near similar communities, families like Amel's were relegated to housing projects in the poorer outer suburbs of Paris. All these details point to the drastic changes in lifestyle that lead to the loss of language transmission in Amel's family. Moreover, the residual resentment of the loss of the Algerian War made putting aside the Arabic mother tongue even more important; people of North African descent were visible minorities, and already facing discrimination before speaking. However, one insidious side-effect was that the silence surrounding the events of October 1961 was compounded; in addition to the radio silence from the French government and media, the stories shared in Arabic fell on the unintentionally deaf ears of the next generation. Attempts to assimilate left the second generation immigrants alienated from their Algerian heritage, and thus unable to fully understand the traumatic histories of their ancestors.

Sebbar overcomes this language barrier, which has become a communication barrier, via Louis's documentary about the events on October 17th, 1961. Schwerdtner observes how the structural silences and references to silences within the novel are contrasted by the witness accounts gathered together in Louis' documentary (8). The use of direct discourse mediated by the video allows Sebbar to highlight the occlusion of the events of the 17th of October, 1961 from the media in general, and Amel's family narrative specifically, while at the same time communicating the untold stories.

The documentary-within-the-novel device emphasizes the plenitude of the silences by revealing the hidden stories underneath. Sebbar not only displays the female agency of Amel, but also her mother Noria. One such instant of reverent and purposeful silence occurs during a documentary segment of *La Seine était rouge* in which Amel's mother Noria is sharing her reflections on the night of October 17. Noria interrupts herself while sharing her account of how violence is recurring in contemporary France, more than thirty years after the 1961 protest:

“...D'autres, aujourd'hui assassinent, laissent pourrir les cadavres sur les places, au bord des routes, des frères, des pères, des amis... des ennemis...” Un silence. Un long silence que Louis n'a pas coupé.

La mère cesse de parler. (43)

This passage incorporates a layering of media that in turn mediates Sebbar's underlying message. To begin, the dialogue is not representative of a conversation between characters, but the transcription of a monologue captured on film. Immediately following the transcription of what Noria says, Sebbar's narrator comments explicitly on the silence that follows. The character Noria ceases to speak, and the filmmaker makes an editing choice to keep the “long silence” in the documentary. Lastly, Sebbar follows this ostensible stage direction note by reiterating that the

mother stops speaking: “[l]a mère cesse de parler.” In an echo to the repeating variations of the sentence “Amel entend la mère,” Sebbar uses a somewhat ambiguous subject, which portends to refer to Noria, who has just stopped speaking in the video. However, it shouldn’t be forgotten that Noria also speaks of her own parents’ silences, and how Lalla would stop talking when Noria would enter the room in the time leading up to the 1961 protest. Furthermore, “la mère” could connote more generally to mothers in France, Algerian mothers, and even the notion of a mother country. Using very few words, Sebbar demonstrates how silences in the narrative can operate on several signifying levels as well as help forge connections between past and present.

Shenaz Patel also uses the position of language within Mauritian society, and in particular the institutional silencing of the region’s lingua franca, Kreol, as a through-line of her narrative. Most of *Le Silence des Chagos* is in French; however, most of the main characters speak in Kreol, which occasionally appears as dialogue in the text. Patel then clarifies the meaning of the Kreol dialogue in the sentences that follow by including a translation or contextual clues in French. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Patel first presents the Kreol language in an excerpt from a traditional Chagossian song on an otherwise blank page, setting it apart from the rest of the text and highlighting the Chagossian culture (13). The excerpt is accompanied by a French translation, as well as a description of the authors, singers and origin of the song. Later on in the text, when Patel introduces the reader to Charlésia at the moment of Mauritian independence in 1968, she portrays her interactions in Kreol. To a non-Kreol speaker and reader, this gesture could have a somewhat alienating effect, separating the reader from the text and making it difficult to understand what is happening. However, once it becomes clear the Patel will repeat in French what the character has spoken in Kreol, the Kreol text becomes a puzzle to be solved, and actually incites one to read aloud in order to figure out what is being said. For example, one of Charlésia’s

neighbors asks her: “–Ou tandé, ounn tandé Charlésia? Kanon l’indépendans...” (16). The word for the noun “indépendance” is almost identical in French, but the subject-verb formation is more difficult to discern. The question is then followed by the answer, which in turn reveals the meaning of the original question: “Oui, Charlésia entendait le canon, et alors?” (16). The reader can then infer/deduce that “ounn tandé” means “vous entendez.” Similar to the verse from the Chagossian song, Patel continues to include first Kreol, followed by the French.

This method of including Kreol dialogue recreates the linguistic challenges of the characters for the reader. It also raises questions about the status of language within Mauritian society. Kreol Morisien is not an official language in Mauritius, and yet it is for all intents and purposes the lingua franca of all the islands inhabitants. However, the official and administrative languages remain those of the former French and British colonizers; English is administrative and French is education. This then constrains Kreol to a position of silence. In her 2007 book *Rainbow Colors*, Srilata Ravi notes the linguistic diversity of Mauritius, where “[m]ore than twenty-two languages are spoken on this tiny island,” and contends that in choosing “French over English as the more accepted means of creative expression, the Mauritian writer’s transformational and transgressive power over language has been more varied, more spontaneous and more political” (2, 4). For Patel to break this silence through writing, making it an integral part of her narrative, serves as a means to underscore the various levels of silence surrounding the events of the evacuation of Diego Garcia and its role in Mauritian independence. But is the inclusion of silence enough to address Spivak’s problematic of the subaltern who cannot speak?

Looking at an example from earlier in this chapter, it would seem that the answer remains in the negative. Charlésia’s conversation with the port authorities served as an example of the official silence surrounding the deportation of the Chagossian people; the exchange also highlights

the question of language and is emblematic of the linguistic marginalization of Mauritian Kreol as noted by Srilata Ravi in her book *Rainbow Colors*.. When the administrative officers finally admit to Charlésia that she will not be able to return to the Chagossian islands, they speak in a combination of French and Kreol: “Il n’y aura plus de bateau de retour. Vous allez devoir rester ici. Zil inn fermé” (31). When the administrative officer speaks to Charlésia, he begins in French, and then ends with Kreol. Most of the dialogue is in French; Kreol does not appear until the very end, and then as a brief message without explanation: “Zil inn fermé.” This gesture of using her native language seems could be understood as respectful; in order to make sure that Charlésia comprehends the situation. However, it could also demonstrate a lack of respect, in that the officers assume she can’t understand the French, nor do they bother to elaborate on why the “island is closed.” While the last exchange between Charlésia and the administrative officers communicates her powerlessness and confirms the end of Charlésia’s life in the Chagossian Islands, it also represents a shift; regardless of the intent, the silence has been broken for Charlésia, proving that her voice has been heard.

Though initially thwarted by their inability to communicate, the protagonists in both Patel and Sebbar’s narratives are desperate to gain information about their pasts, and silence becomes an alternative method of communication, complimentary to spoken language.

Voyages: Journey in Silence

In light of these linguistic struggles, is silence ever desirable for these authors? It seems difficult to imagine that authors who focus on communication difficulties regarding hidden or lesser-known historical events would also valorize silence. Sebbar’s protagonist Amel experiences negative feelings such as frustration and alienation when faced with her inability to understand Arabic when

her mother and grandmother discussed the events of October 17th, 1961. Désiré, Patel's young protagonist born during the voyage of deportation, lives for years with a nickname that he doesn't understand because it coincides with a traumatic event in his family's past, and they will not explain what it means. And yet, in conjunction with the overwhelming evidence that both Sebbar and Patel aim to break silences surrounding untold histories, the presence of silences persists. In order to break the silences and discover what happened and how these events shaped their respective identities, Amel and Désiré must remove themselves from their current environments and journey to discover their truths.

Sebbar's figurative language and manipulation of structure serve to engage the reader in the journey to discover what really happened. This engagement begins with the very first sentence of the entire text: "Sa mère ne lui a rien dit, ni la mère de sa mère" (15). For the next thirty-three pages, Amel, and thus the reader, remain unaware of Noria's experiences during the protests of October 17th, 1961. From the outset, the reader is placed into a literary environment foregrounded in silence, analogous to Amel's. Far from being empty, this state of silence compels both reader and protagonist to discover what happened on that day. Wolfgang Iser describes this effect in his chapter entitled "The Play of the Text," where he explains that "negativity lures absence into presence" (336). In other words, not knowing what happened to Amel's mother and grandmother incites both protagonist and reader to search for the truth.

The desire inspired by the lack of knowledge about Noria and Lalla's experiences on October 17th lead Amel (and reader) on a journey to discover the truth. Similarly, Désiré (and reader) searches for information about his birth by trying to reenact the voyage from Diego Garcia to Mauritius. Several aspects of the journey have been critically analyzed by many scholars, and of particular interest for my work are Michel de Certeau's *L'invention du quotidien* and Rosi

Braidotti's *Nomadic Theory*. De Certeau's comparison of walking through a city street to the speech act provides the framework through which I am able to understand silence as productive and capable of breaking silences (148).⁷⁵ For de Certeau, the act of "manquer de lieu" assumes the functions of verbal communication (155). As such, Amel's trip around Paris and Désiré's voyage out to sea act as conversations that "tell" them about their past and help inform them of their respective identities. For Amel, retracing the step of the protestors on the night of October 17, 1961, allows to "hear" about her mother's experience. (And of course, she and Omer discuss Louis's documentary and she learns more in this way as well.) The same can be said for Désiré's time spent working on the boat, and the nausea and claustrophobia that feels. The "indefinite diversity" that De Certeau describes, I would say, results from the productive silence in which these steps are taken. Understanding silence in this way allows for individualized experiences particular to the "marcheur," as well as a connection to other collective experiences that the "marcheur" may traverse on her or his journey. Braidotti understands the journey as requisite in identity formation, and conceptualizes this moving actor as the "nomadic subject." The "nomadic subject," a product of Braidotti's work in feminist theory, means to address the process of developing agency of women; by extension, it also applies to marginalized persons. In this way, both Sebbar's character Amel and Patel's character Désiré represent examples of Braidotti's "nomadic subject." Not only do the silences surrounding certain aspects of their pasts inspire Amel and Désiré to seek out answers, but they also accompany them along their journeys of discovery, and communicate silently their ineffable stories.

⁷⁵ La marche affirme, suspecte, hasarde, transgresse, respecte, etc., les trajectoires qu'elle « parle. » Toutes les modalités y jouent, changeante de pas en pas, et réparties dans des proportions, en des successions et avec des intensités qui varient selon les moments, les parcours, les marcheurs. Indéfinie diversité de ces opérations énonciatrices. (De Certeau 150-151)

Lastly, a discussion about journeys in these two texts would be incomplete without a brief commentary on the bodies of water that play a role in both texts. For as noted in the 2nd edition preface of W.J.T. Mitchell's book *Landscape and Power*, "landscape exerts a subtle power over people," and as such we need to "look at the view" in which our stories take place (vii). In *Le Silence des Chagos*, the Indian Ocean gives passage to the *Nordvaer* and the deportation of an entire population from one island to another. During the main voyage recounted in the narrative, a child is born. At other places in the story, the Indian Ocean becomes a barrier rather than a conduit, for Charlésia and her people are stranded in Mauritius. In *La Seine était rouge*, the Seine River factors in directly via the title, but only tangentially with regards to the plot. Rather than dictate the movement of Amel and Omer as they travel around the city, this body of water serves as a metonymical reminder of the bloody attack and murder of hundreds of Algerian protestors on October 17, 1961, and the attempt to hide it by throwing bodies into the river. Both bodies of water are tainted with the destruction caused by hegemonic colonial powers. The representation of the European river, however, is limited in *La Seine était rouge* to the prejudiced violence committed against a portion of the population and the resulting shame, whereas the Indian Ocean "perpetrates" violence but also generates new life in *Le Silence des Chagos*.

As mentioned before, Amel's adventure around town begins after she has viewed Louis's documentary on the 17th of October, where she witnesses and understands what her mother experienced the night of the protest. Amel sees the documentary soon after running away from home, which happens at the beginning of the narrative on page (17). However, the reader learns what she has discovered in the documentary in parallel with Amel's travels around Paris. As the narrative alternates between the scenes of the documentary and Amel's storyline, a sentence repeats at the end of four of Amel's chapters, announcing the next testimony from the film: "Amel

entend la voix de sa mère [*Amel hears her mother's voice*]" (32, 40, 54, 101). The word choice and the verb tense suggest that an audible action occurs, but the reader knows that Amel is not with her mother, rendering this impossible. Rather, this sentence refers not to an act of hearing but to Amel's reflections and memories. Even once the reader understands the figurative meaning of final sentence, it remains unclear whether Amel is remembering hearing her mother's voice from a previous conversation, from the documentary film, or if Amel is imagining what her mother would say about the spray-painting of monuments around Paris. The sentence, slightly altered, appears two additional times. In the middle of the text, one chapter ends with "Amel entend sa mère [*Amel hears/understands her mother*]" (77). Sebbar erases the mother's voice syntactically; the removal of her mother's voice from the sentence then allows for multiple meanings of the verb, for *entendre* can mean "to hear" or "to understand" in French. This marks the moment when Amel begins to relate to her mother's situation; as if by explaining why she can't be with her mother and grandmother, she begins to empathize with their inability to discuss that events of October 17th. The last version of this sentence becomes: "On entend la voix de la mère [*We hear/understand the mother's voice*]" (115). Anne Donadey interprets this reformulation as a gesture to include "the community at large in a process of anamnesis" (32-33). The text is no longer just about Amel, nor about her mother, but of the remembering by all the children of the forgotten victims of the October 17th, 1961. The double-existence of Noria's testimonies, as memories repeated in her daughter's mind, and through the scenes in the film, transcribe an enduring silence in the poetics of this text. For, insofar as this text tells us, Amel never discusses the events of October 17 with her mother. Even the reader who participates in the act of "hearing and understanding the mother" has done so throughout the reading of the text. Through Amel's travels across the city, Sebbar develops a voice that is both silent, heard, and understood.

Though Amel never speaks directly with her mother or grandmother about the night of October 17th, 1961, she does try to communicate her new discoveries to the general population at large. For every place in which Amel and Omer find a commemoration to former French soldiers, they fill up an empty space with a reminder of the “Battle of Paris.”⁷⁶ Outside the prison across from Louis’s apartment, they begin by acknowledging the dates of the Algerian War, not yet considered such; they spray-paint in fluorescent red capital letters: “1954-1962 DANS CETTE PRISON FURENT GUILLOTINÉS DES RÉSISTANTS ALGÉRIENS QUI SE DRESSÈRENT CONTRE L’OCCUPANT FRANÇAIS” (29).⁷⁷ On the façade of the Hotel de Crillon place de la Concorde, they write: “ICI DES ALGÉRIENS ONT ÉTÉ MATRAQUÉS SAUVAGEMENT PAR LA POLICE DU PRÉFET PAPON LE 17 OCTOBRE 1961” (81). On the Quai Saint-Michel, they spell out: “ICI LES ALGÉRIENS SONT TOMBÉS POUR L’INDÉPENDENCE DE L’ALGÉRIE LE 17 OCTOBRE 1961” (107). Each monument leads to a corresponding element referencing the Algerian War, on which Amel and Omer rewrite an epitaph that includes Algerians in the commemoration of French history. Laïla Amine comments that “For Sebbar, contestations of the national narrative found in Louis’ film or Amel’s graffiti enable individuals to map out an expanded vision of the war with affiliations that cross social, cultural, and national borders” (191). Forthwith, blank spaces, in the book as well as on the monuments, are not void of meaning, but rather invitations to discover meanings that are not readily apparent. As such, the blank pages in Sebbar’s text represent the lack of institutional memory and commemoration, the silence

⁷⁶ It remains unclear if Amel actually does any of the spray-painting herself, or if she simply accompanies Omer. However, the fact that she continues to accompany Omer signals her complicity.

⁷⁷ France’s National Assembly passed law officially recognizing Algerian War of independence as such on June 10, 1999 (House and MacMaster 315).

surrounding the events of the 17th of October, 1961, *and* the opportunity to *entendre* alternative aspects to history.

In order to communicate various perspectives about the 1961 protests, Sebbar combines a documentary commemorating the October 17th march with Amel's journey to reinscribe Algerians into the History of France. Patel, too, incorporates the memory of a past trauma with a younger generation's quest to retrace the steps of their predecessors. In *Le Silence des Chagos*, Désiré attempts to reconnect with his roots by getting a job on a boat similar to the one that deported his family from the Chagossian Islands to Mauritius in the 1970s. During his first trip out to sea, he is riddled with seasickness and longs to escape the bowels of the ship as his mother did. Désiré asks himself : "Où trouver du silence sur ce bateau qui vrombit et tressaute comme un bourdon tombé dans une bassine ? " (123) Rather than the cathartic recreation of the October 17 protest through Paris that Amel experiences, Désiré's nautical employment becomes a recreation of his mother's traumatic exile; he ends up suffering the feelings of claustrophobia and nausea that his mother lived through as she gave birth to Désiré while being delivered from her island home. Désiré endures what could be considered an empathetic episode of post-traumatic stress, allowing him to understand (on some level) his mother's experiences and how she dealt with them. He seeks the answer to his discomfort in the peace of silence, just as his mother remained silent about his birth for so many years.

Désiré's boat trip is not the only way in which the tropes of the journey and silence interact. While Désiré may seek out silence on the noisy ship, that doesn't mean that silence is always positive for Patel's characters. In fact, the description of the *Nordvaer*'s last arrival in the Chagos Islands reiterates the deceptive aspects often associated with silence. The arrival in Mauritius is both welcome and unwelcome. Much of the passage dedicated to describing Raymonde's voyage

from the Chagossian archipelago to Mauritius describes the noise, nausea and claustrophobia she experiences, as well as the pain of childbirth. The silent appearance of the *Nordvaer*, its quiet and stealthy arrival, was not the usual delivery of good and filling up on resources time, but rather a final voyage, a final goodbye, and a forced evacuation of the island. This stillness is then contrasted with the voyage itself, accompanied by loud and endless noise of the boat's engine, the end of which signaled the arrival in Mauritius (110). Véronique Bragard conceives of the *Nordvaer* as a "murmuring vessel" whose cries contribute "to the poetics of dislocation that constitutes the matrix of the Indian Ocean imaginary" (142). The voyage from Salomon to Mauritius by way of the Seychelles has been trying and unpleasant, and it comes with a relief that the trip is over. However, the trip as a whole was unwanted, and the destination remains undesirable for Raymonde and her family. The imprisonment continues for two days as the family has to wait on the ship before disembarking in Port-Louis, Mauritius. Though she is happy to get off of the *Nordvaer*, Raymonde does not feel welcomed in Mauritius. When they arrive at their new home, it's a smelly shack with no running water and stopped up toilets. This journey does not end with self-realization, and serves primarily to break the silence surrounding the forced deportation of the Chagossian people.

Later in the text, however, it is with the "murmuring vessel," Patel's most creative narrative gesture, that the author demonstrates once again the complex nature of silence and her multifaceted use of it. By way of an understated change in narrative voice, Patel allows the *Nordvaer* to speak. Towards the beginning of a chapter, a new paragraph, separated by a blank double-space on the page, starts with the sentence "Il porte ces cris en lui." (133) It is not immediately evident that it is the boat talking; the ambiguous third person singular pronoun seemingly referring to Désiré. However, as the passage continues, it becomes apparent that the "il" in question is not a "he" but an "it," and that Patel is transmitting the story through the boat's perspective:

Il porte ces cris en lui. Ils résonnent dans sa carcasse, leur onde sourde effarouchant les oiseaux qui se hasardent à le prendre pour perchoir. Il a beau chercher à se tasser dans le sable où il est à demi enfoncé, ces étranges vibrations qui fragmentent l'eau recommencent. Il suffit d'un cri d'oiseau et le silence se fracasse dans son vieux corps. (133-4)

This personification permits a seemingly objective perspective on the forced deportation of the Chagossian people, for the ship had no stake in the decision; its only purpose was to transport goods. Patel reiterates this by cataloguing the ship's origins in Germany and then having the ship make a comparison between the "belle année" of 1958 when it transported passengers who weren't experiencing the "choc du dépaysement" like the Chagossian deportees would fifteen years later (134). The *Nordvaer* continues to detail its life by recounting the arrival of the train, eventual sale to the Seychellois government, and subsequent voyages around the Indian Ocean carrying goods and supplies. Once again, the *Nordvaer* also comments on the warmth of the occasional Indian Ocean passenger that would accompany its shipments (135). The passage then returns to the deportation of the Chagossian people, a day on which the *Nordvaer* was shocked "qu'il puisse porter autant de corps sans exploser" (134). For the ship, like the people trapped inside its hull, the passage feels like death; as the *Nordvaer* continually recites the Norwegian national anthem, it wonders if these memories from long ago are a sign of "la mort."

The *Nordvaer* continues to recall the forced deportation of the Chagossian people by means of a detailed account of a dog chasing after his owner. The desperation of the scene is heightened by the fact the child "tend la main, les deux mains, il tend ses cris et tout son corps vers le chien," eager to reunite with the dog who has only three legs and no eyes (136). The *Nordvaer* is haunted by the three-legged blind dog waiting on the beach for the child that will never return, so much so that "il a même songé à les noyer" (136). The heart-wrenching tale of the abandoned dog

culminates with the *Nordvaer* overhearing that most of the dogs on the island had been previously rounded up and burned alive in giant clay ovens (137). The *Nordvaer* then links the silent cries of the deformed dog on the beach, with the silent cries of the Chagossian deportees: “Et ces hurlements se mêlent aux cris, des cris silencieux terrés des gorges humaines, des cris qui n’ont pas éclaté parce qu’ils n’ont pas franchi les bouches aux dents serrées” (137). The *Nordvaer*’s perspective, as described by Bragard, permits the author to recount the traumatic events of the narrative, and serves as means to let Patel speak to the reader.⁷⁸ I would add that this passage also provides a space with which Patel can concretize the inextricable links between silences and the deportation of the Chagossian people. The *Nordvaer*, a voiceless inanimate object, reveals some of the most important details of this untold story, all the while incorporating silence in its many forms.

Through the memories of the boat, Patel explores the notion of the “silent cry”, the unvoiced pain and suffering of the Chagossian people. The recounting of the boat’s rich history as a vessel of transportation is then juxtaposed against the “blank” history of Désiré’s life. The repetitive anaphora of “lui” and “ils” that begins each sentence emulates the waves lapping at the hull of the boat, once again transporting the reading along on the journey:

⁷⁸ “More concretely, prosopopeia is used by the author to expose three traumatic events: the displacement of the last Chagossians, the birth of Désiré and the killing of island dogs by fire. More concretely, investing the ship with a lyrical voice is used to convey trauma, that is, something which remains impossible to grasp. The third-person narrative with its realist and unified perspective somewhat undermines the traumatic experience often conveyed by such devices as repetition, gaps, affective states and visual images. However, the ship metaphor enables the author indirectly to engage with the consciousness of her characters, while maintaining a respectful distance from their testimonies. More broadly, the ship image can be read as a synecdoche of a significant interrogation, namely the passage of the testimony via the voice of the author” (Bragard, “Murmuring Vessels” 141).

Lui sait qu’il a vu ce chien, un rescapé sans doute. *Ils* sont là, ses yeux, qui hurlent, plus fort qu’un chien qui sent l’approche de la mort, avec plus d’insistance, plus de désespoir. Et ces hurlements se mêlent aux cris, des cris silencieux terrés dans des gorges humaines, des cris qui n’ont pas éclaté parce qu’ils n’ont pas franchi les bouches aux dents serrées.

Lui les a entendus. Rauques, crus, hérissés de peur et d’incompréhension. *Il* n’a plus cessé de les entendre, aucune tempête n’a pu leur imposer le silence.

Ils résonnent en *lui*, les cris silencieux que ces hommes et ces femmes ont étouffés au fond de leur gorge, tellement fort qu’ils ont coulé de leurs yeux en longues traînées salées.

C’est ce jour-là qu’il a commencé à rouiller de l’intérieur. (137-138, my emphasis)

The *Nordvaer*’s testimony ends with the recollection of Désiré’s birth: “Un bébé. Un bébé est né dans mes entrailles. Dans mon ventre. J’ai aidé à lui donner le jour” (139). The first-person subject pronoun and possessive adjectives confirm the personification of the ship, and its message segues to the more pertinent identity at hand, that of Désiré. The mostly blank page 139, the entirely blank page 140, and the half-blank page 142 following the boat’s tale now reinforce the generative nature of the silence it had been carrying, as if the pages were symbolic of the story waiting to be written.

Le Silence des Chagos, and Désiré’s quest, ends with the intersection of the various storylines; Désiré and Charlésia encounter each other at the port of Port-Louis. Whereas Désiré’s mother was unable to adequately explain to him what happened to him when he was born and why the time surrounding his birth was so difficult, Charlésia provides information that can fill in the gaps, for Désiré and Patel’s readership as well. The word “silence” punctuates the conversation between Désiré and Charlésia, one in which she explains why their people were deported from the islands. Her description, preceded by “un silence,” compares memories to fish hooks, and how its

construction is such that a memory, like a fish hook caught in skin, cannot be removed without ripping the flesh and leaving scars (150). Charlésia admits that, despite the agony of recalling forced exile, the nostalgia for the Chagossian Islands remains. Because they were stripped of their rights, the Chagossian people cling to their memories, despite the pain that accompanies them. Ironically, the need to actively remember demonstrated by Charlésia and Désiré stems in part from the institutional forgetting that has inadvertently made these memories so precious.

Because of the silences surrounding the October 17th massacre and the Chagossian deportation, both characters felt alienated from their families, and unsure about their identities. Though the characters initially view their lack of knowledge as negative, it is these productive silent moments that lead to and punctuate the characters' journey to self-discovery. For both Amel and Désiré, a journey instigated and accompanied by silence leads them to discover integral parts of their personal histories.

Conclusion: Entendre le Silence

Though more recognized today than in the decades immediately following these historical events, the 1961 Algerian protest in Paris and 1970s Chagossian deportation from Diego Garcia have gained recognition thanks in no small part to the work of authors like Sebbar and Patel. The lacunae built into the structure of official historical narratives is a commonality amongst postcolonial countries that gained independence in the mid-20th century. Both sides, the former occupying nation and the newly autonomous nation, went to great lengths to cultivate a national narrative that did not include violence, sacrifice, and abuse of power. However, the 21st century has come with even greater public and global awareness. In 2011, commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the 17th of October, 1961 saw the renewal of conversations surrounding the Algerian

War's legacy, including the French government's belated official recognition of the Algerian War as such in 1999, as well as the 2001 dedication of the small plaque on the Saint-Michel bridge commemorating the fallen Algerians in 2001 (House and MacMaster 315, 319). Véronique Bragard reports that lawsuits in a Great Britain tribunal have declared the Chagossian deportation illegal, which could potentially lead to at least a momentary return home for the plaintiffs (136).⁷⁹ And yet, victims in both situations continue to contend with discrimination under governments that recognize fault while refusing to take responsibility or provide reparations for their suffering. Thus the events of the massacre in Paris and the Chagossian deportation remain effectively silenced half a century later.

As Patel's story comes to an end, she brings the narrative full circle by ending the text much as it began, with the same description, almost verbatim, of the Chagos Islands as "drops of rain" (151). The description, poetic and visually artistic in nature, now carries with it another meaning. Whereas once these small island droplets were the home and pride of its population, now they wander in the vast ocean, metaphorically uprooted, stripped of their original meaning, belonging to some other people, serving some other purpose. And at the same time, these tiny islands now also bear the heavy weight of the remembrance being performed by its lost population, and by Patel's text. The Chagos are no longer simply tropical island paradises, but sites of home, betrayal, loss, death, domination, longing, and myth. Through her writing of *Le Silence des Chagos*, Patel has broken the silence of the Chagos Islands and their people, as well as clarified their importance, their plenitude, and their relationship to its people.

⁷⁹ "Thanks to the release, in May 2007, of secret documents testifying to the British-US Chagossian deal and revelations of 'an imperious brutality and contempt,'¹² Chagossians have won a new victory. Two British judges held that the orders made by the UK government to deny the Chagos Islanders return to their islands were illegal. It remains to be seen, though, whether these denunciations will lead to the homecoming of the islanders to their native soil" (136).

La Seine était rouge culminates with a chance reunion of the three young protagonists; Louis runs into Amel and Omer in Alexandria, Egypt. Both Louis and Omer are writing stories with Amel as the heroine, in which she will be the central agent of the narrative. However, in a somewhat contradictory move, Amel does not speak at all. She is once again cloaked in silence and a bystander to her own existence. What can this mean? If Sebbar was so eager to tell Amel's story, to shed light on the story of those involved in the peaceful protests turned violent in Paris on October 17, 1961, then how can her protagonist sit mute at the conclusion of the narrative? It is possible, that as Lionnet and others have recognized in other francophone women's texts, that Amel's silence exhibits her autonomy and agency. It could also be a way in which Sebbar confirms the ever-existing need for improvement by the French government toward its people of Algerian descent.

At the same time, it could be said that it was through the witnessing of other people, at the behest of a French man's documentary, that Amel was able to learn about this silenced history of her mother's past. This perspective might then, for some, weaken my argument that Amel displays her agency by following the path of the protestors took in 1961. In other words, that it is still the former colonial French power that remains in control of the narrative. And while I see that this is a viable observation, I believe that by focusing on the framework of the text, the moments between the video and the ongoing thread of silence between Amel and her mother that structure the tale, that the purpose and the value of the video seem secondary, if not tertiary, in terms of import to Patel's overall message. My analysis of the title, the repetition of silences, and the blank pages, has sought to do more than recreate an orientalist interpretation in which a white French male leads an Arab woman to discover herself. It is true that there existed, however, and still exists, a certain amount of privilege that would allow more easily for a white French male to make a documentary

on the 17th of October, 1961, than a female of Algerian ancestry. Still, in the end, it must be acknowledged that it is in fact a woman of Algerian descent, Leïla Sebbar, who shares the stories of all her characters and to write the first “novel... to focus entirely on the memory of October 1961 or to attempt to include the perspectives of all those involved” (Donadey 29).

Both Sebbar and Patel deploy and employ silence in various forms in order to rupture silence surrounding events that have implications on personal and institutional levels. By focusing on individual characters and family relationships, and how these events had long-lasting effects on the subsequent generations, both authors highlight the personal effects of decisions made by the French and Mauritian authorities. Through the use of various perspectives, readers are able to see that the refusal to admit the truth about their respective traumatic events in France and Mauritius had negative effects for all those involved, and that the initial hope of preserving the dignity and stature of a government was impossible because it ignored the realities of the individuals it proposed to represent.

The authors’ commentaries on the current respective state of affairs in France and Mauritius, however, contrast significantly. Sebbar’s conclusion, in which Amel leaves France for Egypt without reconnecting with her mother, surmises that the rift between the French government and its citizens of Algerian descent remains strained and far from resolution. Amel is only able to find access to answers through her contemporaries, and the generational gap is maintained. This separation manifested itself in reality when not a single French state official was present for the 2001 unveiling of the plaque commemorating the Algerians lost on the Quai Saint Michel (House & MacMaster 319). For Patel, on the other hand, several characters are able to communicate and/or discover their histories; Raymonde tells Désiré about his birth, and Charlésia reconnects with her past through the sharing of life on Diego Garcia with Désiré. These results portend a

hopeful outlook on the future for the Chagossian people, one that seems to be slowly playing out in modern times; events of the last twenty years have seen court verdicts granting some Chagossian citizens the right to at least visit their former homeland (Bragard 58). For Leïla Sebbar and Shenaz Patel, silence is, in many ways, connected with pain, suffering, separation and the inability to express oneself. But more importantly, it carries with it, as do the Parisian spray-painted monuments and the ship named *Nordvaer* that travelled the Indian Ocean, the potential to generate discussion and express the ineffable.

CHAPTER FOUR

Voix du passé:

Assia Djébar's and Natacha Appanah's Ghost Stories

Assia Djébar and Natacha Appanah have spent much of their careers filling in the blanks of history. Like the four authors discussed in chapters two and three, Djébar and Appanah have written novels with the intent to tell untold stories that enrich the narratives—personal, national, and historical—from Algeria and Mauritius. Through the re-telling of untold or lesser known stories that took place during the Algerian War for independence from 1954-1962 and during World War II in Mauritius, Djébar and Appanah provide a missing perspective for events that were in some way or another silenced, both locally and throughout the world. *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002) is one of many texts in Djébar's oeuvre that implements literary silences to address the institutional silences surrounding the Algerian Revolution and the oppression and violence in Algeria, especially with regards to women. Through this novel, Djébar provides pathways through which her reader can hear the untold stories of brave women, and in particular, the voice of her national heroine, Algerian martyr Zoulikha Oudai. Far from the front lines of war, Natacha Appanah's *Le dernier frère* (2007) tells the story of the friendship between an Indian Mauritian boy and a young Czechoslovakian Jewish detainee during World War II in Mauritius. Beginning with a vision in a dream of a deceased friend, the protagonist, an elderly man named Raj, recollects the silences of his childhood and the time he spent with an unlikely companion, David. Though very different in narrative structure, these texts incorporate spectral characters as conduits through

which to communicate the ineffable.⁸⁰ Both Djébar's *La Femme sans sépulture* and Appanah's *Le dernier frère* address unwritten histories by evoking the silent language of nature and violent experience in stories of ghosts from the past.

The inclusion of ghostly protagonists is not new to postcolonial literature. In his article "Place, Position and Postcolonial Haunting in Assia Djébar's *La Femme sans sépulture*," Michael F. O'Riley describes this strategy: "The postcolonial act of writing the hidden stories of subjects of colonial oppression is thus figured by the limit of consciousness where recovered histories emerge in traces as spectral figures of imperial conflict and erasure" (68). By using ghosts as a departure point for their narratives, Djébar and Appanah foreground their texts in silence; as deceased characters no longer able to physically speak, any words spoken by Zoulikha or David are inherently silent. Also notable is the way in which they incorporate silences into the communications of their "spectral figures." It is worth mentioning this truism—the non-verbal status of these characters—in order to highlight the motif of silences that the authors develop in various modes throughout the texts.

Similar to Djébar's treatment of Algeria's past, Natacha Appanah addresses an occluded aspect of Mauritius's history during war-time with her novel *Le dernier frère*. According to Françoise Lionnet, who analyzes the novel in her article "'Dire exactement': Remembering Interwoven Lives in 1940s Mauritius," "*Le dernier frère* is Appanah's personal foray into this silenced past, and an occasion to reflect on childhood, language, memory, ethical responsibility, and the intertwined losses of an Indo-Mauritian family and a young Czech-Jewish deportee named David Stein" (206). While Lionnet's examination questions some of "major liberties" that

⁸⁰ Use of the term "spectral" references Michael F. O'Riley's discussion of "spectral figures" in his 2004 article "Place, Position and Postcolonial Haunting in Assia Djébar's *La Femme sans sépulture*."

Appanah takes (or ‘inadvertent mistakes’ she makes) in terms of an accurate historical setting of the text, she also commends Appanah’s exploration of Mauritian participation in the detainment of Jews during World War II (218). Lionnet’s observations about *Le dernier frère* demonstrate that the novel exemplifies Srilata Ravi’s claims regarding 20th and 21st century Mauritian Francophone literature: “... the Mauritian novel in French is a literary space *where* the individual, the communal and the colonial/national intersect and *which* exposes and interrogates the dominant ethnocultural and geopolitical determinisms that are prevalent in Mauritian society” (*Rainbow* 9-10). Moreover, Ravi also believes that the novels act as “a discursive space where both competing and interlinking interpretations of past and present co-exist, painting different images of ethnicity, nation, and identity on this Indian Ocean island (“Indo-Mauritians” 30-1). The larger institutional silences regarding wartime events in Mauritius and Algeria in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s reiterate themselves through the characters and the content in both Appanah’s and Djébar’s narratives. Through prosopopoeia and the natural world, silence becomes the language to communicate the trauma and violence.

Silenced Violence

Woven into the historiographical nature of Assia Djébar’s novels is an ever-present violence. In *La Femme* and throughout her oeuvre, Djébar deploys violence in its many manifestations, underscoring its continued existence in modern-day Algeria. Not only does Djébar evoke the physical torture and high death toll of the Algerian war for independence from France, but she also highlights the psychological violence of colonization and subjugation, and in particular breaking the silences surrounding the women’s experiences. Soheila Kian suggests that “pour Djébar écrire la violence est une façon de témoigner du passé et du présent,” “de guérir des blessures,” and to

“faire renaître la nation algérienne et ses sujets” (104-105). In an interview with Clarisse Zimra, Djébar expresses her need to create literary answers to the questions posed by renewed violence in her homeland. Djébar admits:

I was derailed by the street riots of October 1988 in Algiers: I saw blood flowing in the streets. For several years I had been an uncomfortable witness of the fundamentalist rise in public life—particularly among students. I told myself that the only kind of response of which I was capable, *as a writer*, was to go back to the *written* sources of our history. (122)

As a result of continued internal political conflict in Algeria, the number of victims was estimated between 40,000 and 100,000 deaths, according to some researchers (Ciment 1, Testas 161).⁸¹ Moreover, in the decade that followed, known as “les années noires,” journalists, artists and writers who would normally cover such events and report them through the media became targets of these militant groups, thus reducing the amount and accuracy of available information to other domestic and world organizations attempting to promote peace in Algeria (Ciment 6).⁸² Compelled to address such brutality, Djébar continued to add to her prolific oeuvre with *La femme*, a text that

⁸¹ In addition to the Front Islamic du Salut (FIS), which the government abolished/dismantled in 1992, and its armed branch, the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA), other organizations have formed, and continue to promote revolutions through violence (Ciment 3, Hafez 47). In 1997, the GIA perpetrated massacres against innocent bystanders in the south of Algeria: “These massacres featured the most barbaric forms of brutality and execution, including throat slitting, decapitation, mutilation, rape, kidnapping, and the slaughter of children, women, and the elderly” (Hafez 37).

⁸² For more information on les années noires, please see : Belarbi, Ahcène. *Demain, la mémoire: chroniques de l’Algérie massacrée*. Éd. des Écrivains, 2000 ; Benchicou, Mohamed. *Journal d’un homme libre*. Riveneuve, 2008. ; Boussouf, Malika. *Vivre traquée*. Calmann-Lévy, 1995. ; Labter, Ladhari. *Journalistes algériens, 1988-1998 chronique des années d’espoir et de terreur*. Chibab Éditions, 2005. ;---. *Journalistes algériens entre le bâillon et les balles*. Ed. l’Harmattan, 1995. ; Moussaoui, Abderrahmane. *De la violence en Algérie: les lois du chaos*. Actes Sud ; Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l’homme, 2006. ; Slimane, Brahim Hadj. *Les années noires du journalisme en Algérie*. Éd. du Cygne, 2010.

weaves together Algeria's historiography with fiction, to voice unheard stories in order to temper overemphasized ones.

Though most of her texts and films address violence in some way, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (1995), *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002), and *La Disparition de la langue française* (2003) are the strongest examples of Djébar's 'capable' 'response' to connecting colonial and postcolonial violence in Algeria. Jane Hiddleston's 2006 book, *Assia Djébar: Out of Algeria*, elucidates not only the connections Djébar forges between past and present violence in each of the three aforementioned texts, but also the echoes found between these texts. She writes:

If *La Femme sans sépulture* figures the interplay between memory and amnesia in the form of the apparition of Zoulikha's ghost, *La Disparition de la langue française* is itself haunted by the earlier novel in its return to and reinvention of these motifs of dislocation and disappearance. Published just a year later in 2003, *La Disparition de la langue française* again explores the disturbing resurgence of memories of the war of independence, but here the focus simultaneously shifts forwards to the violence perpetrated by Islamists during the 1990s, and the text hints, as in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, at an unnerving cycle of repetition. (170)

The repetition of themes indicates a lack of resolution; still, Djébar continues to try to fill in the blanks left by history. Throughout this process, Djébar uses silences within her texts in order to show her recognition that not all stories have been shared.

Much of the narrative follows Djébar, accompanied by Zoulikha's youngest daughter Mina, as they travel around Algeria visiting with friends and family. During one such encounter, a close family friend and neighbor, interchangeably called Dame Lionne in French or Lla Lbia in Arabic, recounts the deaths of the Saadoun sons, three boys killed during the war more than twenty

years prior. Dame Lionne's story of the Saadoun brothers is punctuated by the word *silence* from beginning to end. Prior to her recollection, Djébar notes the quietude with the word acting as an entire sentence: "Un silence" (28). Dame Lionne pauses in her story about the young sons who were killed, and how they were warned that night not to go out: "La Dame rêve, écoute au-dehors *un silence frileux*, un frémissement, puis elle s'absente, yeux fixes, les franges de sa coiffe tremblotante dans la pénombre" (32, *my emphasis*). After several more details, once again Dame Lionne stops speaking, marked purposefully by another sentence of "silence" (33). In her tale, she notes the silence of grieving women who are accompanied by their silent tears (39-40).⁸³ In addition to the literal presence of the word "silence" within the text, Dame Lionne also mentions to Mina that she will not include references to Zoulikha in this memory, despite the fact that Zoulikha "pulses through her" every time she sees Mina (30). The silences interposed in Dame Lionne's story indicate moments of contemplation, self-reflection, despair, comfort, respect, familiarity and nostalgia. Hiddleston has seen this as Djébar's "attention to the psychological state of the speaker, of her omissions and digressions, and personal affects that colour her representation of the past" (*Assia Djébar* 165). The mental state of Djébar's characters often reflects the residual effects of traumas experienced in the past. The violence described by Dame Lionne during the Saadoun brothers account depicts the atrocities committed during the war from the perspective of women who took care of the bodies of the dead (31-44). Within the Saadoun anecdote, other

⁸³ "...*toutes les femmes se cachèrent et firent silence*. Je me souviens qu'en ce début de la nuit, la pluie s'était mise à tomber; et nos larmes, maintenant *silencieuses*, semblaient des oueds qui, sur le carrelage, se mêlaient à l'eau de la création" (39-40, *my emphasis*).

"J'ai pris la parole devant toutes, tandis que je contemplais ces trois jeunes gens : « Ce ne sont pas des hommes, déclarai-je en les admirant devant leur mère, leur sœur et toutes les autres qui *entraient en file et en silence*. Ecoutez, vous toutes, et inclinez-vous : ce sont nos lions ! »" (40 *my emphasis*).

violent episodes, such as the egg seller who was beaten bloody with his own crutch, are revealed (32). Later in the text, Djébar includes Dame Lionne's stories about the torture and capture of El Habib, Zoulikha's son, upon his return from his step-father, El Hadj Oudia's, funeral (111). It isn't until Zoulikha's monologues, though, that Djébar demonstrates the complex representation of silence and violence.

Whereas *La Femme* focuses on the devastation of war, *Le Dernier frère* sheds light on issues of domestic abuse and racial inequality in the diverse island nation of Mauritius. Much of the text in *Le dernier frère* is dedicated to the childhood memories of its protagonist, a seventy-year-old Indo-Mauritian man named Raj. The narrative begins with Raj dreaming of a visit from David, a Czechoslovakian Jewish refugee who was detained at the local prison where his father worked during World War II. Prompted by the return of his long-ago lost friend, Raj's mind goes back in time and revisits the ups and downs of his formative years. Central to these recollections is the abuse inflicted upon Raj by his alcoholic father. Raj describes how his father "hurlait des choses" and beat him, recalling that often his father's "colère et sa violence, gagnaient la bataille" (26-27, 98). A particularly vicious beating sends nine-year-old Raj to the hospital at the prison where his father works, leaving "l'infranchissable mur de la violence et de la mort" between them (72). Even more painful than the physical wounds inflicted upon Raj are the emotional ones. Raj's first overall memory is of his older brother Anil taking a beating in his place (22). This memory proves particularly difficult, as his little brother attacks the father in an attempt to protect the older one, while Raj stands by and does nothing. This formative experience concretizes Raj's image of himself as weak and fearful, qualities which bring him much shame as a child.⁸⁴ The guilt he feels

⁸⁴ "Enfant, j'étais faible. Des trois frères [Anil, Raj et Vinod], j'étais celui qui avait le plus peur, celui qui était toujours un peu malade, celui qu'on protégeait le plus de la poussière, de la pluie, de la boue. Et pourtant, c'est moi qui ai survécu à Mapou" (23).

at being inadequate becomes magnified when his brothers die in a mudslide following a forceful storm. The non-verbal attacks from his father invoke Raj's survivor guilt, and silently torture Raj:

Les yeux de mon père sur moi, ce regard qui noircissait de plus en plus, contre qui pouvait-il hurler, qui pouvait-il taper pour exorciser sa colère ? Et cette question qu'il n'a jamais pu prononcer tout haut mais que j'entendais à chaque fois que je passais à côté de lui, à chaque fois que sa main s'abattait sur moi, sur ma mère. Pourquoi toi ? Pourquoi toi, Raj, petit vaurien frêle, as-tu survécu ? Pourquoi toi ? Pourquoi toi ? (41)

His father's dark stare, combined with the regular beatings, leave young Raj constantly asking himself why he survived. The silence between father and son is emotionally brutal, and only occasionally violated by his father's vociferations, equally as cruel (43).

The dramaturgical quality that O'Riley noted in *La Femme sans sépulture* aligns with Appanah's vision of the "théâtre violent" portrayed in her novel *Le dernier frère* (130). The author's focus on violence—physical, emotional and natural—situates her text among contemporary Mauritian writers realistically representing the pluralistic population. In his article "L'expérience de la violence dans le roman mauricien francophone de la nouvelle génération," Emmanuel Jean-François analyzes the role of violence in contemporary Mauritian literature, and reads the presence of violence both in terms of content and esthetics as an overarching change in the texts hailing from his home island.⁸⁵ He develops the concept of the "territorialisation du mal," a movement by which Mauritian authors are subverting the traditional narratives of Mauritius as island paradise, and addressing the reality of social, economic and gender inequalities affecting

⁸⁵ "Cet ensemble de sous-thèmes liés à la question de la violence prend du coup une valeur particulièrement importante dans l'écriture de l'insularité puisque cette nouvelle description de l'île révélée dans toute son horreur fait éclater de l'intérieur la représentation exotique pour donner à voir une société ébranlée dans ses fondements mêmes. Cette représentation d'une île violente pousse à porter un autre regard sur la condition sociale du pays" (Jean-François 520).

the local population (516-517). Appanah's tale delves into the violence and silences surrounding the death of a young Jewish refugee, and the impending death of a man raised in the Coolie tradition of indentured servitude in the British colonial territory.

Despite the relative sociopolitical peace in Mauritius during the 1940s, Raj's home life remained tumultuous. Though slavery had been abolished, both British and French governments alike had found the alternative of indentured servitude, with which they could underpay and overwork peoples in search of a better living. This was the case for many Mauritians of Indian descent, known locally as Coolies.⁸⁶ Raj and his family represent this population. Raj's early life was spent in Mapou, a "slum" shared by his family with other members of the indentured servant class (17). Conditions did not improve much when Raj's family relocated to Beau Bassin. Other indications of the family's impoverishment include the fact that Raj was the only child to go to school, and that both the mother and father had to work. Appanah also explores the Fanonian concept of "depersonalization" experienced by Raj as young victim of domestic violence and as a Mauritian of Indian-Coolie descent. Fanon's interpretations of the results of subjugation can serve to explain the familial violence in Appanah's work.⁸⁷ The discrimination experienced by Raj's

⁸⁶ See Veronique Bragard's "Regards Croisés Sur La Mémoire Coolie Des Antilles Aux Mascareignes." *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2006, pp. 163-180; and Srilata Ravi's "Indo-Mauritians: National and Postnational Identities." *L'esprit Créateur*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2010, pp. 29-45, doi:[10.1353/esp.0.0236](https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.0.0236).

⁸⁷ The extent to which Fanon can be said to be promoting this violence has been debated by scholars, and perhaps most notably in Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to the 1961 text, Hannah Arendt's 1970 book *On Violence*, as well as Homi K. Bhabha's 2004 forward entitled "Framing Fanon." Other scholars have interrogated the origins of extreme violence in the Algeria War. Rita Maran, in her investigation into the motivating forces behind the systematic torture deployed by the French army in Algeria, cites several possibilities, including the fear of fascism and terrorism (80-1). She also highlights France's behavior in Algeria as one of the most impressive examples of a contradiction between theory and practice, coupling the ideology of the *civilizing mission* with the implementation of torture to maintain possession and control of the Algerian territory. James D. Le Sueur traces the roots violence back even further in time, to the Roman Empire, indicating that such methods of torture had been practiced in this part of the world for thousands of years (163).

father in his work-life effected his home-life, creating a legacy of “depersonalization” that left Raj suicidal as a teenager, not unlike many of Fanon’s patients in the Algerian War (Appanah 202; *The Wretched of the Earth* 249-310).

Not only did Fanon highlight women’s roles in the Algerian War for independence and the mythology surrounding their oppression, but he also forged connections between similar situations of oppression in other times and places around the world. In a collection of essays published posthumously in 1965, *Toward the African Revolution*, Fanon likens Nazism to colonialism, considering them both as “evil” (171). Though set far from “the revived methods of torture and genocide” that occurred on European, American and Japanese soil, David’s European Jewish heritage situates *Le dernier frère* within the destruction and discrimination of World War II (171). Appanah couches references to the violence of David’s refugee life in Raj’s reflections as he wonders how David could have ever laughed or smiled “avec tout ce qu’il avait vécu du haut de ses dix ans” (10). And while the prison at Beau Bassin never served as a site for the perpetration of genocide, like many of the European concentration camps (i.e. Auschwitz-Birkenau), there was nonetheless a significant population of Jewish refugees detained in the prison because of their cultural-religious background, living under constrained and less than satisfactory conditions.

Geneviève Pitot’s 1998 historiography, *The Mauritian Shekel: The Story of the Jewish Detainees in Mauritius, 1940-1945*, details life for the Jewish refugees during their time on the island. Pitot’s text, one of the only texts dedicated to this event, compiled from newspaper articles, government documents, and detainee memoirs, follows the group of Jewish refugees from their European emigration beginning in 1939, through the four years in Beau Bassin prison in Mauritius,

Both Maran and Le Sueur, in tracing the origins of violence in Algeria, indirectly support Fanon’s claim of the inevitability of violence in a dominated, oppressed society seeking independence.

to their eventual admittance into Palestine in 1945. After the first year in Mauritius, the detainees were experiencing physical and psychological problems:

The physical problems included old age, fatigue, the tropical climate, and the unaccustomed foods, which many found difficult to digest, especially prepared under dubious hygienic conditions. In spite of the rose-tinted reports prepared by the Commander, amoeba and dysentery were endemic. There were also infections due to poor diet and malaria which continued to claim its victims, especially during the hottest months of the year. There was also a variety of psychological problems: frustration due to many causes, the desire for liberty that had become a neurosis in some cases, the constant friction of living with people that one had never liked and now could barely tolerate, as well as sometimes tense relations with the authorities. (159)

Though incomparable to the torturous life (and death) faced in the concentration camps, detainees of the Beau Bassin prison still experienced deterioration of the body and of the mind as a result of regulations imposed upon them by an oppressive, and in this case, colonial, power. In his letter of resignation from the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in 1956, Fanon writes that “[m]adness is one of the means man has of losing his freedom” and that the Algerian Arab is “permanently an alien in his own country” and “lives in a state of absolute depersonalization” (53). This “neurosis” or “madness” described by Fanon manifests itself in the revolt at Beau Bassin prison that occurs after the cyclone and precedes David’s escape with Raj, described as “une chose monstrueuse” (108). It is also expressed in David’s illness; though malaria was documented to have afflicted the detainees, and be a general malady of concern for this part of the world, the fact that it eventually kills him, so close to the end of the war, fortifies that connection between detainment in Mauritius

and the extermination his fellow Jews faced in Europe, silently evoking the extreme violence perpetrated during the Holocaust.

Djebar's Ekphrasis, a mosaic of silences

The problematic of how to adequately describe violence looms largely for both Appanah and Djebar. One solution, it seems, is the inclusion of silences within conversations or their descriptions. With *La Femme sans sepulture*, Djebar finishes a part of her biographical project that began twenty years earlier. Djebar's story in *La Femme* is made up of a collection of anecdotes from those family and friends who knew Zoulikha, the legendary female warrior who fought and then disappeared during the Algerian War. Through her writing, Assia Djebar humanizes, contextualizes, and nuances the already complex understanding of the violence of the Algerian War. This manipulation of voice by Djebar facilitates her interpretation of the legend; the real Zoulikha disappeared suddenly and her family was left with many unanswered questions. In a prosopopoeial gesture, Djebar gives the spirit of the deceased Zoulikha the ability to speak, and it is through Zoulikha's monologues that the reader accesses Djebar's imagination and homage to her dead heroine. Over the course of these chapters, Zoulikha speaks to her youngest daughter, Mina, about her experiences in the underground resistance. This literary gesture, what Emily Tomlinson terms "la stratégie-femme," allows Djebar to honor the memory of a local female warrior as well as to bring to light how silence intertwined with the violence perpetrated in Algeria during the war (37, 46-47).⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Tomlinson's "*la stratégie-femme* consists in rescuing these figures [i.e. Zoulikha] for an instant from the silence of their tombs" and in "re-cognizing" "the expression of silenced subjectivity" (37, 46-47, original emphasis).

Djebar weaves in to the written work of fiction mentions of the documentary film she had been working on years earlier, once again focusing on the mélange of media, as well as the mixture of fiction and fact. She confirms the intention to rewrite Zoulikha's story with the first line of the Prelude to *La Femme sans sépulture*: "Histoire de Zoulikha: l'inscrire enfin, ou plutôt la réinscrire..." (13). Mirroring the silence surrounding Zoulikha's life and contributions to the Algerian War is Djebar's own personal twenty-year literary silence. Djebar admits her own personal silence with regards to the narrative from the outset of her autofictional text. In a 2003 interview with A. Armel, Djebar explains the text's history:

C'est un roman commencé en 1981-1982, après *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*. J'avais écrit cinquante pages environ sur l'histoire de Zoulikha, une résistante de ma ville, montée au maquis à quarante ans et arrêtée en 1958, puis portée disparue. J'avais rencontré ses deux filles pour mon film, *La Noubia des femmes de Mont Chenoua*, dédié à Zoulikha. L'été dernier, je l'ai repris, tout en m'interrogeant, parfois avec culpabilité, sur mon propre abandon : j'ai fini peu à peu par comprendre que, dans les années 80, j'étais dans la contestation des héros à glorifier, en voyant que devenait la plupart des ex-héros vivants... (102)

Djebar underscores this previous delay within the novel via one of Zoulikha's daughters, who chastises her for not coming sooner to talk about her mother, "la mère des maquisards" (14). And this is not the first time; the stories transcribed in *La Femme sans sepulture* are told to Djebar several years after she initially met the women in Zoulikha's life. *La Femme* is not Djebar's first foray into telling Zoulikha's story. Twenty-five years earlier, Djebar dedicated her film, "La Noubia des femmes du Mont Chenoa," to Zoulikha. Jane Hiddleston comments on both the commonalities and differences between the two projects:

The focus also of Djébar's investigation in "La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua," Zoulikha's story demonstrates the unyielding violence of colonial oppression while simultaneously exposing the cracks in the subsequent public denial of that violence through the heroine's recurrent reappearance even after her death. The novel is distinct from Djébar's previous investigations, however, because the evocation of the war takes the form of the ghostly reappearance of the central character who, like the spectres of colonialism, hovers between the living and the dead because she was never properly laid to rest (*Assia Djébar*, 158-159).

Hiddleston's observation centers on the relationship between Zoulikha's representation and its connection to the legacy of colonial violence. One of the most important aspects of Zoulikha, both as a person and as character, is that her death and burial (if there even was one) remain a mystery. For Florence Martin, "Telling Zoulikha's story a second time means listening to the silence surrounding it" (161-162). Djébar says as much in the text, in an exchange between the narrator and Mina in reference to the documentary which at the time had yet to be released: "Ensuite, poursuit la narratrice, je vois ce film se dérouler presque en muet: au fur et à mesure qu'approche le suspense" (204). The integral role of silence, noted by the author and critics alike, compels a close examination of the silences within Zoulikha's spectral monologues. Through the combination of stories and silences, Djébar is able grasp at the meaning, or at least begin the process of understanding, of what happened to Zoulikha and who she was.

Djébar acknowledges and even reinforces the mixture of genre in the content that will follow in the text. Djébar begins *La Femme sans sépulture* by informing the reader of her intentions in the text, indicating that she has taken literary liberties in order to bring the story of her hometown heroine to life. In the *Avertissement*, she writes: "J'ai usé à volonté de ma liberté

romanesque, justement pour que la vérité de Zoulikha soit éclairée davantage, au centre même d'une large fresque féminine – selon le modèle des mosaïques si anciennes de Césarée de Maurétanie (Cherchell)” (9). The overlapping of history and fiction is joined together by the inspiration of ancient Roman mosaic art. Similar to the use of spectral figures, Djébar's inclusion of the mosaic as a motif throughout the text counts as another means by which she incorporates non-verbal, or silent symbols, creating a historically based, fictionalized representation of the female warrior Zoulikha Oudai.

This act of piecing together Zoulikha's story plays out through the role of the narrator who most often functions as the interviewer who listens to the stories and enacts silence in order to hear. Djébar deploys silence through the narrative structure as well as within the descriptions of Zoulikha's story, silent and unknown to many readers. As the narrator continues to visit with Zoulikha's family and friends, the ghost of Zoulikha interjects her own story through a series of four monologues. In these monologues, Djébar allows the ghost of Zoulikha to speak; the second-person narration seemingly addresses the reader, but we soon learn that the deceased warrior speaks to her daughter Mina, who she addresses as “ma chérie” or “ma Mina.” Still, Mireille Rosello believes that “[t]he opening remark [Avertissement] seems to exclude the possibility that this work is going to be a ghost story or veer toward the fantastic. And yet, ... the dead woman addresses the reader in the first person. Her ghost speaks directly to us” (151-152). By allowing Zoulikha as a character to recount her own story, Djébar gives a voice not only directly to this woman, but indirectly to all silenced women, in particular those from Algeria. In this sense, Djébar's prosopopoeia speaks a multitude of silences: the unknown ending of the female revolutionary, the ineffable stories of the deceased victims of violence, and the unspoken realities

of Algerian women during the war for independence. Djébar attributes equal substance to silence and words and their ability to communicate Zoulikha's story.

In her 1994 article entitled "Arab Women Arab Wars," Miriam Cooke underscores silences surrounding women's participation in the Algerian War when she writes: "the story we now have of the women in the Algerian Revolution is one that tells *what happened to the women* and not *what the women did*" (16). Eight years later, *La Femme sans sépulture* addresses both of Cooke's concerns. The text recounts the return of the Djébar to her birthplace, Césarié. In this town there lived a legend, and the novel gives homage to the famous Zoulikha, disappeared combatant, "la mère des maquisards" (Djébar 14). The narration is polyvocal and exclusively feminine; female family and friends of the deceased female combatant share memories of wartime, showing the strength of the community of women in Djébar's village and in Algeria in general. The violence that Djébar addresses comes out in part through the anecdotes told by those closest to Zoulikha: her two daughters, Hania and Mina, her sister-in-law Zohra Oudai (known also as Tante Zhora), and Lla Lbia (known also as Dame Lionne), her neighbor and protector. Djébar organizes the chorus of female voices as conversations, memories, and memories of conversations about Zoulikha. These stories, born of and told with silence, help bring to life the violent setting in which the revolutionary war heroine lived and operated.

Djébar's "roman-mosaïque" can be seen in the polyphonous narrative, voiced by Zoulikha's daughters Hania and Mina, her sister-in-law Zohra Oudai, and family friend Dame Lionne. It also manifests itself in the plethora of names used to refer to the narrator. The other characters in the text refer to the narrator using twenty-four different names, the most popular of

which include the “la visiteuse”, “l’étrangère” and “l’amie.”⁸⁹ Additionally, the autodiegetic “je” often refers to narrators voice. As a result, the position of the narrator as a character changes constantly, subverting a traditional and clear-cut narration for one that continuously calls into question its own perspective. Djébar thus mediates every anecdote by inserting herself into the narrative through the multiplicity of names. For Florence Martin, such “a narrative [...] can only be polyphonic (a single narrator may be unable to find the words for such ferocious cruelty)” (Martin 169). It can also be said, however, that she uses the same strategy to erase herself from the narrative; each time a new appellation is used, it seems, even if only momentarily, to represent a different character. The many names represent different characteristics; for example, the name “l’étrangère” recapitulates the strangeness or foreignness of Djébar’s position as she returns to Algeria after several years’ absence. Moreover, it refers to Djébar’s own feelings of alienation and difference, as well as the separateness Djébar assumes her hosts must feel towards her. Jane Hiddleston comments on Zoulikha’s position in the novel, observations that also apply to the narrator; she writes: “Zoulikha’s ghost speaks and is simultaneously silenced. She is both there and not there, she infuses the narrator’s fragmented evocations while at the same time absenting herself from them” (*Assia Djébar* 170). Djébar remains ever-present within the narrative, and yet somehow seems to allow other voices to speak louder than hers because of constant name changes. Hiddleston notes that “the curious position of the narrator/listener draws particular attention to the difficult process of relinquishing control of the narrative to leave space for alternative

⁸⁹ The following is a list of the twenty-four different names used to refer to Assia Djébar, followed by the first page on which they appear : je (9), la visiteuse (45), l’étrangère (45), l’intervieweuse (46), l’amie (83), l’invitée (47), cette voyageuse (47), cette nièce (48), cette inconnue (48), la passagère (69), sa compagne (80), son interlocutrice (80), l’autre (82), la voisine (82), celle qui écoute (87), cette femme, l’auditrice (90), l’écouteuse (93), cette fille de nos voisins (101), ma petite (116), la quêteuse (150), la narratrice (154), la conteuse (156), l’étrangère pas vraiment étrangère (213).

perspectives” (*Assia Djebar* 166). I would add to Hiddleston’s idea by noting that the back and forth also indicates the act of *taking back* control of the narrative.

The layering of narration through multiple names is also reflected in the storytelling style of the character of Tante Zohra. In the following passage, Djebar puts forth, through the narrator’s observations of Tante Zohra, her views on the process and purpose of stories, and her methodology for transmitting memories. The narrator comments:

Une histoire dans l’histoire, et ainsi de suite, se dit l’invitée. N’est-ce pas une stratégie inconsciente pour, au bout de la chaîne, nous retrouver, nous qui écoutons, qui voyons précisément le fil de la narration se nouer, puis se dénouer, se tourner et se retourner... N’est-ce pas pour, à la fin, nous découvrir... libérées ? De quoi, sinon de l’ombre même du passé muet, immobile, une falaise au-dessus de notre tête... Une façon de ruser avec cette mémoire... La mémoire de Césarée, déployée en mosaïques : couleurs pâlies, mais présence ineffacée, même si nous la ressortons brisée, émietlée, de chacune de nos ruines (129).

In Tante Zohra’s tangential orations, Djebar sees a strategy by which listeners achieve a sense of liberation in discovering the connections of the various anecdotes and untangling the dominant through-line. As the memories of Césarée, and those of its great heroine Zoulikha, resurface, it seems up to the storytellers and story listeners, in all their different forms, to piece them together into an enduring piece of literary art. In addition to the commentary on nature of memory, the above passage also valorizes the nature of the silenced past, and recognizes it as being ever present in the conversations of the local people of Césarée. This valorization also manifests itself when

the narrator and Zoulikha's daughter Mina drive in silence; the narrator is deep in thought and preoccupied by the stories she has just heard and the voice of Dame Lionne.⁹⁰

While Djebbar recognizes the plenitude of silence, and its essential role in telling untold stories, her ultimate goal is to break the silence surrounding women's stories. This message comes through Mina's point of view about "la visiteuse". Mina notes her own personal lengthy silence with regards to her mother's story, as well as that of her fellow females, and how the "visitor's" presence has allowed them to break the silence about her mother, an act that is both cathartic and empowering:

Elle, installée parmi nous, chacune des femmes, si longtemps muette, ou distraite, ou bavarde mais avec des petits riens, des propos menus, chacune éprouve le besoin de s'alléger. S'alléger ? Parler de Zoulikha, faire qu'elle se meuve, ombre écorchée puis dépliée.... O langues du souvenir ! (88)

The visitor's silent presence allows Mina, her sister, her aunt and her family friend to voice their reverence and appreciation for Zoulikha, and bring her back to life through the "languages of memory". Though the women in Zoulikha's life have in various ways been muted, this was in no way an indication that they had nothing to say. Djebbar's text allows their voices to be heard, achieving her goal to "write women's silent and often uninformed history" (qtd. in Armel 103).

90 "Tandis que Mina, à mi-parcours du retour à Alger, conduit en silence, son amie qu'on peut supposer somnolente, mais en réalité habitée entièrement par les derniers récits de la veille, qu'elle a elle-même sollicités, chez Dame Lionne – cette « voix de Dame Lionne » s'est arrêtée en elle, comme si, en vérité, l'éloignement, après une demi-heure de route loin de Césarée agissait pour diluer peu à peu, la vitesse de la voiture y ayant sa part, ces voix persistantes et mouvantes de la mémoire..." (150, my emphasis).

Language and/of Silence

While Djébar's *La femme* focuses on creating a literary mosaic of women's voices and allowing them to share silence and histories, Appanah's *Le dernier frère* works to break silences surrounding ethnic and religious inequalities and discrimination in Mauritius's history. As a result of their respective colonial histories, both countries are multicultural and thus multilingual, and as result the question of language figures largely in their narratives. The multilingual context, can paradoxically result in a lack of communication between characters that do not speak the same language. In these instances, silence becomes the language of communication. In the following section, I analyze how both authors address the plurilingual environment of their characters, and how they navigate conversations through the language of silence.

The significance of plurilingualism appears throughout *La Femme sans sépulture*, and in Zoulikha's case, becomes an identifiable characteristic. Her education and upbringing allowed her to become fluent in Arabic, Berber, and French languages. One of Tante Zohra's stories recounts how her cousin Djamilia is mistaken for Zoulikha because she speaks French to officers searching for the trilingual rebel (130). Her linguistic abilities played a role in her personal relationship as well; Zoulikha's third husband, El Hadj Oudai, only spoke Berber and Arabic, and so Zoulikha was tasked with translating the French language newspapers for him (143). Djébar underscores Zoulikha's language skills most directly in her final monologue. Amidst a scene in which Zoulikha graphically describes how she is stripped naked and tortured, the war heroine proudly states: "Ma voix qui n'émettait aucun mot, ni arabe, ni berbère, ni français" (200-201). Despite her pain, Zoulikha refrains from reacting or revealing any information to the French authorities about her participation in the revolution. Zoulikha's refusal to speak in such a stressful situation attests to her fortitude and dedication to independence, both Algeria's and her own.

Djebar continues to highlight the various languages throughout the entire text. She includes the names of cities and characters in both French and Arabic: “De ma ville, « Césarée », c’est son nom du passé, Césarée pour moi et à jamais...” (13); “Marengo (Hadjout, aujourd’hui)” (17); the name of the neighbor, used interchangeably throughout the text, in French “Dame Lionne” and in Arabic “Lla Lbia” (25). She also interjects Arabic words into the text, such as “une medersa,” “le menfi,” and “des hablous,” where context would make them understandable (70). One of the chapters is entitled “Voix de Hania, l’apaisée,” indicating the meaning of Zoulikha’s eldest daughter name in Arabic (52-53). This inclusion of Arabic provides an indication of what Djebar later states directly in the text; that many of these conversations are translated and transcribed from Arabic to French. For Zoulikha’s youngest daughter, Mina, Djebar’s linguistic intervention is crucial to her ability to understand the stories about her mother (105).

The multiple languages from the “*nuba* of female narrative voices” are also noted for their multiple accents (Martin 163, original emphasis). These distinctions demonstrate how closely language, and its pronunciation, are linked to identity and status. Most conversations take place in Arabic, with what Djebar considers to be “...douceur... de la sonorité andalouse propre à l’arabe raffiné...” (15). There is also a comparison between refined Arabic and “arabe dialectal,” highlighting the difference between a classical version of the language taught in classrooms, and the colloquial version that most people, especially outside of the cities, would use. Djebar references how Dame Lionne, long-time resident of Césarée and Zoulikha’s confidant, speaks “dans son dialecte précieux” (27). Hania, Zoulikha’s oldest daughter, can speak both Arabic and French; she is very proud of “[s]on accent français impeccable” which allows her to pass for a European, but often “elle passe à l’arabe et à son tutoiement plus facile” (56, 86). An anecdote

from Tante Zohra recalls a moment when, after independence, she addressed an official in Berber, inadvertently insulting him and ruining her chances of getting his help (135-136).

In addition to the inclusion of Arabic words in her French language texts and the explicit recognition of the various languages being spoken, Djébar also interjects her own commentary on the status of language within the Algerian national context. A third of the way into *La Femme sans sépulture*, Djébar seems to indirectly criticize the Arabization movement promoted by the resulting Algerian government following independence. She writes: “Le jeu des trois, sur une même terre: trois langues, trois religions, trois héros de résistance, n’est-ce pas mieux?” Toutefois, cette conclusion, la visiteuse ne l’a pas formulée à voix haute, mais pour elle seule” (70). In this passage, the narrator silently contemplates the utility of the Arabization of Algeria, which excluded all cultural influences except that of Arabic and Islam. Thus, Christianity and Judaism didn’t have a place in the national religious narrative, nor did French, Berber, or Hebrew.

On the seemingly contradictory side of Algeria’s multilingual past and present lies the prevalence of silence within the text. When Zoulikha’s youngest daughter, Mina, addresses the narrator, she takes long pauses in between details of her story:

— Moi aussi, *murmure* Mina, j’enseigne à Alger. Mais au collège ! J’ai vingt-huit ans.

Elle *se tait*. Elle respire.

— À l’indépendance du pays, j’avais quinze ans !

Elle *se tait encore*. Puis elle reprend, *plus bas* :

— Quand ma mère a été tuée, j’avais douze ans. (*my emphasis*, 15)

Mina speaks quietly and thoughtfully, taking breaths and breaks as she begins to think about the revolutionary war and her mother. The pauses that are noted by Djébar indicate Mina’s state of mind, but also serve to refocus the reader’s attention on what Mina will reveal next. Whether she

stops herself from speaking because she is overwhelmed with grief or nostalgia is less important than the fact that Mina stops herself from speaking in order to move forward with her overall story. The hesitations draw the reader in, encouraging them to wonder what about this story makes it so difficult for Mina to talk about it.

Learned silence resulting from loss or trauma is also explored in Djébar's text through the actions of the heroine's youngest daughter Mina, and through the reflections of her oldest daughter Hania. Hania observes the developing relationship between her younger sister and the 'visitor', and she reflects: "Elles conversent là-bas: ma sœur a grandi maintenant, *elle a appris le silence*, mais avec l'autre elle parle, ou elle écoute" (82, my emphasis). Hania's comment carries with it the cultural obligation of the Algerian woman to remain silent. However, as noted in the dependent clause of the sentence, she is also able to negotiate silence, to use silence and to overcome silence by talking with the narrator. By connecting these two ideas in one sentence, I propose that it shows the generative potential of silence; Mina, through silence, is now able to share her experiences with someone else.

The word "silence" and its derivatives, as well as representations of non-verbal communication such as pauses indicated by ellipses, repeat regularly throughout *La Femme sans sépulture*. Early in the narrative, Zoulikha's youngest daughter remains silent upon her reunion with neighbor Dame Lionne: "Mina, attentive, reste silencieuse" (26). Dame Lionne, former fortune-teller turned story-teller, regularly suspends her anecdotes (28, 32, 33, 42-43, 116, 148). When Hania refuses to portray her mother, her explanation is interrupted by parenthetical hesitations; when she explains how her mother inhabits her, "un silence incertain s'étale" (51, 85). Even Tante Zohra's stories are notably preceded and/or interrupted by silences: "Après un

silence”; “Après un long silence” (74,113). The presence of these many silences suggests a variety of emotions and attitudes, including comfort, respect, familiarity, pain and nostalgia.

The plenitude of silence, and its purpose within a narrative is then reinforced once again as the narrator and Mina discuss editing the film about Zoulikha that the narrator began filming years earlier:

—Ensuite, poursuit la narratrice je vois ce film se dérouler presque en muet:
au fur et à mesure qu’approche le suspense.

—Ainsi, à chaque fois, dix ou vingt fois peut-être, la sortie de la ville avait lieu, pour ma mère, sans histoire ! C’est vrai, il y a le bruit de la rue, des soldats, mais pas de paroles entre les personnages ! Chacun d’eux a le cœur qui bat quelques minutes, au passage de cette porte. (155)

Both characters recognize that a lack of dialogue would create a suspense for the viewers, as well as an opportunity to relive the experience of Zoulikha as she traveled back and forth from the village to the mountains delivering supplies and information. Djébar explicitly recognizes, at least in terms of the relationship between documentary and audience, how silence draws the viewer in to the storyline. We as readers have an opportunity to understand the process by which the narrator develops a cinematic intrigue, and thus must also consider the silences in written text as well.

Later, Djébar explores the notion of a desired silence. Mina and the narrator eat at a restaurant owned by a pied-noir who was able to return to his hometown in Algeria after being sent away to Lyon in 1962. They eat the local cuisine and the loquacious owner makes it difficult for the two women to contemplate the stories they have heard about Zoulikha and how best to commemorate her, in the film, and in general. The narrator thinks to herself: “ ... (et elle se dit : La cuisine est délicieuse, les légumes marinés comme à la maison, mais Dieu que le patron est

bavard !... Nous laissera-t-il enfin dans le silence qui nous convient aujourd'hui ?) ” (183). This moment of inner-monologue, though in content fairly banal in the face of such situation, sets itself apart from the rest of the text for several reasons. The act, talking to oneself, is often inherently silent, a characteristic which is indicated as such by the use of parentheses as well as the expression “elle se dit”. In this self-reflective moment the narrator expresses that it is silence, not idle chit-chat, that they require. Silence is necessary in order to be contemplative, to be able to listen to each other, to be able to recall their memories, and to hear Zoulikha, whose voice, through the testimonies of her family and friends, has begun to inhabit the narrator’s mind. When silence finally arrives, Mina feels free, or at least freer, to speak about her memories of her mother, something which she has been largely unable to do up until this point in the narrative:

Soudain, ce fut la paix. Le silence, venant du jardin dehors, à peine la stridulation prolongée et affaiblie des cigales. Le patron disparaît pour sa sieste ; il laisse son serveur, un adolescent, veiller sur les clientes.

Mina garde sur les lèvres un sourire distrait. Plonge-t-elle dans le passé ? L’interrogation de son amie va-t-elle rester suspendue ?

Puis elle se met à parler ou, plutôt, se prépare à s’écouter parler : dans ce restaurant-gargote, un de ses relais familiers, elle n’oublie pas qu’elles sont... sur le chemin du retour, vraiment ? (184)

At last, Mina recounts her last visit with her mother Zoulikha, her final memory of her mother before Zoulikha disappeared. Thanks to silence, she finally breaks her own personal silence on the subject, able to talk about the village heroine whom she remembers as the mother she lost as a young girl. Woven with French and Arabic, silence acts as another language, to help tell the stories of the women of Algeria.

Like Djébar, Appanah addresses the realities and difficulties that can arise in a multilingual society. Her exploration of this within *Le dernier frère*, however, is limited mostly to the interactions between Raj and David, the two young protagonists. Still, this relationship proves fruitful because, due to the lack of a common mother tongue, silence also acts as a language. That is to say that because of their linguistic limitations, Raj and David find ways to communicate nonverbally, and they manage to develop a friendship.

Raj and David first “meet” at the Beau Bassin prison. Raj delivers lunch to his father at the prison, and afterward finds a secret hiding place in some bushes near the fence surrounding the prison. Raj would go there to talk to and mourn his deceased brothers. One day, on the other side of the fence, Raj and David make eye contact; they have both been crying and trying to hide it from others, but feel a connection. Raj continues to look for David after their first chance encounter, to no avail. It is only after he is hospitalized in the prison following a severe beating from his father, that Raj and David are reunited.

Raj’s admittance into the prison hospital confirms that French is not the language spoken in his home. Raj describes the change and hesitation in his father’s voice as he tries to convince the medical staff that Raj had fallen from a tree: “Il s’est arrêté plusieurs fois et à chaque fois, de sa voix de femme, il disait en français, tombé de l’arbre. Je ne savais pas que mon père parlait français...” (72). Raj’s commentary is notable not only for the background information it shares—that French is not his mother tongue—but also because he is more surprised by his father’s language ability than he is the obvious lie about how his son was injured. It also echoes previously mentioned descriptions as to the lower-class and uneducated status of Raj’s family.

The relationship between social status and language in Mauritius has a long history, and remains relevant in the present. In Srilata Ravi’s 2007 monograph *Rainbow Colors: Literary*

Ethnotopographies of Mauritius, she explores the diversity of Mauritian literature in French in relation to geographical settings and the ethnocultural identities of the peoples living in these areas. Her thorough background of Mauritius's heterogeneous population provides a basis from which to better understand the linguistic situation in which Raj and David's friendship blossomed. Ravi tells us that "More than twenty-two languages are spoken on this tiny island, but French, English and Kreol are the most widely used languages" (*Rainbow* 2). Moreover, "French remains the most influential language used in literature and other forms of creative expression," and one chosen over the English, a legacy of British colonial rule that ended in 1968, a century and a half after that of the French (*Rainbow* 2-3, 4). Françoise Lionnet, who has pioneered and promoted the study of Mauritian literature, has also provided a detailed summary of the role of language in her multicultural homeland. In her chapter "*Créolité*, Language, and Public Policy," she discusses both the history and present positions of language and literature in Mauritius:

The visual and print media broadcast or publish in several languages [in Mauritius], sometimes in the same program or article. But, as discussed in chapter two, the historic relationship since the eighteenth century between print culture and the French language has helped sustain the dominance of that language in the print media generally, whereas in recent years, *Kreol Morisien* is increasingly present in radio and television broadcast. *Kreol* is the language spoken by all, the only one that can be termed "national." French and English are also used and understood to different degrees by most citizens. Bhojpuri, Urdu, Tamil, Cantonese, and Hakka are now, or have been in the past, spoken by some members of the corresponding ethnic groups (especially, for some of them, in the context of ritualized social behaviors such as religious ceremonies). (227-228)

Though Appanah never specifies, it is likely that Raj's family spoke Tamil, Telugu, or another Indian dialect in the home. This is suggested not only by the family's life in Mapou, but most directly through the names of the protagonist and his brothers: Raj, Anil, and Vinod. The fact that French is not spoken in the home, (perhaps somewhat surprising because the first-person narrative is in French,) is thus revealed, when Raj unexpectedly hears his father speaking it at the hospital.

Raj's memory of his time in the prison hospital as a result of his father's beating is understandably disjointed and unclear. Not only did he suffer severe head injuries at the time, but the narrative has him trying to recall this memory sixty years later. The elderly Raj reflects: "C'est étrange, je n'ai pas tout de suite réalisé qu'ils s'exprimaient dans une langue que je ne connaissais pas" (76-7). This revelation sets the stage for the linguistic silence that will remain, for the most part, between Raj and David. As a result of the language barrier, there is very little direct dialogue in Appanah's text. Rather, through reported discourse, there are descriptions of the tone of the exchanges, as well as the sentiments they produced:

Au début, il m'a dit des choses tout bas, dans cette langue étrange et chuchotante. Cela ne m'a pas inquiété et il a, pendant un long moment, murmuré. Il s'était penché vers moi et dans mes oreilles, son discours était un long chuintement qui m'a beaucoup apaisé, comme une prière qu'on m'aurait soufflé à l'oreille. Mais après tout, peut-être était-ce une prière. Je regrette de ne pas avoir compris ce qu'il me disait, ce qu'il avait sur le cœur et voulait partager avant même qu'on ne se dise des prénoms, mais je l'ai écouté et le regardant attentivement, et je me sentais bien, entouré de sa présence et de ses mots. (78-79)

This first verbal exchange between Raj and David is rich with dialogue and at the same time silent. Because David speaks in a language unknown to the protagonist, Raj is unable to comprehend the exact meaning of his interlocutor. However, Raj, rather than feeling alienated by the inability to

understand the specific words, instead focuses on the tone, rhythm and manner in which David speaks these words, and senses that David is saying a prayer for him. Though Raj does not speak or understand Yiddish, he still gleans meaning, providing an interaction that supports the idea that there is communication beyond words.

Raj and David do not remain, however, absolutely silent. Despite their different backgrounds, they still try to communicate with each other, through games, gestures and mimicry; Raj explains: “Quand nous parlions, nous le faisons avec beaucoup de gestes, de mimiques, un peu comme les sourds” (88). Since dialogue is nearly impossible, Appanah uses this method as a work-around for performing communication within the narrative without quotation or m-dash marks. The limits of language are brought to the foreground in Raj’s discussion of needing a term for his kind of bereavement and loss. Raj explains:

Ma mère a porté, toute sa vie, comme moi, la mort d’Anil et de Vinod, et comme moi, elle n’a jamais réussi à mettre un mot sur ce deuil-là. On peut dire qu’on est orphelin, veuf ou veuve, mais quand on a perdu deux fils le même jour, deux frères chéris le même jour, qu’est-ce qu’on est ? Quel mot dit ce qu’on devient ? Ce mot nous aurait aidés, nous aurions su de quoi nous souffrions exactement quand les larmes nous venaient aux yeux inexplicablement et quand, des années plus tard, il suffisait d’un parfum, d’une couleur, d’un goût dans la bouche pour tomber à nouveau dans le chagrin, ce mot-là aurait pu nous décrire, nous excuser, et tout le monde aurait compris. (103-104)

There is no term that adequately describes Raj in relation to the loss he had endured, as there is for widows and orphans, leaving Raj with a feeling of alienation of both of self and from society. Raj remembers his learned silence, and how he would talk to himself, very quietly, in the absence of

his brothers.⁹¹ His survivor's guilt, in addition to the emotional damage caused by his father's alcoholism and physical abuse, keeps him from fully engaging in the school community. Though Raj doesn't speak to anyone, his whispered stories can be understood as communication with his brother's in the afterlife, and to some extent, a communicative and productive silence.

The plenitude of silence and its ability to encourage and promote communication plays a central role in *Le dernier frère*, though in a more indirect fashion than in *La Femme sans sépulture*. As Raj visits the grave of his childhood friend David, deceased over half a century earlier, he too finds the quiet reflection taking him back to a time when, despite the limits of language, he and David were able to forge a friendship:

Je crois que c'est comme cela que ça s'est passé. Après toutes ces années, je gratte et je fouille dans mon souvenir et il faut me pardonner car parfois c'est plus difficile que je ne le pensais. Il est possible que ce ne soit pas dans cet ordre-là qu'il m'ait dit les choses, il est probable que mon esprit arrange un peu les souvenirs mais ce que je sais très certainement, c'est que nous avons parlé très lentement, pendant des heures, dans la lumière déclinante de l'après-midi. Les mots dans cette langue française nous étaient étrangers, à tous les deux, cette langue qu'il fallait plier désormais à notre esprit, à ce que nous voulions dire et non plus, comme à l'école, se contenter de décrypter et de répéter. Nous faisons le même effort pour communiquer et nous faisons cela lentement, patiemment, peut-être est-ce la raison pour laquelle nous avons pu nous dire, très vite, des choses importantes, comme je suis seul. Moi aussi. (80-81)

⁹¹ [À l'école] "Je restais dans mon coin et je parlais tout seul, tout bas. J'avais aussi appris cela à Beau-Bassin. Je me racontais des histoires comme, j'aurais, jadis, raconté des histoires à Anil et à Vinod. Je bougeais mes lèvres comme ma mère quand elle écrasait ses potions, ses herbes, pour éloigner le mauvais œil, le mal et les rongeurs qui venaient manger les légumes du potager et bouffer le bout de nos orteils" (45).

The two boys had to speak slowly and deliberately in the ““neutral” medium of French” in order to understand each other (Lionnet, “Dire” 231-232). The passage highlights the importance of listening, as well as the desire or need to understand someone. Because Raj and David were lonely, and because they did not speak French often or fluently, they both had to make a silent effort and listen attentively to what the other was saying.

Perhaps partially as a result of the linguistic challenges that Raj and David faced in their relationship, and surely in part due to the traumatic ending, Raj is unable to speak about David for many years. When Raj goes back to school after a year of recovering from polio, he doesn’t tell anyone about David or their adventures; the only release he finds comes from returning to his hiding place near the prison, to cry as he did the day he met David (200). He waits years in silence until the history lesson about World War II, and though the exchange with his teacher is somewhat embarrassing, it ignites a passion to discover as much as possible about David (203-205). As discussed in the earlier in the chapter, Appanah includes a supposed newspaper article from 1973 that “officially” confirms the presence of Jewish detainees on Mauritius from 1940-1945 (205). The article reignites Raj’s research into Yiddish and World War II. Still, with the exception of his wife, Raj keeps these childhood experiences and the circumstances surrounding them a secret from his friends and his son. His silence is maintained another thirty-some years, before he dreams of David and feels compelled to “dire exactement” the story of this instrumental friendship in his life (175).

One step Raj takes toward honoring his friend is to learn the language David had spoken. He buys a French-Yiddish dictionary, and upon reading through it, recognizes words the words for “mother,” “hungry,” and “brother” (172-173). This recognition confirms for Raj that despite the limitations, he and David were able to, in fact, communicate. Through this exercise, Raj also

comes to another revelation; he admits: “...et maintenant je comprends qu’il [David] s’accrochait à sa langue maternelle, le yiddish, parce que c’est tout ce qui lui restait” (172). Even though French was Raj and David’s common tongue, David had continued to communicate in Yiddish because, as an orphan far from his homeland, he had lost every other connection to his past. With this new understanding of David, adult Raj recalls the last night with David in superlative terms: “C’est cette nuit-là que David chanta... plus magnifique que j’aie entendues” (178).

Through the exploration of the multilingual societies in which Djébar and Appanah’s narratives take place, both authors show the significance of language and how silence can function as language in such situations. While there may be limitations for the characters in terms of verbal communication, various permutations of silences that appear in both texts, whether through syntax or the allusion to moments of silence, demonstrate the power of silence within the narrative.

Violence of Nature, Nature of Violence

Somehow, despite the absence of fluency in a common language, Raj and David become friends. This is due, in part, to the ability of silence to act as a communicative language. It is also due to the non-verbal language of nature in Appanah’s narrative. Through descriptions of extreme weather and tropical island beauty, the natural surroundings of Mauritius help tell David and Raj’s story.

In the absence of dialogue, Appanah finds another way to tell the stories of Raj and David: nature. The natural world of Mauritius guides Raj through major events in his life, and descriptions of the weather and surrounding landscape accompany every memory. Toward the end of Raj’s adventure with David, nature literally becomes legible:

Nous passons notre temps à essayer de lire les lignes de la nature. Je crois que de tout temps les hommes ont été comme cela, à guetter des réponses, des signes, des avertissements, des punitions et des récompenses qui viendraient de l’au-delà. [...] David était à ma droite et son silence disait qu’il contemplait comme moi, qu’il absorbait la fraîcheur et les promesses de cette aube nouvelle. (181)

Raj learned this tradition of « reading the lines of nature » from his mother, who used plants homeopathically. Appanah has Raj situate himself and David in the general history of mankind, connecting himself not only to his mother and her ancestors, but also all the other communities in which the natural world plays a central role in daily life.

In *Le dernier frère*, the natural world becomes a silent language with which the author speaks, but also a means by which Raj and David communicate. In the book *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard analyzes the ways in which ecology can be used in the interpretation of literary texts. Garrard adopts philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept that language is not limited to human speech, but rather is able to incorporate gestures, expressions, and sounds from the natural world. Merleau-Ponty theorizes that “this language “belongs” to the animate landscape as much as it “belongs” to ourselves” (Garrard 36). The preponderance of descriptions of the environment set the stage for communication beyond words in which Raj remembers his first encounter with David as one of a “reconnaissance au premier regard, une identification physique, une reconnaissance du malheur aussi” (74-75). Appanah describes the instant recognition and affinity that Raj and David have for one another, one that was forged long before they tried to speak to each other. Without words, they were able to see themselves in each other, relate to each other’s situations, and perhaps due to the silences (deportation and imprisonment, physical and mental

abuse, containment, persecution for religious affiliation) forced upon each of them separately, find solace in this new, more friendly natural silence.

Lionnet notes the link that Appanah makes between the “tragic destinies unfold [that] against the lush background and ferocious storms of the tropics” (Lionnet 209-210). Appanah’s descriptions of the landscape and weather in Mauritius through Raj’s eyes elicit the conflicting joys and pains of remembering lost loved ones, thus acting as metaphor for this unnamable emotional state. The river near Mapou is the site of frolicking of Raj and his brothers while fetching water, but also the place where he loses his brothers to a mudslide. One moment Raj’s trail to the prison is destroyed and his path unclear, the next moment he is reunited with David, who is able to escape thanks to the chaos caused by the terrible storm. This text uses natural events, such as storms, to punctuate the narrative, and contrast them with the unnatural detainment of the Jewish refugees. The novel thus adds to the concept of productive silence in nature not only through the setting but also via the linguistic barriers, albeit not insurmountable, that David and Raj face. Whilst they do possess the limited ability to communicate in French, it is through their play in the courtyard of the prison and running through the woods that they bond.

Along with Raj’s recollections of the physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his father, he also remarks regularly on the violence of nature on the island. Raj likens storms in his hometown of Mapou to monsters and to combat: “À Mapou, la pluie était un monstre. On la voyait prendre des forces, accrochées à la montagne ; comme une armée regroupée avant l’assaut, écouter les ordres de combat et de tuerie” (19). He uses words such as ‘explode’ and ‘invade’ to describe the blinding lighting and mudslide that took his brothers’ lives (20, 33). His older brother Anil’s body was never found, but they discovered his younger brother five days later with “la tête éclatée” as a result of the force of the natural disaster (35). The cyclone that precedes David’s escape from

Beau Bassin prison, also includes vocabulary often associated with physical beatings. Raj describes how “la forêt craquait, se brisait, résistait” and how “la pluie qui mitraillait, des branches et des cailloux ... s’abattaient” (104-105). Nature’s destructive ability plays an important role as several different moments in Raj’s life.

Appanah deploys nature as action that occurs of its own accord and to which the characters must react.⁹² This device aligns with W.J.T. Mitchell’s proposal in the collection of essays entitled *Landscape and Power*, that encourages writers to “change “landscape” from a noun to a verb” (1). Though the relationship between the character and the environment is described using written words, it is inherently non-verbal, and thus possessing of silence. In the sixth chapter of Françoise Lionnet’s essay collection entitled *Writing Women and Critical Dialogues: Subjectivity, Gender and Irony* (2012), she recognizes the authors of *Paul et Virginie*, *La lézarde*, and *Le dernier frère* for their enrichment of francophone literature through descriptions of natural island surroundings. The use of ‘botanical allegory’ allows these authors to avoid the mimetic trap inherent in the post/colonial. She writes:

Bernardin, Glissant et Appanah traduisent des formes de subjectivité insulaire par le truchement d’une allégorie botanique – palmiers et arbres fruitiers – qui raconte toute autre histoire que celle de la dépendance mimétique par rapport à la métropole. (182)

Appanah’s “other story” involves the personification of nature that protects *and* destroys.

The protective role of nature is displayed first and foremost through Raj’s mother and her medicinal use of plants. She uses her knowledge to heal Raj’s wounds when he is beaten by his father, and helps him survive polio (195). Raj’s mother works hand in hand with nature through

⁹² This view of course does not take into account the 21st century concern of humankind’s effect on the environment through global warming, as this particular concern is not put forth by the authors in the texts treated in this essay.

the syntax of the narrative as well. Raj notes that "...la nature et ma mère semblaient être aux aguets" (102). The watchful protection in nature can also be seen in Raj's hiding place in the bushes just outside the prison (49-58); when Raj spent time here and observed his father working, he was not afraid (65). He also describes the "protective shield" of the forest's silence, and its potentiel for action: "Dans la forêt, c'est un silence presque animal, où la nature est en attente, prête à bondir, un silence épais fendillé par des craquements, des bruissements, des présences" (61, 154-155). This last description of the animalistic silent energy of the forest follows Raj's and David's flight from home; the comfort and plenitude of the silence in the forest that Raj usually experienced was replaced by emptiness, abandonment, and a lack of life. Appanah clearly subscribes to the multifaceted nature of silence, and she communicates this through descriptions of the natural setting of Mauritius.

Portrayals of nature pervade Appanah's narrative; the protective and beautiful ones just as pervasive as the destructive and deadly ones. An example of this comes early in the text when Raj describes his family's move from Mapou to Beau Bassin. He explains: "Le soleil et la pluie étaient devenus des choses essentielles, agréables et douces, pas de ces monstres comme à Mapou... qui tuent les enfants" (39-40). Within one sentence, Appanah shows both the positive and negative aspects of nature that guide Raj's life.

Through the use of weather, flora and fauna in *Le dernier frère*, Appanah explores the many facets of nature on Mauritius. As Raj and David were sleeping for the night after having run away, the comfort and plenitude of the silence in the forest that Raj usually experienced was

replaced by emptiness, abandonment, and a lack of life.⁹³ It is this shift that compels Raj to tell David about his brothers and how they died. He remembers with horror and accuracy the sound of the thunder that clapped the day he lost his brother's in a mudslide:

J'ai soixante-dix ans aujourd'hui et je me souviens comme si c'était hier du tonnerre qui a semblé venir de nos ventres tellement il a résonné en nous. Je me souviens de la peur, au début, du silence irréel qui a suivi le tonnerre, qui a tout figé, même la nature était en attente, et nous, nous n'osions plus bouger. (33)

Appanah's description of the thunder iterates the physicality of the thunderclap and the paralyzing effect of the thunder on Raj and his brothers. This sound seemed to resonate from his stomach, and still does as he remembers that day. The description of 'nature in waiting' likens it to a sibling or member of the family, as if nature would've run with the brothers too. This comment also hints at the multivalent nature of nature itself; that there is a distinction made between the destructive, violent nature of storms, and the reconstructive, generative nature of plant life.

The description of Raj's brothers' deaths is similar in its inclusion of beauty, awe and terror of the hurricane and mudslide. Raj and his brothers travelled daily to the river to fetch water, and were completing this task when a storm hit the island. As they made their way through the forest, Raj notices the insects and plants behaving in unusual ways: "Aucun papillon n'est venu vers nous, les buissons étaient secs, le vent faisait naître des minitornades et nous nous arrêtions pour voir les feuilles monter en spirale et redescendre" (32). The unique occurrence of leaves swirling in a "minitornade" formation and how it captivated Raj and his brothers is a memory that serves to

⁹³ "Et ce silence, différent de celui qui régnait dans la forêt. Dans la forêt, c'est un silence presque animal, où la nature est en attente, prête à bondir, un silence épais fendillé par des craquements, des bruissements, des présences. Ici, c'était un silence abandonné, il n'y avait que le vent qui soufflait dans les choses inanimées" (Appanah 154-155).

foreshadow the cyclone that will play an important role later in the narrative, "...le cyclone [qui] a duré quatre jours et quatre nuits" and led to David's escape from Beau Bassin prison (104). Once again, Appanah goes into great detail about the cyclone, and how it shuts down the village, school, and destroys parts of the prison yard. At the same time, concurrent with the gusts of wind and the pounding rain, catharsis occurs for both Raj and his mother, who spend the hurricane sheltered in their home, crying for the loss of their brothers and sons. A moment of terror becomes of moment of shared grieving.

While extreme weather events such as cyclones are the subject matter of many of Raj's memories in *Le dernier frère*, they appear briefly as metaphors for memories and the act of remembering in *La Femme sans sépulture*. Early in the text, Hania, Zoulikha's eldest daughter, remarks on the appearance of the narrator and the effect of her return. Hania observes: "Voici cette nièce de la voisine tuberculose – cette inconnue, au visage aigu et non fardé, seuls les yeux couleur noisette, noircis de khôl, et qui a une façon lente de vous fixer – déclenche, par son arrivé, des tornades de souvenirs" (48). One moment Hania feels that talking about her mother reenacts her murder, the next moment she feels reassured by the conversation and experiences a release of bitter feelings of abandonment. For Hania, the act of remembering is intense and powerful, uncontrollable with unpredictable results and a forging a capricious path ahead. In one such instance, the narrator is talking with Mina, who is about to reveal a painful secret from her romantic past. Right before Mina embarks on her story of unrequited love, Djébar describes the mood as a room after a storm: "...son auditrice a l'impression d'être rentrée par inadvertance dans une chambre ouverte à tous vents, comme après le passage d'un orage – volets battant, porte aux vitres brisées, lieu déserté qui aurait été théâtre de querelles, de paroles violentes" (93). The sudden and extreme effects of weather provide excellent metaphors for the process of remembering.

Djebar uses another ‘natural’ metaphor to pay homage to her hometown heroine – that of the bird. Midway through the narrative, the narrator visits the town museum and describes the strange mosaic with three bird-women from Césarée, which Mina relays is a retelling of Homer’s Ulysses and the Sirens from the *Odyssey* (106-107). The narrator remains “immergée dans la scène antique,” contemplating the position of the women-birds, who she is sure are about to take flight (108-109). The lightness of the women-birds is replaced in the next moment by the reality of the current-day “torpeur” in Algeria since the end of the war in 1962 (109). As she contemplates the mosaic, the state of her home nation and the life of her hometown heroine, she declares that only one woman really took off, and “c’est Zoulikha!” (109). Through the mosaic, Djebar makes connections between ancient mythology, her hometown of Césarée, and the modern-day ghostly legend she let speak through the text.

The image of Zoulikha as a bird returns again via the musings of the narrator as she contemplates Zoulikha’s presence in the memory of all the women she has been speaking with. She reflects: “Ainsi – rêve l’étrangère – Zoulikha héroïne flotte inexorablement, comme un oiseau aux larges ailes transparentes et diaprées, dans la mémoire de chaque femme d’ici...” (128). As opposed to the violent, incontrollable nature of remembering Zoulikha that Hania describes, Djebar sees Zoulikha’s presence in memories as a graceful, floating bird. In fact, this is the image that was intended to precede the very first line of the text. Djebar explains:

Le livre devait s’appeler “Les oiseaux de la mosaïque.” Le titre *La Femme sans sépulture* s’est imposé entre autres parce que je l’ai fini juste après le 11 septembre, à New York où, à dix minutes de mon nouveau logis, trois mille personnes allaient rester sans sépulture. Pour ce roman-mosaïque j’ai été appelée à réinventer les deux filles dans la durée de leur mémoire douloureuse... (102-103)

Had the original title been kept, the natural imagery of the bird would have accompanied Zoulikha's floating ghostly spirit throughout the entirety of the novel. However, because of the change in title, Zoulikha as bird-in-flight becomes a secondary association. What does remain, despite the change in title, is the essence "de la mosaïque" in the novel as Djébar pieces together anecdotes to honor Zoulikha's memory.

Silent Prosopopoeia: Listening to Ghosts

The most surprising voice in Djébar's memorialization of Zoulikha is that of the revolutionary herself; Djébar dedicates four chapters of *La Femme* to the deceased's heroine's ghostly musings. As Zoulikha addresses her daughter Mina, (and the reader), she makes references to blinding light, torturers, soldiers, grenades, bloody feet, hair pulled back, tortured, exposed breasts, and being beaten by a gun (64-65, 69). In Zoulikha's last monologue we find the greatest amount of detail about the torture that she suffered at the end of her life. She begins this monologue by talking to her daughter about "la longue durée de la torture et des sévices, ne te dire que le noir qui m'enveloppait" (197). Zoulikha shares details about how her torturers prepared the generator wires, buckets of water, and sharpened knives in order to "palper, tâcher d'en percer le ressort secret" (200). Zoulikha seems to try to mitigate her pain and suffering, somewhat paradoxically, by thinking about giving birth to her four children:

Penser aux quatre enfants que j'ai eus, au feuillage de murmures, de gémissements, de râles déchirés et d'assauts furieux qui ont précédé leur venue à chacun – t'imaginer plus particulièrement toi, Mina... cela m'a permis de traverser cette durée de la torture si longue sans que le sang, le pus ou l'urine m'éclaboussent l'âme, me souillent le cœur. (198)

Zoulikha is stripped naked and tortured, but finds peace and resolve by repeating her children's and last husband's names "tandis que [s]on vagin électrifié vrillait entièrement comme un puits sans fond..." (200-201). O'Riley reads this scene in the final monologue as a "visual spectacle" and "historic tableau" which represents the reproductive nature of colonial violence (76-77).⁹⁴ This juxtaposition of Zoulikha's tender maternal reminiscences of childbirth against that of rape and torture portrays the complex and often conflictual aspects of the Algerian War. For some, the revolution resulted in independence; for others, it ended in forced evacuation. For all, the war that pitted families and neighbors against each other lead to some kind of loss. Despite the silent years between Djébar's filmic tribute of "La Nouba" in 1977 to her hometown heroine and the literary one in *La Femme* in 2002, the inclusion of Zoulikha's monologues within the text proves extremely effective at reminding readers of Algeria's violent past.

Djébar's literary 'revival' of Zoulikha Oudai embodies the "Algerian woman" that Fanon describes, one who is "at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured, raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and to his inhumanity" (66).⁹⁵ In the first chapter in which her spirit/ghost speaks, "Premier monologue de Zoulikha, au-dessus des terrasses de Césarée" Zoulikha describes her capture, all the while making reassurances to her daughter Mina (63-69). The tone of her story is direct and calm, like that of a mother trying to explain a serious situation

⁹⁴ "The text underscores the haunting and gendered memories of images of colonial violence that engender a reproductive genealogy, uniting perpetrator and perpetrated in the aestheticized enclosure of colonial history" (O'Riley 76-77).

⁹⁵ In addition to the various manifestations of violence in colonial territories, and his in-depth analysis on the psychopathology resulting from the violence of the Algerian Revolution in men, Fanon also addresses the role of women in the fight for independence in his essay "Algeria Unveiled." In fact, Djébar's entire oeuvre, and certainly *La Femme sans sépulture*, rectifies the misleading "status of the Algerian woman—her alleged confinement, her lack of importance, her humility, her silent existence bordering on quasi-absence" underscored in Fanon's essay (65).

to her young child. She balks at the number of soldiers, trucks and helicopters that come to her arrest: “tout ceci, seulement pour une femme!” (67). Zoulikha then reports resolutely that “[l]e fusil du garde le plus proche s’abat mon dos. Je réussis, dans un sursaut, à ne pas fléchir. Ils doivent se mettre à trois ensuite pour me porter de force et m’enfoncer sous la bâche du camion” (67). Zoulikha paints an image of violence without superlatives or adverbs, indicating her previous experience with such mistreatment and violence as a quotidian presence during the war. That she focuses on her preparedness for the pain, her ability not to react to being struck by a weapon, as well as fortitude and resistance that requires three men to transport her into a truck legitimizes her role as a warrior. It also highlights the importance of her legacy for the Algerian people; making Zoulikha focus on her strength for her daughter during her arrest within the narrative is also a means by which Djébar gives homage to Mina’s mother’s real-life fortitude.

With the second monologue, Djébar shows the more complicated, human side of the war heroine. Zoulikha addresses her interrogations by a French military officer, her mixed feelings towards this Commissioner Costa, and the ways in which Algeria, colonized by the French since 1830, became the site of a violent war for independence from 1954-1962 (117-123). Towards the beginning of this ghostly discourse, Zoulikha admits that she refrained from sharing with her daughter her whereabouts during this interrogations: “Toi, ma Mina, je ne te disais pas que je me rendais aux convocations du commissaire Costa” (119). By confessing to her previous silence, Zoulikha underscores the multitude of silences that existed with regards to her life. Not only did her service go undocumented in the larger Historical sense, but so too did her trials remain unknown to her closest family members. Zoulikha continues by discussing her ambiguous relationship with Commissioner Costa. She details one scene which she calls “un viol sans complicité, mais peut-être sans haine” (121). The ambivalent emotions Zoulikha expresses toward

the commissioner exemplify the difficult task of describing, recounting and understanding Zoulikha's experiences in the underground rebellion. In her reading of the text through the psychoanalytic lens of introjection and incorporation, Anne Donadey views the passages discussing Commissioner Costa as evidence that Djébar is "interested in highlighting aspects of the war of liberation that do not coincide with official versions, including rape and desire for the "enemy"" (84). This taboo subject, a silence within Algeria's national narrative, becomes a silence spoken through Zoulikha's ghostly confessions. Moreover, within this second monologue, the various permutations of the word *silence* are juxtaposed; one describes a pleasant meal with family listening to news of the death and violence of the Algerian war, and another refers to an interrogation with the officer which ends in a rape (118, 120). This exchange is perhaps the apotheosis of Djébar's skill at complicating what may seem like a very binary situation of right and wrong, good and bad. She gives a nostalgic description of listening to bombardments and warfare, and recounts the desire experienced during a sexual assault. Such a gesture on Djébar's part continues to reiterate the importance of investigating silences and understanding that the loudest voice does not always tell the whole story.

Zoulikha's third monologue takes us back to the war heroine's childhood, when she was about the same age as her daughter Mina, or as Zoulikha puts it: "au moment de la stupéfaction silencieuse qui te saisit, à la nouvelle de ma disparition..." (168). She recounts her success in school, and her father's ability to keep their family land when others in the region lost theirs to the French government. Zoulikha also describes her marriage to Mina's father, Hadj Oudai, and how this relationship, in addition to her educational background, lead her to be a formidable rebel in the Algerian resistance. When Zoulikha mentions silence in this monologue, it relates to her daughter's shock, to her own dumbstruck reaction to falling in love, as well as to her lifestyle as

an Arab Muslim woman before joining the rebellion (173, 176). All of the references to silence at first seem to portray more traditional conceptions of silence and the social position of Muslim women in Algeria. At its core, however, Djébar weaves the exceptional story of an educated woman who married three times of her own volition, and who cherished and admired the comradery within the female community. She recognizes the silencing she was subject to as a Muslim woman, and reveals and praises the revolutionary work she completed, alongside other women. Zoulikha's revalorization of "la vie quotidienne avec ses chambres closes, ses patios secrets et quelques fenêtres aux persiennes entrouvertes, ce monde du clos, des chuchotements et du silence" then allows her daughter Mina to break her silences. The chapter which follows the third monologue describes Mina as she finally shares her side of Zoulikha's story with the narrator.

Zoulikha's final monologue recounts the torture she suffered at the hands of French soldiers, and the darkness she experienced during the days she followed. In addition to the extreme violence perpetrated against her, Zoulikha also recounts her final hours and the subsequent days, when her body was abandoned to die in remote woods, and eventually begins to decompose. Zoulikha now, in her final message to her daughter, reflects on the meaning, the potential of silence, a silence that has captured the suspense of the drama that she experienced:

... ses nuances, heure après heure, sa pâleur imperceptible lorsque les chiens bergers n'aboient plus et que le silence, couvercle immuable, écrase les fermes éparpillées, un silence d'attente, de théâtre, de tragédie éventée en plein midi qui prête à l'éther une vibration sourde et argentée... mon corps à terre se durcissait, s'installait dans une vigueur qui désormais te parvient. (204)

Though the silence of expectation that has encapsulated Zoulikha's unknown story is a silence filled with the torture and murder of well-loved revolutionary, it is also a silence that has preserved a mother's love for her children and her country.

The analyses of Zoulikha's monologues vary as much as the emotions the ghostly character expresses. Michael F. O'Riley underscores the exceptionality of Djébar's heroine by noting that "Zoulikha remains outside the projected territorial and corporeal embodiments of the lingering psychic strife of the colonial era and defies the claims of the body and its voice to a fixed place or territory in history" (81). Mireille Rosello contends that "the novel offers itself up as a different kind of tombstone" and that "[t]he desire for freedom and dignity is neither buried nor missing; it is alive, if not safe, within the novel's words" (161). While both O'Riley and Rosello provide important observations about Djébar's contributions to appropriate methodology of memorialization of war heroes and heroines, Hiddleston offers perhaps the most concise and complete description of the end result of *La Femme sans sépulture*:

The attempt to exhume, understand and mourn the victims of colonial oppression is not easily fulfilled, and writer and reader are called upon somehow both to resolve the past and to disallow its false resolution. Zoulikha's ghost speaks and is simultaneously silenced. She is both there and not there, she infuses the narrator's fragmented evocations while at the same time absenting herself from them. (*Assia Djébar* 170)

Perhaps using the expression "end result" is misleading, for none of these scholars understand Djébar's work as an end to anything. They speak of the simultaneity of actions which are not fixed in any place or in any time, but continue to 'defy' physical constraints, 'live' in the present, and 'resolve' the issues of the past. And now, through Djébar's text, readers can also, in silence, hear ghostly Zoulikha's story.

The ability for the characters of David and Zoulikha to speak is made possible through the mediation of the text, though as noted, to varying degrees; through the monologues, Zoulikha possesses more control and freedom with the information she shares, while David's voice gets filtered more obviously through the Raj's memories and desires. Similar to the gesture made by Djébar in *La Femme sans sépulture*, Appanah deploys the hauntings and memories of a deceased character as a central narrative tool. *Le dernier frère* begins with the line: "J'ai revu David hier" (7). We then learn that the protagonist, Raj, is still in bed, and most likely dreaming. A description of David follows, noting both David's physical attributes as well as the silent nature of David's appearance:

Je ne sais pourquoi j'ai tourné la tête vers la porte, David n'avait pas fait de bruit, ce n'était pas comme avant quand il marchait et courait un peu de guingois, et je m'étonnais toujours que son corps maigre, ses jambes et ses bras longs et fins comme les roseaux qui poussent au bord des rivières, son visage perdu dans ses cheveux doux et aériens telle l'écume des vagues, je m'étonnais toujours de tout ça, cet ensemble de choses petites et douces et inoffensives, fasse autant de bruit sur le sol quand David marchait. (7)

Initially, the reader is drawn in by the fact that David made no noise, and yet still attracted Raj's attention. The description and use of the imperfect tense intimates that David is a ghostly memory from the past; we realize on the following page that Raj is in fact dreaming. Raj explains his surprise at David's silence, because he used to make so much noise when he limped around the forest. This reverie continues in silence, despite the dreaming Raj's hopes and expectations: "Mais David, lui, ne m'a rien dit, il est resté là, à me regarder patiemment, entre ombre et lumière" (11). Raj finds himself also unable to speak, and he soon wakes (8, 11). Haunted and also comforted by David's visit, Raj asks his son to take him to St. Martin's Cemetery.

The silence present in the novel's debut remains as Raj seeks out David's tombstone. We as readers, however, still learn more about the specter from Raj's dream as he continues to silently remember his friend. He does not explain to his son why he wishes to visit the cemetery, and upon finding David's resting place, Raj kneels down and returns silently to memories of his childhood and friendship with the deceased boy buried below him. Appanah hinted at David's background during Raj's dream, when Raj wonders how David was able to not to cry considering everything he'd lived through (10). Raj then asks himself : "Mais alors, que savais-je moi, à neuf ans, des Juifs et de l'étoile de David ?" (14) With this brief question, in addition to the engravings on the tombstone, the reader can confirm that David was a young Jewish boy during World War II. Raj's admitted ignorance highlights the silence in Mauritius about Judaism and the perils faced by Jews under Nazi occupation in Europe. It also perhaps enlightens the reader about his or her own ignorance as to the presence of Jews on the Indian Ocean island during the 1940s.

The silence surrounding the circumstances of David's presence in Mauritius in 1945 manifest themselves through the repetition of silences throughout Appanah's narrative. In one such instance, Raj recalls waiting anxiously in history class to learn more about his friend David, only to be humiliated by his professor and accused of making up history:

J'attendais que le professeur parle enfin de ceux-là, de ceux qui étaient à Beau-Bassin et dont ma mère m'avait dit qu'ils avaient repris un bateau. [...]

—Oui ? Raj ?

—Monsieur, est-ce que vous pouvez parler des Juifs qui sont arrivés ici ?

—Pardon ?

—Est-ce que vous pouvez, s'il vous plaît, parler des Juifs qui sont arrivés ici ?

—Mais il n’y a pas eu des Juifs ici. Qu’est-ce qui te prend d’inventer cela ? Tu penses qu’ils sont venus d’Europe à la nage ou quoi ? (203-204)

In this exchange, Appanah addresses the silence surrounding the presence of Jews on Mauritius during the Second World War. Geneviève Pitot’s historiographic work confirms that media coverage of the presence of Jewish detainees in Mauritius was limited and that interaction with the detainees was strongly discouraged: “Media released statement saying that no one could contact refugees without serving time in jail” (132).⁹⁶ This, in combination with the teacher’s ignorance, suggest a concerted effort on the part of government authorities to keep this episode out of the British Mauritian history books.

In an effort to further legitimize the historical reality which serves as the basis for Appanah’s plot, she includes an excerpt that resembles a newspaper article from 1970, which discusses the internment of 1500 Jews who had been rejected from entering Palestine in 1940 (208-210). Printed in a different typeface and format than the rest of the text, the article explains the internment of the Jewish refugees in the local prison, twenty-five years later. The inclusion of another textual genre highlights the lacunae in media coverage in Mauritius’s past, as well as the potential fictionalization of historical facts in journalism. Françoise Lionnet questions this gesture

⁹⁶ “The Mauritian newspapers made no mention of the punitive aspect of the refugees’ detention in Beau Bassin nor the politics surrounding their deportation from Palestine. The detention itself was never questioned either. It was thought normal that people emanating from “enemy countries” would be imprisoned as a security measure. Among them might be Nazi agents. This argument was used to enforce the rule forbidding communication with the detainees. After all it was wartime, and people were used to the imposition of numerous security measures. They accepted them without question.

Furthermore, when the refugees arrived, no one tried to determine the exact circumstances that brought them to Mauritius. The general impression was that the British had saved them from the danger of *evacuation*. The fact that the Secretary for the State for the Colonies in London would have like to send them to the devil was, of course, never disclosed!” (Pitot 131)

in the narrative, for while it contains elements of partial truths, “this (3-page) account, cannot possibly originate from a “real” newspaper story, since it is only in the late 1980s that information about the 1940s began to appear in the public media” (“Dire” 212). Using Pitot’s text, Lionnet fact-checks Appanah’s fictional newspaper story and finds most details to be untrue. She subsequently questions this narratological choice, and wonders what the consequences might be:

But it does seem to me that by resolving the narrative questions about truth and fiction by means of a “news” story that is not one, and thus not factual, the author risks undermining, in the end, the best contribution of her compelling novel, that is, the fundamental opacity of humans to one another, and of the past in the present. Or perhaps the point is, ultimately, for the reader to question the so-called “document” and the “facts” it presents. (233)

Both of points Lionnet’s are compelling. The latter observation, which underscores how Appanah sets the stage for the reader to question any information from the authorities, by presenting many occasions in which the authorities (Raj’s father, Mauritian government, ignorant school teacher) make questionable decisions and comments. Just as Raj travels in Mauritius and throughout the world in search of information about David, so does the author compel the reader to continue to seek out the truths about the Jewish presence in Mauritius during the 1940s.

In congruence with Raj’s quest to understand his friend David, he imagines how David might have remembered Raj and the time they spent together. Unlike Zoulikha’s monologues, however, David is only permitted to speak through Raj. Raj explains:

J’aurais tellement voulu que David ait eu la chance de grandir et de vieillir comme moi. J’aurais voulu qu’il raconte, lui, son histoire, avec ses mots et les choses que lui seul a pu voir. Il dirait des choses comme : *De l’autre côté des barbelés, j’ai vu un garçon sombre aux cheveux noirs. Il pleurait comme moi et les feuilles lui collaient au visage et on aurait*

pu croire que c'était un animal. Il était à moitié enfoncé dans la terre, ce garçon à la peau sombre, je ne voyais que sa tête, ses yeux noirs comme des billes de jeu et si ce n'étaient pas ses pleurs, il m'aurait fait peur avec sa tête de sauvage.

Il dirait, peut-être aussi : Raj m'a appris à grimper aux arbres, à courir de telle façon que mes pieds ne touchent pas terre (ou alors à peine), il m'avait dit de courir pour courir, d'oublier son corps et sa tête et juste de sentir l'air qui frappe le visage et la vitesse qu'on prend à mesure qu'on oublie ses jambes et qu'on regarde droit devant et qu'on rit.

(160-1, original emphasis)

The narrator gives David the ability to speak in the first-person, but most of what David says refers to Raj. The only time David acts as a subject is when he “sees” Raj; otherwise his words describe Raj, or more precisely, how adult-Raj views his younger self through David’s eyes. Lionnet recognizes how “Raj desperately wants to be able to convey as truthfully as possible David’s *own* story” and that “he refuses to put himself in the role of ventriloquist” (“Dire” 231). I would add to her observation by saying that Raj eventually does try to speak for David, but conversely makes David *his* ventriloquist, speaking wishful words about an idealized version of Raj, the Raj that he hoped he was when he was David’s friend. Had Raj, and thus Appanah, using the information they had learned in their research about the Jewish detainees in Mauritius, employed the first person more diligently, they would have perhaps better fulfilled Raj’s desire for David to share his own story. By keeping Raj as the central actor and describing what he did, however, Appanah demonstrates her respect for “the fundamental opacity of humans to one another” (Lionnet, “Dire” 233). And whereas David’s voice may remain forever silent, Raj’s voice finally speaks out.

Raj continues to doubt his authority to tell David’s story, but nonetheless wants to share his story to the best of his ability. He admits:

Ah, j'ai l'air fin de raconteur tout cela aujourd'hui, de dire tout cela, de parler de lui comme cela, comme si j'avais une quelconque légitimité à parler de ces choses innommables, qu'est-ce que je sais moi de ce qu'il pouvait ressentir, qu'est-ce que je sais moi de la déportation et des pogroms, qu'est-ce que je sais moi de la prison? Pauvre vieux que je suis ! (161-162)

Part of Raj's uncertainty comes from the very ineffability of certain events, traumas that elude explanation. Or perhaps we can understand Raj's insecurity as Appanah's; a caveat that shows the struggle between the desire to shed light on the presence of Jewish refugees in Mauritius during World War II, coupled with the recognition that her representation is limited. Through Raj's thoughts, Appanah underscores the complex interplay of catharsis Raj feels as he finally speaks about "unnamable things" and the survivor's guilt that has kept him silent into old age. Through Raj, Appanah demonstrates the importance of sharing traumatic stories, and of recognizing and respecting the parts that remain silent.

Nathachah Appanah's and Assia Djebar's literary ghost stories revisit violent moments in their respective countries' histories that had remained (for the most part) cloaked in silence. For both authors, silence is an integral part of their storytelling process. Appanah explains the necessity she felt to write about Mauritius during the Second World War:

En débutant l'écriture de mon quatrième roman, je me suis dit qu'il fallait vraiment que je traite de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Je m'interrogeais sur la rencontre entre un petit Mauricien et un petit Juif, ignorant de tout de leur existence respective. D'ailleurs, la plupart des réfugiés juifs n'avaient absolument aucune idée de l'existence de l'Île Maurice. Et je me suis dit que ces deux méconnaissances-là, en même temps, cette grande

reconnaissance qu'ils avaient entre eux de la difficulté de leur vie propre, devaient être mis en perspective... (qtd. in Lionnet, "Dire" 211)

The central relationship of *Le dernier frère* fleshes out the heart of minor transnationalism by exploring what happens when two populations (and in this case, fictional representations of them) meet. The narrative encounter allows the reader to identify the cultural differences and understand their shared humanity that surpasses language, ethnicity and religious background. For Djébar, the need for humanity deepened in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11th, 2001, where she living. The attacks inspired Djébar to finish the "roman-mosaïque" that she had started some thirty years earlier. In a 2002 interview, Djébar elaborates:

Cette narration romanesque tente d'inscrire l'histoire silencieuse et souvent mal éclairée des femmes. Elle vient réparer un oubli, une amnésie de nos sociétés sur une part essentielle d'elle-même, conforté par le fait qu'en Occident, la connaissance du tiers-monde ne se fait qu'à travers l'histoire immédiate. (Djébar in Armel interview, 103)

Djébar's "attempt to inscribe the silent and often unenlightened history of women" is in fact not just a memorial narrative, but also a model for speaking the silences of women. Thanks to these texts, Zoulikha's "chant demeure" for Djébar's readers, and Appanah's readers can say that 'nous nous souvenons, nous aussi, de "l'histoire de David" (214, 211). Whereas Djébar provides a more self-reflexive and explicit exploration of the nature of silence in female Algerian society, Appanah incorporates the silent natural world and its integral role in Mauritian literature. Through the ghostly and thus silent voices of a war heroine and war victim, these authors enrich and inform the histories and cultures of their respective homelands.

CONCLUSION

As part of the methodology guiding my research, and in the newer traditions of the past twenty-five years or so, I took a comparative transnational approach in the analyses of silence in novels by Francophone women from Algeria and Mauritius. From there, I organized each chapter by theme, contrasting a novel from both countries. Hélène Cixous's *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* and Ananda Devi's *Les Hommes qui me parlent* joined together in the second chapter because of the autofictional genre, the authors' experimental use of language, and the well-developed connection between writing and identity. In the third chapter, Shenaz Patel's *Le Silence des Chagos* addressed the trauma of forced deportation and the quest to understand the undisclosed effects of the displacement of the Chagossian people, echoing the detailing of the deadly protest in Paris in Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. The characters in both novels experience silences as a result of the multilingual societies in which they live. Lastly, I examined the prosopopoeial voices in Assia Djebar's *La femme sans sépulture* and Nathacha Appanah's *Le dernier frère*. In addition to allowing ghost characters speak, both authors interrogate the long-silenced memories of their protagonists' respective pasts. Languages and the ability or inability to speak them play a central role in the lives of the main characters, and for Appanah, the descriptions of the natural world in Mauritius structure the narrative and serve as a nonverbal (silent) language with which the characters communicate. In all six texts, silence figured largely in the inspiration of the authors, the communication of the characters, the recognition by the general public (or lack thereof), and/or the structure and syntax of the manuscript.

It was alarming and comforting at the same time to discover the commonalities between this small sample of Algerian and Mauritian women's literature. On one hand, the countries had significantly different colonial histories, and yet the authors from both regions described a colonial

legacy of alienation, violence, and loss. On the other hand, all the authors portrayed their struggling characters as people with hope, perseverance, and the ability to connect with others regardless of the obstacles. Authors and characters alike recognize the unjust silences they are faced with and then manage to break those silences, all while deploying and interpreting productive, fertile silences.

As with any academic endeavors, there were several other potential texts that fulfilled that criteria set forth in this dissertation, but did not make it into the final manuscript. Ananda Devi's short story *Moi, l'interdite* (2008), uses magical realism to tell the story of a hare-lipped girl who temporarily shape shifts into a dog. Paradoxically, it is this time as a dog that allows her to belong to a community, whereas she had been shunned by her family as a human. Insights from teratological scholarship may shed light on other silenced topics, such as the marginalization of people with physical deformities. It also calls into play the non-verbal communication between animals. Algerian author Malika Mokeddem's autofictional work of a similar name to that of Devi's, *L'interdite* (1993), also addresses exclusion; her forbidden woman experiences alienation from her family because she breaks Algerian gender roles, leaves the village and becomes a doctor. The story of her return home and her friendship with a young local girl provide opportunities to look at silence in narrative as well as what could be considered women's more *silent* role in Algerian culture. Yamina Mechakra's *La grotte éclatée* (1979) provides an intimate look at the life of female Algerian revolutionary. In addition to the detailed descriptions of injury, Mechakra explores the suffering of confinement that the first-person female narrator experiences in the cave in the Aures Mountains of Algeria during the war for independence. The text itself is imbued with material silences; chapters of narrative prose are interrupted by emotionally charged poetry, leaving large amounts of seemingly empty white space.

Silences allow for slippage between languages, thus allowing for a more transnational reception and understanding. If the colonial language forever relates back to colonial domination and the subsequent nationalist project, then the breaks in text/dialogue/narration serve to create intertextual and extratextual connections between books written in French. It is another way to look at Francophone literature, not as reproduction of 19th and 20th century French colonial domination, oppression and manipulation, but as a production of its own accord, that expresses African experiences in a language in which they did happen. All six authors revere the literature they were educated on, but remain critical of it and reshape language and writing in order to make it represent them, and potentially others. The silences serve as a means to connect author and reader, and writer and self, despite the diverse and sometimes seemingly paradoxical deployment of silences with their works.

These moments of silence, both explicit and implicit in the text, help engage the reader in the communication of the story more effectively. The nonverbal cues prepare the reader for the upcoming events, and perhaps allow for a richer reader experience that wouldn't happen as easily with the inclusion of dialogue. The complex operation of silences may initially challenge reader comprehension, or perhaps temporarily elude her recognition. When juxtaposed with silence, the power and depth of sound is augmented, enriching the potential meanings. Similar then to the idea of an empty dark space, the womb where human life is created, so can silence be conceived as a space where sound and meaning is created. Silence is the in-between of discourse, and focusing on silence(s) could subvert the inherent "hierarchical structure of male-female relationships" found in the nature of most languages (Oyewùmi 158). Thanks to these authors, the silences remain, preserving a porosity of the text that maintains the veracity of the narrative while simultaneously allowing the reader to incorporate her own layers of meaning into the interpretive reading

experience. Silences, in these novels, serve to forge connections to people of Algeria and Mauritius, and in particular the women, at the same time as it reveals their stories.

I now understand the silences as a necessary trace or aura of the untranslatable or unspeakable. Certain memories or events are too violent or traumatic to recount, some are hindered by a language barrier, and still others are stories not yet heard. In order to maintain the integrity of the narrative, for author, subject, and reader, silence must be present. Cixous and Devi are as such able to more accurately communicate their respective pasts and identities because silence maintains the specificities of their histories, it can legitimize silence as productive in identity formation through the literary project. The complexity of their narratives, the polysemic vocabulary, and of course, the careful and deliberate inclusion of silence, blank pages and ellipses gives Cixous's and Devi's stories depth beyond a simple recounting of personal memories. The silences that exist between mother and child in Sebbar's and Patel's novels instigate journeys for truth that ultimately break silences surrounding the traumatic events in the parents' lives. The silences that punctuate the discussions between the narrator and Zoulikha's daughter mark the difficulty with which the character recounts her memories. Moments spent in silence between Raj and David in Mauritius express an affinity beyond language. Without the space preserved by silence in the narrative, we could not move forward. For all six authors, silence is an integral part of their storytelling process. This highlighting of silence in its many forms and manifestations both problematizes and venerates its existence, use, and purpose. Still, however complex silences might be, the work in these novels suggests that the only way to appropriately communicate silences is through their inclusion.

WORKS CITED

- Acheson, Kris. *Fences, Weapons, Gifts: Silences in the Context of Addiction*. 2013.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*. University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Al-Nowaihi, Magda M. "Resisting Silence in Arab Women's Autobiographies." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2001, pp. 477–502.
- Amine, Laila. "Double Exposure: The Family Album and Alternate Memories in Leïla Sebbar's *The Seine Was Red*." *Culture, Theory, and Critique*, vol. 53, no. 2, June 2012, pp. 181–98.
- Anderson, Elizabeth. "Writing as Sanctuary: Place, Movement and the Sacred in the Work of Hélène Cixous." *Literature & Theology: An International Journal of Religion, Theory, and Culture*, vol. 27, no. 3, Sept. 2013, pp. 364–79,
<http://proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2013701788&site=ehost-live>.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. Aunt Lute Books, 2012.
- . *Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color = Haciendo Caras*. Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990.
- Appanah-Mouriquand, Nathacha. *Le dernier frère*. Olivier, 2007.
- Armel, Alette. "Assia Djebar; La Mémoire des femmes." *Magazine littéraire*, vol. 410, no. June, 2002, pp. 98–103.
- Ashcroft, Bill. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed, Routledge, 2002.

- Bannerjee, Rohini. "L'Espace Littéraire Mauricien: L'Hétérolinguisme Dans l'oeuvre Francophone d'Ananda Devi." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 15, no. 5, Dec. 2011, pp. 505–12,
<http://proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2012640695&site=ehost-live>.
- . "Rompre Le Silence Des Chagos: Entretien Avec Shenaz Patel." *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones*, vol. 23, no. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 198–211.
- Beniamino, Michel. "Écritures Féminines à l'île Maurice: Une Rupture Postcoloniale?" *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, vol. 23, no. 1, Apr. 2008, pp. 144–54,
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/stable/25702110>.
- Block de Behar, Lisa. *A Rhetoric of Silence and Other Selected Writings*. Translated by Rennie, Cecilia, Mouton de Gruyter, 1995.
- Blyth, Ian, and Susan Sellers. *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory*. Continuum, 2004.
- Bouaïssi, Zahia. *Femmes aux frontières de l'interdit. Étude des premiers romans d'Assia Djébar (1957-1968)*. 2008.
- Boutaghou, Maya. "Défense et illustration d'un universel mauricien." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4, 2011, pp. 451–69, doi:[10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.451/1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.451/1).
- Bragard, Véronique. "Cris de Femmes Maudites, Brûlures Du Silence: La Symbolique Des Éléments Fondamentaux Dans l'œuvre d'Ananda Devi." *Notre Librairie: Revue Des Littératures Du Sud*, vol. 142, Dec. 2000, pp. 66–73.
- . "Murmuring Vessels : Relocating Chagossian Memory and Testimony in Shenaz Patel's Le Silence Des Chagos." *E-France : An on-Line Journal of French Studies*, vol. 2, 2008, p. 132, <https://dial.uclouvain.be/pr/boreal/object/boreal:81521>.

- . "Regards Croisés Sur La Mémoire Coolie Des Antilles Aux Mascareignes." *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, no. 2, 2006, p. 163.
- . "'Righting' the Expulsion of Diego Garcia's 'Unpeople': The Island Space as Heterotopia in Literary Texts about the Chagos Islands." *New Literatures Review*, vol. 47–48, 2011, pp. 57–69.
- Bragard, Véronique, and Srilata Ravi. *Écritures mauriciennes au féminin: penser l'altérité*. Harmattan, 2011.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Brozgal, Lia Nicole. *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory*. 2013.
- d'Almeida, Irène Assiba d'. *Francophone African Women Writers : Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. UP of Florida, 1994.
- Budick, Sanford, and Wolfgang Iser, editors. *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*. Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Buell, Lawrence. "Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2011, pp. 87–115,
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/qui_parle/v019/19.2.buell.html.
- Calle-Gruber, Mireille. *Assia Djébar*. ADPF, 2006.
- , editor. *Assia Djébar, nomade entre les murs--: pour une poétique transfrontalière*. Maisonneuve & Larose, 2005.
- . *Assia Djébar, ou, La résistance de l'écriture: regards d'un écrivain d'Algérie*. Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001.
- . *Hélène Cixous*. Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française, 2005.

- . "La langue des alliances: 'Mon algériance.'" *Études littéraires.* -, vol. 33, no. 3, 2001, pp. 83–94.
- . "Le livre d'Algérie." *Expressions maghrébines : revue de la coordination internationale des chercheurs sur les littératures maghrébines.* -, vol. 2, no. 2, 2003.
- . "L'essai comme forme de réécriture: Cixous à Montaigne." *Études françaises*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2004, pp. 29–42.
- Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Centre culturel international de Cerisy-la-Salle, editors. *Hélène Cixous, croisée d'une oeuvre.* Galilée, 2000.
- Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Hélène Cixous. *Au théâtre, au cinéma, au féminin.* L' Harmattan, 2011.
- . *Hélène Cixous, Photos de Racines.* Des Femmes, 1994.
- Calle-Gruber, Mireille, and Sophie Thomas. "The Book Inside The Book." *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 24, 2002, pp. 71–95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44030923>.
- Caradec, Gwenola. "Deux Cas d'écriture Ou de Violence Textuelle Dans Le Cahier d'un Retour Au Pays Natal d'Aimé Césaire et Les Rêveries de La Femme Sauvage d'Hélène Cixous." *Expressions Maghrébines: Revue de La Coordination Internationale Des Chercheurs Sur Les Littératures Maghrébines*, vol. 14, no. 1, Summer 2015, p. 101.
- Cazenave, Odile. "Les Hommes Qui Me Parlent d'Ananda Devi: Un Nouvel Espace Pour Se Dire?" *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones*, vol. 28, no. 2, Autumn 2013, pp. 39–52.
- Certeau, Michel de, et al. *L'invention du quotidien, tome 1 : Arts de faire.* Nouv. éd., Gallimard, 1990.

- Cheref, Abdelkader. *Gender and Identity in North Africa: Postcolonialism and Feminism in Maghrebi Women's Literature*. Tauris Academic Studies ; Distributed in the United States and Canada exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Cheung, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*. Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Cixous, Hélène. "La Venue à l'écriture." *Entre l'écriture, Des Femmes*, 1986, pp. 9–69.
- . *Le Livre de Promethea*. Gallimard, 1983.
- . "Le rire de la Méduse." *L'ARC*, vol. 61, 1975, pp. 39–54.
- . *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*. Éditions Galilée, 2000.
- Cixous, Hélène, and Susan Sellers. *The writing notebooks of Hélène Cixous*. Continuum, 2004.
- Compan, Magali. "Mots Confiés et Identité Cachée: Ecriture Éphémère et Narration Dans Sensitive de Shenaz Patel." *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones*, vol. 24, no. 2, Autumn 2009, pp. 129–44.
- Corbin, Laurie. "The Other Language, the Language of the Other in the Work of Assia Djebar and Hélène Cixous." *MLN*, vol. 129, no. 4, Sept. 2014, pp. 812–28.
- Corio, Alessandro. "Entretien avec Ananda Devi." *Francofonia Francofonia: Studi e Ricerche Sulle Letterature di Lingua Francese*, vol. 25, no. 48, 2005, pp. 145–67.
- Cornwall, Heldris of. *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*. Edited by John A. Alford, Translated by Sarah Roche-Mahdi, Michigan State University Press, 1200s.
- Coward, Harold, et al. *Derrida and Negative Theology*. SUNY Press, 1992.
- Cunniah, Bruno Clifford. *Fonction et Représentation de La Mauricienne Dans Le Discours Littéraire*. s.n, 2000.

- d'Almeida, Irène Assiba. *Francophone African Women Writers : Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. University of Florida Press, 1994.
- de Grissac, Guillemette Jeudi. "Figures féminines et construction identitaire dans les romans de Shenaz Patel." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4, 2011, pp. 489–511, doi:[10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.489/1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.489/1).
- Décarie, Isabelle. "Une Scénographie Onirique: Les Rêveries de La Femme Sauvage d'Hélène Cixous." *Tangence*, vol. 76, Autumn 2004, pp. 69–85.
- Derrida, Jacques. "La Loi Du Genre/The Law of Genre." *Glyph: Textual Studies*, vol. 7, 1980, pp. 176–201.
- Devi, Ananda. *Indian Tango*. Éditions Gallimard, 2007.
- . *Les hommes qui me parlent*. Gallimard, 2011.
- . *Moi, l'interdite*. Éditions DAPPER, 2000.
- Devi, Ananda, and Kate Schlosser. *Parler Avec Ananda Devi*. 2010.
- Djebar, Assia. *La femme sans sépulture*. Albin Michel, 2002.
- . *L'Amour, La Fantasia*. Editions JC Lattès, 1985.
- Donadey, Anne. "Introjection and Incorporation in Assia Djebar's La Femme sans Sépulture." *L'Esprit Créateur*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2008, pp. 81–91, doi:[10.1353/esp.0.0030](https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.0.0030).
- . *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing between Worlds*. Heinemann, 2001.
- Eason, Kathryn A., and Nancy Hodges. "Reading Contemporary Female Body Modification as a Site of Cixous' 'L'écriture Feminine.'" *Fashion Theory (Print)*, 2011, pp. 323–43.
- Edwards, Natalie. *Shifting Subjects: Plural Subjectivity in Contemporary Francophone Women's Autobiography*. University of Delaware Press, 2011.

- Ehret, Rebekkah. "Communicative Silence: An Ethnolinguistic Approach to Non-Verbal Communication." *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, edited by Gudrun M Grabher and Ulrike Jessner, C. Winter, 1996, pp. 99–112.
- Einaudi, Jean-Luc. *La bataille de Paris 17 octobre 1961*. Éd. du Seuil, 2007.
- Eroğlu, Çağrı. "Scènes Primitives et Algériennes Dans Les Réveries de La Femme Sauvage d'Hélène Cixous." *Littera*, vol. 33, Dec. 2013, pp. 67–80.
- Fanon, Frantz. "Algeria Unveiled." *A Dying Colonialism*, Grove Press Inc., 1965, pp. 35–67.
- . *L'An v [i.e. cinq] de la révolution algérienne*. 4e édition, F. Maspero, 1966.
- . *Peau noire masques blancs*. Éditions de Seuil, 1952.
- . *Pour la révolution africaine; écrits politiques*. F. Maspero, 1964.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Les Damnés de La Terre*. 2. éd., F. Maspero, 1961.
- . *Les damnés de la terre*. Vol. 1991, Gallimard, 1961.
- Faqir, Fadia. *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers / Eber, Shirley*. Garnet, 1998.
- Felski, Rita. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Hutchinson Radius, 1989.
- . *The Gender of Modernity*. Kindle ed., Harvard UP, 1995.
- . *Uses of Literature*. Kindle ed., Blackwell Publishing, 2008.
- Fisher, Claudine G. "Cixous's Auto-Fictional Mother and Father." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 38, 2003, pp. 60–76.
- Friedlaender, Banu Finesinger. *Hélène Cixous' l'écriture Féminine: A Feminine Writing: A Theoretical Exploration of the Meaning of Writing to Adult Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse: A Project Based upon an Independent Investigation*. 1997.

- Fulton, Dawn. "Elsewhere in Paris: Creolised Geographies in Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine Était Rouge*." *Culture, Theory & Critique*, vol. 48, no. 1, Apr. 2007, pp. 25–38, doi:[10.1080/14735780701293482](https://doi.org/10.1080/14735780701293482).
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 2nd ed, Routledge, 2012.
- Genette, Gerard. "Flaubert's Silences." *Figures of Literary Discourse*, translated by Sheridan, Alan, Columbia UP, 1982, pp. 183–202.
- . *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Lewin, Jane E., Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse*. UP of Virginia, 1999.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Le discours antillais*. Seuil, 1981.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *La Mémoire Collective. Ouvrage Posthume Publié*. 1. éd., Presses universitaires de France, 1950.
- . "Mémoire collective et mémoire individuelle." *La mémoire collective*, PUF, 1950, pp. 1–34.
- Hall, Elizabeth Berglund, et al. *Cixous after / Depuis 2000*. 2017.
- . *Textual Tensions: Reading (with) Helene Cixous*. [s.n.], 2003.
- Hanrahan, Mairead. "Of Altobiography." *Paragraph, A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2000, pp. 282–95.
- Hansen, Anisa Maria. *On the Philosophy of Héléne Cixous: The Écriture Féminine Reflection in Bohdan Chudoba's Model of Complete Time*. 2003.
- Hawley, John C. *India in Africa, Africa in India Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms*. Indiana University Press, 2008.
- Herdina, Philip. "The Manufacture of Silence (or How to Stop People Doing Things with Words)." *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, edited by Gudrun Grabher and Ulrike Jessner, C. Winter, 1996, pp. 29–44.

- Hiddleston, Jane. “‘Le Silence de l’écriture.’ Arabic and Its Absence in the Works of Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar.” *Revue Critique de Ficción Française Contemporaine/Critical Review of Contemporary French Ficción*, vol. 3, 2011, pp. 29–39.
- . “‘Le Silence de l’écriture.’ Arabic and Its Absence in the Works of Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar.” *Revue Critique de Ficción Française Contemporaine/Critical Review of Contemporary French Ficción*, vol. 3, 2011, pp. 29–39.
- Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*. Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996.
- Hiddleston, Jane. *Poststructuralism and Postcoloniality: The Anxiety of Theory*. Liverpool University Press, 2010.
- Hitchcock, Peter. “The Scriptible Voice and the Space of Silence: Assia Djébar’s Algeria.” *Bucknell Review: A Scholarly Journal of Letters, Arts and Sciences*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2000, pp. 134–49.
- Hoogstraet, Jane. “‘Unnameable by Choice’: Multivalent Silences in Adrienne Rich’s Time’s Power.” *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women’s Writing as Transgression*, edited by Deirdre (ed.) Lashgari, UP of Virginia, 1995, pp. 25–37.
- House, Jim, and Neil Macmaster. “Ever-Present Memories?” *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory*, Oxford UP, 2006, pp. 310–34.
- Hubbell, Amy L. “The Past Is Present: Pied-Noir Returns to Algeria.” *Nottingham French Studies*, vol. 51, no. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 66–77.
- Irigaray, Luce. “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine.” *The Irigaray Reader*, edited by Margaret Whitford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991, pp. 118–32.

- Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 2nd ed, Longman, 2000, pp. 188–205.
- Issur, Kumari R. "Le Roman Mauricien d'aujourd'hui." *Francofonia: Studi e Ricerche Sulle Letterature Di Lingua Francese*, vol. 25, no. 48, Spring 2005, pp. 115–24.
- Issur, Kumari R. "Le Roman mauricien d'aujourd'hui." *Francofonia Francofonia: Studi e Ricerche Sulle Letterature di Lingua Francese*, vol. 25, no. 48, 2005, pp. 115–24.
- Jacobus, Lee A., and Regina Barreca. *Hélène Cixous: Critical Impressions*. Gordon and Breach, 1999, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10093537>.
- Jaworski, Adam. *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives*. Sage, 1995.
- Jean-Francois, Emmanuel B. "L'expérience de la violence dans le roman mauricien francophone de la nouvelle génération." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4, 2011, pp. 513–29, doi:[10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.513/1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.513/1).
- Jessner, Ulrike. "Female Empathy: Linguistic Implications of a Restricted Code." *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, edited by Gudrun Grabher and Ulrike Jessner, C. Winter, 1996, pp. 89–98.
- Kaiser, Birgit Mara. "(Un)Grounding the Human: Affective Entanglements and Subjectivity in Hélène Cixous's Algerian Reveries." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3–4, Feb. 2013, pp. 477–96.
- King, Martha. "Silence, an Element of Style in Pavese." *MIn MLN*, vol. 87, no. 1, 1972, pp. 60–77.

- Knutson, Elizabeth M. "Writing in Between Worlds: Reflections on Language and Identity from Works by Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar." *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, vol. 65, no. 4, Winter 2011, pp. 253–70,
<http://proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2013394834&site=ehost-live>.
- Kuhn, Annette, and Hélène Cixous. "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1981, pp. 41–55.
- Laronde, Michel. "'Effets d'Histoire'. Représenter l'Histoire Coloniale Forclose." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1&2, 2007, pp. 139–55.
- Lashgari, Deirdre. *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression*. UP of Virginia, 1995.
- Lazreg, Marnia. *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. Routledge, 1994.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *Le Pacte Autobiographique*. Éditions du Seuil, 1975.
- Lewis, Jonathan. "Filling in the Blanks: Memories of 17 October 1961 in Leïla Sebbar's *Le Seine Était Rouge*." *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 20, no. 3, Aug. 2012, pp. 307–322, <http://proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2013640544&site=ehost-live>.
- Lindo, Karen U. "Mauritian Cinema and Global Spectators." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4, 2011, pp. 581–93, doi:[10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.581/1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.581/1).
- Lionnet, Françoise. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Edited by Shari Benstock and Celeste Schenck, Cornell UP, 1989.
- . *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. Cornell UP, 1995.

- . “‘Cinq Metres d’ordre et de Sagesse,... Cinq Metres de Jungle Soyeuse’: Ananda Devi’s Unfurling Art of Fiction.” *Écritures Féminines et Dialogues Critiques: Subjectivité, Genre et Ironie*, L’Atelier d’écriture, 2012, pp. 240–84.
- . *Écritures Féminines et Dialogues Critiques: Subjectivité, Genre et Ironie = Writing Women and Critical Dialogues: Subjectivity, Gender and Irony*. Aé, 2012.
- . *Le Su et l’incertain: Cosmopolitiques Créoles de l’océan Indien = The Known and the Uncertain: Creole Cosmopolitics of the Indian Ocean*. Aé, 2012.
- Lionnet, Françoise, and Shumei Shi, editors. *Minor Transnationalism*. Duke UP, 2005.
- Lionnet, Françoise, and Thomas C. Spear. “Introduction: Mauritius in/and Global Culture: Politics, Literature, Visual Arts.” *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4, 2011, pp. 371–400, doi:[10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.371/2](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.371/2).
- Lodge, David, and Nigel Wood, editors. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. 2nd ed, Longman, 2000.
- Lowe, Donald M. *History of Bourgeois Perception*. The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Mair, Christian. “The Semantics of Silence.” *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, edited by Gudrun M. Grabher and Ulrike Jessner, C. Winter, 1996.
- Makward, Christiane, and Odile Cazenave. “The Others’ Others: ‘Francophone’ Women and Writing.” *Yale French Studies*, no. 75, 1988, pp. 190–207, doi:[10.2307/2930314](https://doi.org/10.2307/2930314).
- Malhotra, Sheena. *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- McClintock, Anne. “Angels of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Post-Colonialism.” *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams, Columbia Univ. Press, 1994, pp. 291–304.

- McCullough, Mary. "No More Silencing the Past: First Generation Immigrant Women as Bricoleuses de Mémoire in *Parle Mon Fils Parle à Ta Mère* and *Fatima Ou Les Algériennes Au Square* by Leïla Sebbar." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2003, pp. 188–132.
- Meise, Katrin. "On Talking about Silence in Conversation and Literature." *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, edited by Gudrun Grabher and Ulrike Jessner, C. Winter, 1996, pp. 45–66.
- Merini, Rafika. *Two Major Francophone Women Writers: Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar: A Thematic Study of Their Works*. P. Lang, 1999.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de La Perception*. Gallimard, 1945.
- Mew, Evelyn Kee. "La littérature mauricienne et les dbuts de la critique." *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3–4, 2011, pp. 417–33, doi:[10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.417/1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.13.3-4.417/1).
- Miller, Cristanne. "M. Nourbese Philip and the Poetics/Politics of Silence." *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, edited by Ulrike Jessner and Gudrun M Grabher, Winter, 1996, pp. 139–60.
- Miller, Mary-Kay F. *(Re)Productions : Autobiography, Colonialism, and Infanticide*. P. Lang, 2003.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Differences." *Making Face, Making Soul Haciendo Caras*, edited by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, vol. First, Aunt Lute Books, 1990, pp. 371–76.
- . *Woman, Native, Other*. Indiana UP, 1989.
- Miraglia, Anne Marie. *Des voix contre le silence*. Durham University, 2005.
- Mitchell, W. J. T., editor. *Landscape and Power*. 2nd ed, UP of Chicago, 2002.

- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, et al. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Indiana UP, 1991.
- . "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia UP, 1994, pp. 196–220.
- Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldúa. *This Bridge Called My Back Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Persephone Press, 1981.
- Murdoch, H. Adlai, and Anne Donadey, editors. *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*. UP of Florida, 2005.
- Murray, Jenny. *Remembering the (Post)Colonial Self: Memory and Identity in the Novels of Assia Djebar*. Peter Lang, 2008.
- Olsen, Tillie. *Silences*. Dell Publishing Co., 1979.
- Oyewùmí, Oyèrónké. *African Gender Studies: Theoretical Questions and Conceptual Issues*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- . *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. UP of Minnesota, 1997.
- Patel, Shenaz. *Le silence des Chagos*. Olivier, 2005.
- . *Sensitive*. Editions de l'Olivier, 2003.
- Penrod, Lynn. "Algeriance, Exile, and Hélène Cixous." *College Literature*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2003, pp. 135–45.
- . *Hélène Cixous*. Twayne Publishers, 1996.
- Plumwood, V. "Nature, self, and gender: feminism, environmental philosophy, and the critique of rationalism." *Oxford readings in philosophy*, 1995, p. 155.

- Poddar, Namrata. "The Islands Within: Alterity, Imperialism and the Metroport in Mauritian Fiction." *Dalhousie French Studies*, vol. 94, Spring 2011, pp. 39–51.
- Ramharai, Vicram. "Ananda Devi; Repenser l'identité de La Femme Mauricienne." *Notre Librairie: Revue Des Littératures Du Sud*, vol. 146, Dec. 2001, pp. 110–12.
- Ramsey-Kurz, Helga. *Telling Silences: Aspects of Femals (In)Articulateness in Some Modern Women's Novels*. Edited by Gudrun Grabher and Ulrike Jessner, C. Winter, 1996, pp. 161–76.
- Ravi, Srilata. "Indo-Mauritians: National and Postnational Identities." *L'esprit Créateur*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2010, pp. 29–45, doi:[10.1353/esp.0.0236](https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.0.0236).
- . *Rainbow Colors: Literary Ethnotopographies of Mauritius*. Lexington Books, 2007, <https://www.abebooks.com/After-Empire-Francophone-World-Postcolonial-France/22398437462/bd>.
- Rice, Alison. *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria*. U of Virginia P, 2012.
- . "Rehearsing October 17, 1961: The Role of Fiction in Remembering the Battle of Paris." *Esprit Createur*, vol. 54, no. 4, Winter 2014, pp. 90–102.
- . *Time Signatures*. Lexington Books, 2006.
- Rich, Adrienne Cecile. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. Norton, 1995.
- Rosello, Mireille. "Ecriture Inséparable: Hélène Cixous." *Travaux de Littérature*, vol. 23, 2010, pp. 347–56.
- . "Remembering the Incomprehensible: Hélène Cixous, Leïla Sebbar, Yamina Benguigui, and the War of Algeria." *Remembering Africa*, edited by Elisabeth (ed. and introd.) Mudimbe-Boyi, Heinemann, 2002, pp. 187–205.

- . "Remembering the Incomprehensible: Hélène Cixous, Leïla Sebbar, Yamina Benguigui, and the War of Algeria." *Remembering Africa*, edited by Elisabeth (ed. and introd.) Mudimbe-Boyi, Heinemann, 2002, pp. 187–205.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford UP, 2009.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, and Wikisource. *Les Rêveries Du Promeneur Solitaire*. 1782.
- Ecological Feminism*. Routledge, 1994.
- Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Rowe, Aimee Carrillo, and Sheena Malhotra. *Still the Silence: Feminist Reflections at the Edges of Sound*. 2013.
- Sadiqi, Fatima. *Women Writing Africa: The Northern Region*. Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 2009.
- Salhi, Kamal. *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures: Critical Essays*. Lexington Books, 2003.
- Salhi, Zahia Smail. "Between the Languages of Silence and the Woman's Word: Gender and Language in the Work of Assia Djébar." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, vol. 190, 2008, pp. 79–101.
- Schneider, Annedith M. "Migration and the Inhospitable Reader in Leïla Sebbar's *Le Silence Des Rives*." *Expressions Maghrébines: Revue de La Coordination Internationale Des Chercheurs Sur Les Littératures Maghrébines*, vol. 13, no. 1, Summer 2014, p. 47.
- Schweickart, Patrocínio P. "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 2nd ed, Longman, 2000, pp. 424–47.

- Schwerdtner, Karin. "Enquête, Transmission et Désordre Dans La Seine Était Rouge de Leïla Sebbar." *Temps Zéro: Revue d'Etude Des Ecritures Contemporaines*, vol. 5, 2012, <http://tempszero.contemporain.info/document727>.
- Sebbar, Leïla. *La Seine était rouge*. Thierry Magnier, 1999.
- Sellers, Susan. *Hélène Cixous: Authorship, Autobiography, and Love*. Polity Press ; Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- . *Hélène Cixous' "Ecriture Feminine": From a Writing of the Self to an/Other Writing*. 1992.
- Shiach, Morag. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*. Routledge, 1991.
- Siegfried, Jäkel, and Asko Timonen. *The Language of Silence*. Turun Yliopisto, 2001.
- Spender, Dale. *Man Made Language*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 1990.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 66–11.
- Steiner, George. *Language and Silence; Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*. 1st ed., Atheneum, 1967.
- Thomas, Lyn, and Emma Webb. "Writing from Experience: The Place of the Personal in French Feminist Writing." *Feminist Review*, vol. 61, 1999, pp. 27–48.
- Thorabully, Khal. "L'Ile Intérieure: Entretien Avec Ananda Devi." *Notre Librairie: Revue Des Littératures Du Sud*, vol. 142, no. Oct-Dec, 2000, pp. 58–65.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. "La mémoire menacée." *Les abus de la mémoire*, Arléa, 1995, pp. 9–61.
- Tomlinson, Emily. "Assia Djebar: Speaking to the Living Dead." *The Journal of the Modern Critical Theory Group*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2003, pp. 34–50.

- Torabully, Khal. "À l'Aapravasi Ghat, l'île Maurice Dialogue Enfin Avec l'Histoire." *L'Esprit Créateur*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2010, pp. 63–66, doi:[10.1353/esp.0.0226](https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.0.0226).
- Warren, Karen. *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- Waters, Julia. "'Ton Continent Est Noir': Rethinking Feminist Metaphors in Ananda Devi's Pagli." *Dalhousie French Studies*, vol. 68, Oct. 2004, pp. 45–55, doi:[10.2307/40836853](https://doi.org/10.2307/40836853).
- White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987, pp. 1–25.
- The Crémieux Decree*. <https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/faq/cr%C3%A9mieux-decree>. Accessed 8 Sept. 2018.
- Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Wills, Dorothy Davis. "Economic Violence in Postcolonial Senegal: Noisy Silence in Novels by Mariama Ba and Aminata Sow Fall." *Violence, Silence and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression*, edited by Deirdre Lashgari, University Press of Virginia, 1995, pp. 158–71.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, and Bertrand Russell. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960.
- Wortmann, Simon. *The Concept of Ecriture Feminine in Helene Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa."* 2012.

Yee, Jennifer. "The Colonial Outsider: 'Malgérie' in Hélène Cixous's *Les Rêveries de La Femme Sauvage*." *Tulsstudwomeslit Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2001, pp. 189–200.

Zayzafoon, Lamia B. Y. *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History, and Ideology*. Lexington Books, 2005.