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*Le Retour de 'La Question':*

**Torture, memory and narrative in contemporary French literature**

by

Maria Vendetti

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

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in

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Committee in charge

Professor Thoraya Tlatli

Professor Debarati Sanyal

Professor Stefania Pandolfo

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## Abstract

“*Le retour de ‘La Question’*: torture, memory, and narrative in contemporary French literature”

by

Maria Vendetti

Doctor of Philosophy in French

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Thoraya Tlatli, Chair

This dissertation examines, through literary and testimonial texts, the transmission and dissemination of narratives about torture that took place during the Algerian War of Independence. Fictional depictions of limit experiences such as torture are deeply rooted in discourses about remembering and forgetting. I argue that the frequently used term “open secret” is a misnomer which is taken up in literature in order to be critiqued through narrative fragmentation and shifting generic frames. My project is interdisciplinary, and studies literary and anthropological discussions of torture as both a politicized and sexualized system. I address the problem of representing torture and raise questions about the status of historiography and its place within French, Algerian, and trans-Mediterranean discourses.

My first chapter, “Histories repeating,” examines how and why fictional accounts of torture and its aftermath tend to deliberately conflate and intertwine various historical periods. Making individual memories of physical violence the subject of fiction, the authors I discuss narrativize the historical reality of torture in order to illustrate the *longue durée* and endless repeatability of violence. Being tortured and witnessing torture affects how one is able to transmit the memory of that act, as illustrated by the use of imbricated and hallucinatory narratives in generically diverse texts. Novels by Leïla Marouane and Antonin Varenne, and a short story by Assia Djébar, reveal the persistence of the Algerian War of Independence in contemporary fiction, and oblige readers to adopt a multidirectional approach to reading, as the text employs the same strategy to remember (and forget) extreme violence. In Chapter One, I also argue that texts employing a multidirectional approach to memories of the Algerian War and its aftermaths often work to de-inscribe the law that is written onto bodies. By creating characters that are, in one way or another, survivors and narrators of torture, the texts reject the hegemonic markers of torture, and criticize the systems that uphold *victime/bourreau* identitarianism.

In Chapter Two, “The Tortured Body and the Narrativization of the Impossible,” I turn to the œuvre of Assia Djébar, whose career-long engagement with questions of history and individual and collective memory is evident in all of her texts, to discuss how the transmission of the story of torture is inscribed on the body. I refer to the *mise en récit* of these stories as a narrativization of the impossible, an impossibility that is predicated on the female body as a concrete trace of an act that is

often denied or repressed by the individual. In the collection *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) and novel *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002), Djébar rejects memory as a process at the service of the post-Independence State, and the various forms of transmission of violent narratives in her texts are a movement against monolithic forms of history-making. Rather than taking up positions as *lieux de mémoire*, static sites that work towards a national conception of memory and history, the narratives I examine refuse memorialization and allow instead an open-ended narrative that must be physically passed down in order to circulate in the face of renewed violence in Algeria.

In my final chapter, "Testimonial texts: writing the obscene," I move away from fictional accounts of the aftermath of torture to explore the testimonial genre. Looking to first-person texts by Henri Alleg, Djamila Boupacha and Louisette Ighilarhiz, I argue that metropolitan French intellectuals had to intervene in their circulation and reception in order to mitigate the social and political unacceptability of these texts that are figured as "obscene." Ross Chambers' analysis of testimonial writing as both "untimely" and "obscene" acts in *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial and the Rhetoric of Haunting* underpins my argument that the description of torture in testimonial narratives is an exploration of the obscene; a state of affairs that allows for continual personal and systematic denial of the existence of torture and torture victims. The prevalence of sexual violence and rape and its place in French and Algerian cultural and social memory is also central to Chapter Three and my discussion of the textually obscene: torture is both *hors scène*, out of sight of the public, and obscene in the kind of limit experience it means for the victim and the torturer. The contrast between private and public discourses and the dissonance that can occur when narratives try to cross the public/private divide complicate how stories of torture are made available and received by readers.

Reading testimonial accounts as textual incursions that embody the obscenity of torture and its physical effects, I argue that the paratextual support of French intellectuals was a necessary aspect of the transmission of primary torture narratives during the war. This mediation simultaneously shielded readers from the shock of events that were purposely kept "off-stage," and, paradoxically, highlighted the details of testimony that were the most contentious: descriptions of sexual violence, protracted legal struggles, and the blurred border between the French "us" and the Algerian "them." Multidirectional memory, another form of mediation that transmits narratives of torture, describes a shuttling between separate traumatic memories that are ultimately told together. I use Michael Rothberg's theory to explain and analyze the hinging effect often present more recent fictional texts on the Algerian War that are preoccupied with both the legacy of the War of Independence and the more immediate violence of Algeria's *décennie noire*. Using these narrative theories, I argue that the transmission of narratives of torture, be they fictional or testimonial, relies on a certain degree of mediation or deferral. I posit the transmission, or making public, of these stories as both individual and collective, and marked by a necessarily complex relationship to history, memory, and the physical traces of violence.

By analyzing both Algerian and hexagonal French literature that addresses torture during the Algerian War, my dissertation frames the "*Question*" of state-sponsored violence as an enduring transnational topos that creates a proliferation of ghosts, unanswerable questions, and unsolvable crimes. As a project that engages with both hexagonal French and Francophone texts, my dissertation offers a new theory of how literature can engage with and defy taboos on memorial transmission and publically-recognizable grievances, and how the memory of torture is narrativized and circulated.

# ***Le Retour de 'La Question':*** **Torture, memory and narrative in contemporary French literature**

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## Introduction

“Un peu de sang répandu, un peu de chair broyée, un peu de sueur: il n'existe pas de spectacle plus désespérément terne. L'horreur ignore l'approfondissement: elle ne connaît que la répétition.”

Mohammed Dib, *Qui se souvient de la mer*, 189

This dissertation examines the transmission, in fiction and testimonial writing, of narratives about torture during the Algerian War. In France, the proliferation of texts directly and indirectly addressing the Franco-Algerian conflict makes a lie of the persistent myth of torture as a secret or repressed episode of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history. Casting torture during this period as a largely unknown part of French history is willfully amnesiac at best and disingenuous at worst, and here I argue that the frequently used term “open secret” is a misnomer which literature takes up in order to critique it through narrative fragmentation and shifting generic frames. Fictional depictions of limit experiences such as torture are deeply rooted in discourses of remembering and forgetting, and address both individual and collective depictions of trauma and its afterlives.

For many years, torture by French police and military during the war in Algeria was referred to as an “open secret,” or *secret de polichinelle*, i.e., a fact that was supposedly common knowledge but not up for discussion in a public forum. This term, however, reinforces the kind of sanctioned silence that surrounded the government's endorsement of torture during the war, and its “disappearance” after the war was lost. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, hundreds of texts both denouncing and defending the practice of torture were published in metropolitan France, and at the turn of the century, French and Algerian fiction writers wrote about the events of the Algerian War of Independence as fragmented, threatening, and volatile aspects of a shared history.

When, due to a series of amnesty laws, judicial process and judgment became impossible after the war, literary transmission (such as the texts studied here) mediated between historical events and imagined solutions or ways of remembering, instead of participating in an alleged “forgetting” about torture. In 1962, the Evian Accords mandated amnesty for crimes committed in Algeria and France during the period of violent “events” that the two countries had experienced. In the absence of legal recourse after these amnesties, the post-1962 texts I study rely on a different kind of mediation and transmission. Writing about the aftermaths of torture does not replace legal judgment but instead ensures that the experience of torture remains individual, connected to the body and psychological trauma. Writing also ensures that, through narrative, torture becomes part of history, at the same time as it refuses consensus via sanctioned sites of memory.

This dissertation focuses on texts published in French, in France, that depict torture either first-hand (as testimonial) or second-hand (as fiction). Rather than exclusively addressing episodes of torture by the French police and military against Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) members, I take a broader view of torture and its aftermaths, by analyzing texts that take as their subject the ways in which narrative makes legible the experience of torture. In all these texts, I argue, the War of Independence looms large as a precedent and a context that has both physical and psychological impact on both Algerian and French citizens. Memory of the war is not restricted to those who fought in it in these texts; instead, it is represented as transmissible, as if contagious, to other family members or those who encounter the wake of the war's violences.

I read fictional texts like Assia Djebar's *La Femme sans sépulture* and Leila Marouane's *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* alongside testimonial texts produced during the war, like the collective text *Djamila Boupacha* and Henri Alleg's *La Question*, to theorize the persistent recurrence of discourses about torture in the years following the war, and to trace how that discourse is made legible to the French public. To show why it was necessary to make these texts available and legible, I take up literary and anthropological discussions of torture as both a politicized and sexualized system of violence, addressing the underlying problem of representing torture and raising questions about the status of historiography and its place within French, Algerian, and trans-Mediterranean discourses.

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The “événements” of the French-Algerian conflict are generally considered to begin with a series of organized attacks on French military installations on the night of November 1, 1954, and to end with the Evian Accords, signed on March 19, 1962. However, as with any conflict, the causes and effects of the war extend well before and beyond these dates, and can be traced from the French invasion of Algiers in 1830 to the present day. Declared on July 5, 1962, Algerian Independence marked, in straightforward terms, the success of the Front de libération nationale's campaign, but signaled neither political stability nor the end of violent combat in Algeria. Several large-scale attacks were carried out against Europeans who remained on Algerian soil, most notably the Oran Massacre that took place on July 5, as Independence was being celebrated. Internal conflicts within the FLN also led to a great number of deaths and imprisonments. Ahmed Ben Bella, supported by the head of the army, Houari Boumédiène, was eventually named as Algeria's first president in August of 1962, replacing Ferhat Abbas, the former FLN president and provisional president of independent Algeria.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, in France,

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<sup>1</sup> Ferhat Abbas was a founding member of the Union démocratique du manifeste algérien and the first president of the FLN provisional government, established during the War of Independence. In conflict with Ben Bella's single-party reforms and increasingly communist policies, Abbas stepped down from his position as president of the Assembly in 1963 and was imprisoned for several years. Ahmed Ben Bella, a socialist and founding member of the

the arrival of almost one million pied noirs, the failed assassination attempt on Charles de Gaulle by the Organisation armée secrète (OAS), and the disputed referendum on the direct election of the President, won by the Gaullists after they dissolved the parliament, were just a few of the events that led to the social and political upheaval that characterized the 1960s in the French métropole.<sup>2</sup>

In this work, I refer to the French-Algerian conflict of 1954-62 as the Algerian War, or the Algerian War of Independence. In some cases, this nomenclature is anachronistic, as the conflict was not officially a “war” until 1999, and was deliberately not referred to as such in France during the period. The term “Algerian War” does avoid the euphemisms of the period used by the French government to avoid admitting to a civil war, but it is not unproblematic. As James Le Sueur notes, this name is French-centric, and ignores the many other wars that Algeria has participated in that did not involve France (Le Sueur 328, n.1). In Algeria, the conflict is unreservedly referred to as a revolution (*Ath-Thawra Al-Jazā'iriyya*), emphasizing the rejection of colonial power that was at the heart of the FLN’s efforts. However, I find the term Algerian War of Independence useful because it affirms that a war did take place, and is a reminder of the goal of the war – to achieve an independent Algerian nation – and the French struggle to deny this goal by maintaining Algeria as part of France. For similar reasons of clarity and convention, I refer to the armed conflict between the Algerian government and Islamist groups as the Algerian Civil War. The French-language press in Algeria seems to use both “guerre civile” and “la décennie noire” to describe this period, although there is still debate over its nature, and therefore its designation.

By the beginning of the War of Independence, although Algeria was part of France, its inhabitants were considered either “Français musulmans” (or “indigènes”) or “Français d’Algérie” (*pieds-noirs*). Two separate electoral colleges, which elected representatives to the Algerian Assembly, existed for Muslims and Europeans. Although the legal status and designation of Muslim Algerians had undergone some changes since the end of World War 2, the pre-War power structure was deeply unequal and racist. Instead of adopting the colonial terminology, I employ here the demonym “Algerian,” although a modern Algerian nation did not independently exist before 1962. Equally, I use the terms “Français” and “*pieds-noirs*” where necessary to distinguish between Europeans from the *métropole* and those who lived in Algeria at the outbreak of war.<sup>3</sup>

Until a law was passed in October 1999 events in Algeria were not officially recognized in France as a “war,” but referred to as “événements,” and “opérations de maintien de l’ordre.”<sup>4</sup>

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external branch of the FLN, was elected a vice-premier of the Algerian provisional government while imprisoned in France. He became *président du Conseil* of the FLN in 1962, a few months after Independence was declared. In 1965, a military coup led by Colonel Boumédiène ended Ben Bella’s presidency and established the centrality of the military in Algerian politics for the coming decades.

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough historical examination of the Algerian War of Independence, see Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de la guerre d’Algérie (1954-1962)*, 2004; Martin Evans, *Algeria: France’s Undeclared War*, 2012; Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora (eds), *La Guerre d’Algérie 1954-2004: la fin de l’amnésie*, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of identity and institutional politics in pre-War Algeria, see Benjamin Stora, *Le Transfert d’une mémoire*, 1999,

<sup>4</sup> Law 99-882 of October 18, 1999: “relative à la substitution, à l’expression “aux opérations effectuées en Afrique du Nord,” de l’expression “à la guerre d’Algérie ou aux combats en Tunisie et au Maroc.””

These euphemisms, just two of many employed with regards to the French-Algerian conflict, proved a durable one, and the change in terminology was part of a more widespread political inclination in France, since the late-1990s, to acknowledge, publicly and legislatively, the negative effects of its *mission civilisatrice*. Admitting that it had engaged in eight years of war with a territory that was supposedly part of France was a symbolically charged act, even if by this point very few people would have argued that the “opérations de maintien de l’ordre” were anything other than a war. This change in nomenclature retroactively confirmed what had been perfectly clear at the time: France was at war with an “ennemi intime” that categorically refused its continuing colonial presence.<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Stora, the leading historian of modern Algeria, identifies the turn of the century as a period of “accélération de la mémoire” with regards to the Algerian War in both Algeria and France (Stora & Harbi 501).<sup>6</sup>

The instability of both countries immediately after the war and the aggressively disputed issues of responsibility and punishment that the war engendered go some way to explaining the way in which torture is “forgotten” in the 1960s and 70s. In the aftermath of the war, addressing the issue of torture was a priority for neither de Gaulle’s government, nor Ben Bella’s. The Evian Accords, signed in March 1962, stipulated amnesty from prosecution for crimes committed during the war for citizens of both countries, making it juridically impossible to pursue Algerian or French citizens for the crimes that they may have committed during the war. In France, this meant the exoneration and eventual rehabilitation of OAS members who had plotted against the French government, the release of Algerian prisoners of war held in metropolitan prisons, and no investigation or prosecution of those known or presumed to have tortured during the war. The decree of March 22, 1962, which reinforces the terms of the Evian Accords, states that “Nul ne peut être inculpé, recherché, poursuivi, condamné ni faire l’objet de décision pénale, de sanction disciplinaire ou de discrimination quelconque” for any acts connected to “les opérations de maintien de l’ordre dirigées contre l’insurrection algérienne.”<sup>7</sup>

As Raphaëlle Branche indicates in *La Torture et l’armée pendant la guerre d’Algérie*, the 1962 laws give torture the same exonerated status as any other crime committed during the war – theft, desertion, insubordination, or rape – and reinforces the idea that any torture that did take place was a result of “des errements, des excès, des bavures” (416-8). Branche argues that the law (and similar laws of amnesty that followed it) “planifie l’oubli” of Algerian events, establishing the troubling paradox of recognition and repression that characterizes the memory of the war in France.

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<sup>5</sup> Patrick Rotman’s 2002 documentary, *L’Ennemi intime: Violences dans la guerre d’Algérie*, is one example of the acceleration of memory and commemoration that Benjamin Stora describes, and which is amply illustrated by the increase in fiction and non-fiction films and texts that address the Algerian War of Independence. Rotman’s documentary consists primarily of interviews with men who served in the French army and witnessed or participated in torture.

<sup>6</sup> Stora outlines both extreme, partisan responses to various anniversaries and memorials of the Algerian war, but also outlines what he sees as a positive “franchissement d’un seuil,” the recognition of the Algerian “events” as a war in 1999, and the “nombreuses polémiques et explosions mémorielles” that followed this legal change (Stora & Harbi 505)

<sup>7</sup> Decree number 62-328, March 22, 1962. This decree, along with a similar one concerning French citizens who participated in or supported (materially or otherwise) the “insurrection algérienne,” passed into law later that year.

Elle [the law] dit, en même temps, qu'il s'est passé quelque chose et que cela doit être oublié. Au fond, elle désigne enfin la guerre par son nom, en proposant la paix. Surtout, en amalgamant les actes illégaux au reste des opérations, elle reconnaît enfin, en les effaçant, que l'Etat a ordonné ces violences. (Branche 420)

The official position of recognizing that something happened and that it should be forgotten perfectly illustrates the paradoxical and conflicting relationship that is criticized and lamented again and again in fiction that takes the crimes of the Algerian War as its topic.

Pierre Vidal-Naquet, in *La Raison d'état*, goes further than Branche in his criticisms of the amnesty laws, stating that the series of laws provided not just amnesty, but ultimately “une légitimation” of torture (324). The already-absent accountability for torture is therefore written into law. Amnesty laws also had the effect of making all French soldiers and police officers appear guilty of torture by association, seeing that no differentiation was made between those who had tortured, and those who had not. Realistically, the prevalence of torture, and the fact that it was a sanctioned activity, would have made it extremely difficult to prosecute every military or police agent known to have participated in torture.<sup>8</sup>

Assessing how many Algerian and French combatants and civilians were tortured during the war is, for obvious reasons, an impossible task.<sup>9</sup> Many of the archives in France that relate to military activities during the war remain sealed under various laws that protect France's national security. While some police and military archives have become available – many are declassified after fifty years – certain archives remain classified.<sup>10</sup> In Algeria, almost all archives relating to the war are classified. One available archival resource that reveals the systemic nature of torture is the complaints brought against the French military and police. In her study of these documents, Raphaëlle Branche points to the importance of the injured body as a problematic form of proof of torture:

Quand une victime se décide à porter plainte pour sévices, elle trouve rarement des témoins pour soutenir ses dires. Pour être crue, elle doit montrer qu'elle porte sur le corps les marques des tortures endurées puisque, malgré les précautions des militaires, ces gestes laissent parfois des traces. Leur corps devient alors leur plus sûr témoin. Encore faut-il qu'un médecin ait vu ces marques et les ait authentifiées. (Branche 380-1)

The body is the “plus sûr témoin” if marks are left during torture. Often, however, torturers employed so-called “clean” methods of torture, such as torture by water or electricity, to carefully avoid leaving traces on the body. In these cases, as I discuss further in Chapters Two and Three, the body of the torture victim remains the primary site of proof and contention. If the

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<sup>8</sup> For further discussion of the role of the justice system in France during and after the war, see Sylvie Thénault, “La justice dans la guerre d'Algérie,” in Harbi & Stora, 77-96.

<sup>9</sup> Based on both French and Algerian official figures, Benjamin Stora estimates the total number of deaths, of soldiers and civilians, to be “nearly 500,000.” This number includes those killed in attacks or assassinations in the metropole. See Stora, *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History*, 108-111. See also Guy Pervillé's discussion of how to calculate the number of dead in Algeria, “La guerre d'Algérie: combien de morts?” in Harbi & Stora, 477-493.

<sup>10</sup> For a range of perspectives on recently-declassified archives, see Branche, *La Torture et l'armée*, Linda Amiri, “La Répression policière en France vue par les archives,” in Harbi & Stora, 404-416, and Abdelkrim Badjadja, “Panorama des archives de l'Algérie moderne et contemporaine,” in Harbi & Stora, 631-682. Badjadja discusses the contention around the transfer of archives from Algeria to France in the last months of the war.

body does not have any marks of torture, and the archive is classified, then within this evidentiary logic, torture becomes a crime without witnesses, and cannot be proven. Branche also specifies that given the limited accessibility of the archives, the complaints constitute “que la partie émergée d’un iceberg de violences” (381, n.1).<sup>11</sup>

Before returning to the narrative afterlives of these discourses, some clarification of the kind of torture that took place during the war is necessary. Because of its relative success for the French military, the case of the Battle of Algiers (1957) is often used to illustrate the necessity of the military’s use of torture. The French army, led by General Massu, arrested and interrogated an estimated 30-40% of the male population of the *casbah* of Algiers, and detained and searched many more, including women, who had not previously been searched (Horne 193,199). The interrogations, carried out by Détachements Opérationnels de Protection (DOP), included use of the *gégène*, water torture, and beatings, and were aimed at presumed FLN cell members who could reveal their collaborators and allow for a rapid round up of FLN leaders of Algiers. Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1966 film, *La Bataille d’Alger*, underscored both the brutality of the operation, and its importance to the French campaign, providing a fictionalized snapshot of the lengths that France was willing to go to to win the undeclared war. However, Pontecorvo’s film suggests, at least to some extent, that the use of torture successfully identified guerillas and their cell members and that the “intelligence” gathered by DOPs was valid. As Darius Rejali illustrates, however, Massu’s victory in the *casbah* was a product of sustained detention, surveillance, and collaboration with local informants, all of which created an environment of terror. The campaign was not a precise, selective sweep, but rather a nine-month program of detention and classification that produced thousands of files as the French military sought to control the population through identification and surveillance (Rejali 480-7). However, the perceived success of interrogation by the DOPs, which resorted to torture in many, if not most cases, strengthened the military reliance on torture as an acceptable and widespread military tactic.

Branche identifies the five most common torture methods used on Algerians during the War of Independence, generally used in the same order of escalation: beatings, hangings (weight-based stress positions), water torture, electrical torture, and rape (326). *La gégène*, a portable, hand-cranked generator used to shock the detainee, often on sensitive body parts like the soles of the feet, the nipples, and the genitals, was often used alongside various kinds of water torture, as the presence of water amplified both the pain inflicted and the detainee’s fear. Sexual violence, including threats of castration, forced nudity, electroshock used on the genitals, and vaginal and anal rape, was another category of torture that contributed to the establishment of a relationship of dominance and humiliation within the torture chamber. As discussed in Chapter Three, Algerian masculinity and the nation’s existence and identity were repeatedly threatened in cases of rape.

The importance of the concept of “clean” torture in the French-Algerian War, and its perceived (and desired) modernity is stressed by Kristin Ross, in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*:

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<sup>11</sup> In 1962, Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Perelli compiled the official affidavits of hundreds of Algerians who had filed a complaint against the French government for torture and published them in *Le Peuple algérien et la guerre*. A 1954 report by Roger Wuillaume, inspector general of administration, gives some idea of the ubiquity of torture, and argues that it is necessary and “no more brutal than deprivation of food, drink and tobacco,” cited in Vidal-Naquet, *La Raison d’état*, 66. The full report is given in *La Raison d’état*, 55-68.

*Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (1995). The technological advances taking place in the métropole influenced the torture methods that became widespread, and acceptable in Algeria, perverting them to a “distorted, nightmarish guise” (Ross 111). The torture done to French Communist and journalist Henri Alleg, for example, comprises “parodies of domestic functions,” which underscore both the practical importance of leaving an unmarked body and the ideological desire to “stop the forward movement of time,” that is, to freeze Algeria in a colonial past and therefore stop the disintegration of the colonial system (112, 122). By leaving no traces – at least not physical scars – the French ensure that this chapter of history is unwritten, and unverifiable: the “cleanliness” of this modern torture attempts to create a sense of ahistoricity, even in the face of the realities of decolonization by any means necessary.

Ross’ work adds, I believe, an interesting challenge to the myth that torture accesses information and determines the outcome of war. By stressing the “cleanliness” of torture methods like the “baignoire” (bathtub torture, including drowning, and forced drinking, or pumping) and or the “gégène” (electrical torture, usually done with a small, handcranked battery) Ross reveals the sense of superiority that underwrote French interactions with Algerians: Europeans were the “clean,” right-thinking, modern agents, and Algerians were the “dirty,” savage subjects (always addressed as “tu”) who deserved the kind of treatment they received. The focus on victims’ genitalia, as emphasized in *La Question, La Gangrène*, and testimonials by Djamilia Boupacha and Louise Ighilahriz thematizes the ulterior drive to interrupt or destroy the possibility of reproduction. At the training camp Jeanne d’Arc, soldiers were advised that “[i]l faut que la torture soit propre,” and therefore deniable, relegated to the realm of testimony rather than physical proof if the victim was released.<sup>12</sup> Sexual torture was less “clean” in terms of physical traces, but was accompanied by the shame (for both men and women) of coming forward as a victim of rape and sexual humiliation and therefore rarely reported.<sup>13</sup>

Given the contextual and geo-political realities of the practice of torture during the Algerian War, it is also important to take into account the legal and social status of torture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Torture has been illegal according to international law since World War 2, when statutes relating to the treatment of prisoners (during war or peacetime) were codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Geneva Conventions (1949). The 1975 United Nations Declaration against Torture, defines it as

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or confession, punishing him for an act he has committed, or intimidating him or other persons.  
(cited by Rejali 37)

Later amendments to or debates over the objective nature of “pain” and “suffering” often ignore the other aspects of the legal definition of torture: the use of institutional power against the individual, and the justification of confession or, in 21<sup>st</sup>-century parlance, intelligence-gathering

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<sup>12</sup> “Des cours sur une ‘torture humaine’ sont données aux stagiaires du camp Jeanne d’Arc.” *Le Monde* 20-21 December 1959 : 6 (Rejali 735)

<sup>13</sup> See Lazreg 154-69 on rape as sexual torture as military strategies during the Algerian War.

or “enhanced interrogation techniques.”<sup>14</sup> The necessity of language, of the body providing information that cannot be accessed by other means is, however, crucial to my understanding of the connection between torture and narrative.

For Darius Rejali, as well as other critics, it is important to distinguish between what he calls “classical” torture and modern torture (36). Classical torturers needed to mark their victims’ bodies, to clearly set them apart as belonging to outsider groups or as having disobeyed religious or social tenets. The scarred body was meant to be read by others as a warning, a deterrent, and an advertisement for the workings of state power. With the advent of nations and democracies that strictly limit the kinds of punishment and surveillance that are (officially) allowed on enemy bodies, Rejali argues, like Ross, that torture had to become “cleaner,” leaving fewer marks, and seeking to inflict psychological as well as physical pain that attempted to have an effect on the victim’s identity and sense of self. Rejali’s own definition of torture is useful in that it spells out the systematic and interrogation-based aspects of torture, without strictly limiting it to one context or relationship. He writes that “[t]orture is the systematic infliction of physical torment on detained individuals by state officials for police purposes, for confession, information, or intimidation,” and also considers as torture “the activity of some nonstate actors as torture under specific circumstances” (36).<sup>15</sup>

What is vital to both the United Nations’ and Rejali’s definitions of torture is that the infliction of pain and suffering is deliberate, not a by-product of detention or punishment, and that it includes the use and abuse of public trust: the person doing the torture is not a private citizen acting independently, but someone who acts, or is understood to act, with the weight and protection of the state or similar body behind him or her. Official classification of what is and isn’t torture is useful when thinking about the criminal aspects of torture during the Algerian War, but does not encompass the various justifications given for doing torture, the euphemizations elaborated to conceal it, or the individual viciousness of many acts. What I wish to highlight here is the deliberacy of the act of torture, and its state-sponsored dimension, both of which are essential to understanding the nature of torture in the French-Algerian context.

These definitions clearly fit the situation that existed between agents of the French police and military and Algerian combatants, but they are less immediately applicable in the fictional texts I discuss in Chapter One, where it is a question of violence by Algerian fundamentalist groups, not a state-sponsored group, against Algerian citizens (in ‘*La Femme en morceaux*’ and *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*). Although Muslim fundamentalist groups are, *sensu stricto*, “nonstate actors,” I include these acts for several reasons, one contextual, and one textual. Algeria’s *décennie noire* was fought over opposing claims of who should be in government: the military-supported FLN or the Front islamique de salut (FIS), who had won the first rounds of the election. Although the annulment of the elections and subsequent military suppression of the FIS and the Armée islamique du salut (AIS) meant that the FLN retained power, the FIS’s

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<sup>14</sup> The term “enhanced interrogation techniques” arose from discussions over the legality of certain practices on detained alleged terrorists in offshore CIA prisons. A 2007 investigation into these techniques described them as a “euphemism for torture.” (Molly Moore. “Report Gives Detail on CIA Prisons.” *Washington Post* 9 June 2007. 29 Sept 2013.)

<sup>15</sup> See also *Amnesty International Report on Torture*, 1973, for a discussion of the problem of fixing a legal definition of torture (29-34).

rhetoric and actions made claims on popular support and legitimacy that positioned them as an organized institution. Within the texts, the many references to torture during the War of Independence, and the legacy that it continues to have within Algeria, means that systemized torture is a significant subtext for both narratives. Additionally, both Djebbar and Marouane suggest that this same kind of violence is being done to women by both the colonial state and fundamentalist groups.

For reasons made clear by the process of banalization and legitimization that France's amnesty laws encouraged, the issue of torture faded from the political spotlight across the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The resurgence of violence in Algeria in the 1990s, after the FLN-led government cancelled legislative elections in 1991, attributed to greater public awareness of the long-range socio-political ramifications of the French presence in Algeria. As many intellectuals – journalists, writers, and academics – targeted by the Front islamique du salut (FIS) or the Armée islamique du salut (AIS) sought exile in France, they were able to voice their disappointment in post-Independence Algeria to a wider audience. Simultaneously, the opening up of certain French military archives in 1993 allowed historians much greater access to documentation about the war. While the issue of torture by French agents during the war continued to be extremely contentious, and the amnesties that precluded prosecution remained in place, several highly publicized trials in the *métropole* created a collective confrontation with the physical and political realities of torture during the Algerian war.<sup>16</sup>

In France, the lengthy trial of Maurice Papon, which ended in 1998 with his conviction for crimes against humanity, is an example of the growing national consciousness about the unaddressed crimes of the Algerian War and of the often fragmented way in which those crimes are treated that this project examines. The debates around his trial and his death also exemplify the multidirectional nature of memory and its ability to associate events out of a necessity to commemorate and mourn. Papon, who had served as the budget minister, Paris' *préfet de Police*, and as a mayor in the Gironde region, was found guilty of organizing mass deportations of French Jews to concentration camps in Poland and Germany. Later, as the *préfet de Police*, he ordered the violent repression of a pro-FLN demonstration against the curfew for North African men, a confrontation in the streets of Paris that left over one hundred demonstrators dead. Awarded the Legion of Honor later that year, he was soon implicated in another brutal repression of protesters, this time during a peaceful protest against the OAS, led by the French Communist Party. Papon's role in the hexagonal events of the Algerian War was not part of the case against him in the 1990s, although his responsibility, as the *préfet*, was undisputed. The amnesty laws that forbade prosecution for crimes committed during the war protected Papon on this front, although the media highlighted his involvement in the October 1961 and Charonne massacres, especially as his trail reached the courts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of how France implemented reform with regards to its policies on torture, see Henry F. Carey, *Reaping What You Sow: A Comparative Examination of Torture Reform in the United States, France, Argentina, and Israel* (Praeger, 2011), particularly Chapter 4, "France: Supranational Supervision but Limited Memory Battles and Accountability" 127-151.

<sup>17</sup> Papon was initially accused in 1981, and, after over a decade of legal procedures, was brought before the Cour d'Assises in 1995. His courtroom trial began in 1997. For an explanation of the historical and legal limitations around the charged brought against Papon, see Guillaume Mouralis, "Le process Papon: justice et temporalité," *Terrain* 38 (2002): 55-68. Web. 29 Sept 2013.

Both in and outside the courtroom, journalists and historians, notably Jean-Luc Einaudi, campaigned to create a shadow trial that brought to light the crimes for which Papon was not being prosecuted. One result of this shadow trial was a defamation case in 1998-9 that Papon brought against Einaudi for an article that held Papon responsible for the October 1961 massacre. Papon's complaint was upheld, but Einaudi used the courtroom, and the testimony of several archivists, to enter into the public record the accusations of crimes against supporters of an independent Algeria in the 1960s.<sup>18</sup>

While Maurice Papon did serve in Algeria during the war and supported French Algeria, his case would not be of interest in a work about torture and its aftermaths if it did not exemplify so vividly the changing attitude in France towards remembering a difficult past in a public, or collective, way. The interest in his trial shows both a public and an official desire to bring into the collective narrative memories of the atrocities of the Algerian War, even if those memories had to be created in parallel to, and in the shadow of, Papon's crimes during the Vichy regime.

Historians often see turn-of-the-century France as a nation doing extensive work of commemoration and apology for the crimes of the past.<sup>19</sup> Papon's trial was part of the relentless obsession with the Vichy period and France's role in collaboration, but his trial and the events and discourses around it also help to reframe the stakes of writing about the Algerian War, asking how we might best access narratives that have been "forbidden" for reasons of shame, national security, or political exigency. By creating a context in which historical crimes could be publicly debated, the trials of figures like Klaus Barbie, Maurice Papon and Paul Aussaresses establish often unsettling parallels between the past and the present, or between separate events in the past.<sup>20</sup> They also reveal that collective memory did not apply to all events in the same way. Instead, remembering one event could serve as a way of accessing or transmitting another. In this palimpsestic way, historians, authors, and the public are able to reexamine the Algerian War of Independence as another form of "ce passé qui ne passe pas."<sup>21</sup>

Whatever one might think about the courts' treatment of Papon, the media treatment of his trials and the public interest in their result suggests a "retour" of discourse about torture that takes a different form than that of the return of the repressed suggested in some accounts. In literature, from the late 1980s on, the Algerian War, and its relationship to contemporary France and Algeria (as well as its relationship to other historical events) begins to be explored in fragmentary narratives whose form echoes the contestatory way that torture is remembered in France. Rather than a return, these works of literature present a shift in perceptions of how

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<sup>18</sup> Einaudi's campaign to hold Papon publicly accountable was harshly criticised by historians for both political and methodological reasons. Jean-Paul Brunet, Jim House and Neil Macmaster – all of whom work on the October 1961 massacre – accused Einaudi of exaggerating the severity of the massacres for personal and political reasons, and of demonizing Papon in a near-mythical way. For further discussion see *Charonne, Lumières sur une tragédie* (Flammarion, 2003) and Jim House and Neil MacMaster *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2006)

<sup>19</sup> See for example Ross, and Stora, op. cit., and Henry Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* (Fayard, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Paul Aussaresses served the French army in World War 2, the First Indochina War, and the Algerian War. In 2000, and again in 2001, he defended the use of torture in Algeria and was subsequently stripped of his rank and found guilty of "complicité d'apologie de crimes de guerre."

<sup>21</sup> A phrase coined by Henry Rousso's 1994 book about the process of collective memory, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* (Fayard).

literature could best narrate and transmit stories of torture, and other state-supported crimes. By accepting the recollection of contested historical events as always flawed, always fragmented, and always searching for causes and analogies in other events, fictional narratives could talk about torture and its aftermath from the point of view of the tortured subject, blurring genre lines, and lines between fiction and the archive as they did so.

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The body of work that I read and analyze here spans the period from the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) to today, with a focus on works that concentrate on the description of the physical and psychological results of torture. The earliest texts that I analyze, in Chapter Three, are testimonial accounts of torture written as part of a larger movement of protest against the practice of torture by the French Army in Algeria. Significant divides in how the French saw their relationship with Algeria began to be expressed in the media, predominantly in left-wing and religious publications, establishing a discourse against the military presence there. The euphemistic lie of “les événements” as a matter of national necessity, increasingly challenged by both returning soldiers and *écrivains engagés*, was further destabilized by first-hand accounts of the torture and detention taking place, or, as Jean-Paul Sartre affectively wrote “les crimes que l’on commet en notre nom” (Sartre 58). Henri Alleg’s *La Question*, published by the Éditions de Minuit in 1958, prefaced by Sartre, directly attacked the concept of torture as information gathering or as a tool used against the “enemy.” As a French Communist in Algiers, and a friend of the disappeared Communist and anticolonialist Maurice Audin, Alleg’s testimonial, written while he was still in El Biar detention center, served a pragmatic, immediate function of rallying support for his cause. As it was censored, clandestinely published, and translated, it gathered momentum as an engaged text that spoke for other detainees.

Djamila Boupacha’s testimony, published at the center of a collective petitionary collection, *Djamila Boupacha* in 1962, also has a double life as a text that asks for justice and illustrates the lack of it. Gisèle Halimi, Boupacha’s lawyer, and Simone de Beauvoir rallied to Boupacha’s cause, contextualizing her testimony of weeks of torture and rape in El Biar and Hussein Dey with short texts by hexagonal *écrivains engagés*. Written at the end of the war, *Djamila Boupacha* was not censored, but the contextualizing process that seemingly buffers the public from her work brings into question the public’s ability to “hear” the reality of torture in Algeria, even as its continued practice was relatively well known.

Forty years later, a similar contextualization, one carried out over time and through different media forms, framed Louissette Ighilahriz’s testimony, which echoes many of the atrocities carried out on Alleg and Boupacha. Once again, the first-hand testimony of the torture victim is mediated, here by journalist Florence Beaugé, who initially interviewed Ighilahriz in 2000. The evolution the narrative that Ighilahriz presented, and the virulence with which she was

attacked in both France and Algeria, as a false witness exemplify the still-present taboos surrounding discussion of torture during the Algerian War. Ighilahriz is called upon to “prove” her testimony by displaying her scarred body, a demand that clearly reinitiates trauma by recalling sexualized violence and by insisting that the physical body can be the only real witness to torture.

The body of fictional texts that I analyze takes up the narrative transmission of torture almost a generation after the end of the war. One writer whose literary work illustrates the necessary mediation between private and public memory is Assia Djébar. Her fiction highlights the issues of physical and psychological transmission that I see as central to the memory of torture and represents the ethical tension between individuality and collective memory. Her work repeatedly unsettles heroic narratives and historical accounts of wartime. Djébar’s first book *La Soif* (1957) was published in Paris during the war, and expressed a certain hopefulness for the future of Algeria, but her post-war fiction has focused on the social failures Algerian women face in the aftermath of Independence. Her 1980 collection of short stories, *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement* (revised and republished in 2002) intertwines women’s stories of survival after traumatic and violent events. In the collection’s eponymous short story, Djébar suggests several ways that narratives of violence and survival might be transmitted. In the Djébarian oeuvre, these narratives are not told directly, but communicated by the scarred body, songs, or delirious *récits*.

In ‘La Femme en morceaux’ (1997) and *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002), stories are no longer told by survivors of the War of Independence, but by dead women. The post-mortem voice, connected to a missing or dismembered body, signifies a genealogy of problematic martyrdom for Algerian women. Djébar’s later texts, written during and after the Algerian Civil War, display a deep pessimism about the possibility of survival. In all these texts, the female body becomes a palimpsest that can be read by other characters, transmitting an individual story, but also stories of other women, and other events and time periods.

Leïla Marouane’s 2002 novel, *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, reveals a similar pessimism and engagement with creating, in literature, a historiography of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Algeria that takes into account the repeated violences against women. Marouane’s text connects sexual violence to identity and memory in a way that fragments the narrative, removing certainty about any of the brutality that is described. As the narrative conveys the despair and repetition of trauma, it also reflects on the underlying connections between Algeria during the war of Independence, and Algeria during the *décennie noire*, and how those connections relate to France as a colonial and postcolonial power.

Standing in counterpoint to the texts by Algerian women, Antonin Varenne’s *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin* (2011) raises questions about how contemporary *romans noirs* narrate multidirectional memories of violence. The Algerian War is viewed within the text in flashbacks, but it exists in the present-day narrative with the presence of Brahim, a torture survivor, Pascal, a returned soldier, and the presumably dangerous memories that the text’s antagonists attempt to suppress. Crime fiction’s ability to use history’s concealed and/or minor moments to illustrate institutional corruption and complicity has often been used to address the Algerian War, but the

depictions of torture at the heart of Varenne's novel gestures towards a need to write history in a multivalent way.

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From its beginnings, this project has developed within a political and geographical context in which torture and its afterlives are increasingly relevant. The United States' ongoing "war on terror" brought debate about the definitions and limits of "enhanced interrogation techniques" into public discourse, as legislation made certain kinds of torture allowable in certain places on certain kinds of people. Initially, though, my interest in torture in the Franco-Algerian context stemmed from questions of violence and counter-violence: Where is the line between resistance and guerilla tactics? In a context of decolonization, how does fiction depict violent acts? Are violent acts "read" differently depending on who is the victim of those acts?

My understanding of the remembering and transmission of torture in texts is strongly connected to the question of a subject's ability to recount traumatic events after the fact. In texts like Djébar's 'Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement' or Marouane's *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* the trauma of torture changes the identity of the tortured person, and the way in which that person is able to remember and talk about the experience. The trauma of torture does not, however, make the transmission of the event impossible. Rather, it splinters the narrative, or makes the story of torture only possible in extreme circumstances, or through the mediation of the scarred body. The inherent obscenity of torture – in its relationship to the body, in its sexualized nature, and in its liminal position for those who do not want to know of its existence – means that torture must often be mediated by paratextual elements that vouch for the survivor as a reliable witness and provide a buffer between the reader and the "obscene" event being recounted.

In the texts analyzed in this dissertation, the false logic of torture, as described by theorists like Elaine Scarry, provides an essential lens for understanding how torture is narrated. To understand the false logic of torture, and how this falsehood is inflicted on the tortured body, Scarry's 1985 work, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, is essential. After the Algerian War of Independence, torture became a crime *qui n'en est pas un* according to the amnesty laws that simultaneously invoked and repressed the specter of a generation of men implicated in the atrocities of war. Use of torture by the French military and police during the Algerian War of Independence adhered to the centuries-old false logic of torture as a tool of national defense and information-gathering, an epistemological error at the center of Scarry's work.

Scarry's account of the description and structure of torture uncovers the underlying "fiction of power" and the lie that torture is able to reveal information that is accessed through

pain. That pain is unshareable, and indescribable through language, has become a virtual commonplace, but this argument is only the starting point of Scarry's analysis, which focuses also on the way that the pain of the individual is transformed into power for the state or institution doing the torturing.

While the juridical definitions of torture, previously discussed, are helpful to contextualize turn-of-the-century social and legal ideas about torture, Scarry's examination of the phenomena of torture is invaluable in order to grapple with the issues of transmission and narrative that are central to my study. The focus here is not on the mechanics of torture – what is done or not done to the body, and by whom – but on the processes and perverted logic of the torture chamber and how that logic affects the ability to “tell” after the fact.

For Scarry, the process of torture invariably encompasses phenomena that happen concurrently, but can be separated into three stages:

First, pain is inflicted on a person in ever-intensifying ways. Second, the pain, continually amplified within the person's body, is also amplified in the sense that it is objectified, made visible to those outside the person's body. Third, the objectified pain is denied as pain and read as power, a translation made possible by the obsessive mediation of agency. The workings of these three phenomena will very gradually emerge during ...descriptions of the place of body and voice in torture. (28)

The “mediation of agency” continuously translates the pain of the tortured into the power of the torturer, actualizing the dominance over the individual, who becomes a stand-in, or metaphor, for the desired dominance over the group. Through the misreading of torture as a method of extracting power from the body, it “comes to be described – not only by regimes that torture but sometimes by people who stand outside those regimes – as a form of *information-gathering* or (in its even more remarkable form) *intelligence-gathering*” (Scarry, 12).

The verbal “unanchoredness” that makes language both unreal and perverse during torture takes the torture victim away from representational meaning. If the experience of pain cannot be relayed, if even concrete nouns (in Algeria *la téléphone, la baignoire*) no longer hold an agreed-upon meaning as they are transformed into weapons, then the articulation of the experience loses its potential to communicate meaning. My argument, that post-torture texts use fragmentary, multidirectional, or heavily mediated forms to transmit a story of torture, takes up where Scarry's unmaking leaves off. Reading and analyzing the different ways in which narrative can remake the world, or even just a part of the world, after torture allows us to think about how dominated individuals and groups might seek to a) reestablish themselves as speaking subjects after torture b) intergenerationally transmit narratives that portray the mechanics of torture from the tortured person's point of view and c) reclaim language as a meaning-constructing tool, but one that can be manipulated, unmade, and remade by the tortured as well as the torturer.

Understanding the dynamics of the torture chamber in this way has helped me to see testimonial and fictional texts as being written in the wake of and in response to the attempted destruction of thought, language, and memory. The false logic of torture, which establishes torture as a way of turning pain into both “intelligence” and state power, relies on relationships

to the Other, to one's own body, and to memory that emerge time and again in the fictional texts of Chapters One and Two.<sup>22</sup> The directive to tell, to reveal the answer to torture's question, is caught up in the desire to narrativize the traumatic events of torture. Writers reject the idea that to stay silent is to somehow "succeed" as a victim of torture and describe the physical and mental effects of that torture through the optic of fiction. However, my focus is not a description of what happens during the act of torture but instead to think about how, after torture takes place, the trauma of the event can be narrated and transmitted.<sup>23</sup>

What is striking in work by Djébar and Marouane is the project of making trauma and disembodiment present within the text. Both these writers reject the idea that trauma cannot be accurately remembered, and that torture undoes language, making the experience of pain unrelatable. In the case of Djébar's work, her use of language, and the importance of varied forms of utterance in her texts, such as songs, poems, cries, conversations, dreamlike monologues, and post-mortem speeches, show how that language is being tentatively reconstructed. Marouane's novel, told from the point of view of the traumatized and disfigured Fatima, uses intralinguistic puns and repetitions to portray how Fatima avoids directly recounting her experience of kidnapping and rape. Her *jeux de mots* play with the idea of making and unmaking the meaning of language after the dismantling of identity has taken place.

Testimonial texts written by survivors of torture also use narrative to remake language in the wake of trauma. In the testimonial texts I look at in Chapter Three, the remaking of language and memory is assisted by the intellectuals who write petitions, prefaces and articles to create a structure in which the testimony becomes legible. Alleg and Boupacha both insist on their lucidity and the force of their memories of torture by recounting painful details of their experiences. They, along with Ighilahriz, also deny the misinterpretation of their pain as relinquished power by speaking out, to great effect, about the individuals who tortured them in the name of the French state. By focusing on torture as an act carried out by individuals on individuals, the relationship between the dominant state and dominated person is interrupted. What connects these testimonial texts to the previously discussed fictional texts is the importance of narrative – in these cases, a first-person narration of torture survived – as a way of reconnecting the individual victim to an identity that is made coherent through the ability to narrate, and of connecting the individual event of torture to the larger historical context.

Historian Raphaëlle Branche bases her work on the specific context of the French-Algerian conflict on a similar understanding of the goals and mechanics of torture. For her, torture is "une arme de guerre, une violence employée à dessein, pour gagner" (14). In the context of the Algerian War, while intimidation and objectification were part of torture, its overarching goal was to win the (undeclared) war, to quash the revolutionary violence of the FLN and its sympathizers. Like Scarry, Branche defines the system of torture around phenomena of

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<sup>22</sup> By "the Other," I refer to Edward Said's definition of the term in *Orientalism* (1978), as the result of an ethnocentric view of the world that creates a politically, socioculturally, and economically othered identity that is always understood as a minority figure (as was the case in French Algeria). In Scarry's work, she usually refers to "other people" or "others," terms which can mean both the hegemonically established "foreign" figure of the other, and the person other than one's self in her work.

<sup>23</sup> For useful descriptions of what happens during the act of torture, see Rejali, *Torture and Democracy*, or Rita Maran's *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French-Algerian War* (1989).

pain-causing and language-destruction, denying the justification of a “fin extérieure” that gave wartime torture its prevalence. Branche writes that

[l]es définitions de la torture qui la lient à une fin extérieure, telle que l’obtention de renseignements, portent en elles l’euphémisation de ces violences, notamment celles qui sont accomplies sans but repérable. Au contraire, il faut resserrer la définition sur trois éléments fondamentaux qui ignorent cette fin apparente : la souffrance infligée, l’intention de celui qui l’inflige, et enfin la volonté d’ôter à l’autre sa capacité de penser, qui est au cœur de cette intention. (15)

By trying to divest the torture victim of his or her capacity for reflection, the torturer takes aim at his or her status as a thinking subject, further underscoring the divide between the “rational” torturer and the “irrational,” unthinking guerrilla agent. Without thought, the torture victim is supposed to become a conduit for information, language that is seen as summoned up by pain and suffering, rather than by thought. The three elements identified by Branche – suffering, the intention to cause suffering, and the desire to eliminate thought from the body and language – are intimately linked, and render problematic the justification of torture as an information-gathering activity. This euphemization therefore mentions only the stated goal or outcome of torture (Branche’s “fin extérieure”), eliding its process. The ability to inflict torture on Algerians during the war was, according to Branche, linked to a “flottement perpétuel dans la définition de l’ennemi.” Algerians both were and were not properly “French,” the conflict was and was not a war, and this ambiguity allowed for an “état d’exception où la frontière entre la violence et le droit se brouille” (15).

The euphemization of torture, and the concealment of its real goal when systematically carried out as part of a colonial enterprise are what the texts I analyze here are working against by staging the return and repetition of the trauma of torture. Instead of accepting the world-ending nature of torture, they experiment with various ways of reconstructing narratives through which its memory is transmitted. Testimonial texts have pragmatic legal and political goals, but also reestablish the torture victim as a speaking, narrating subject. The fact that this reestablishment can occur so long after the fact, as was the case of Louise Ighilahriz, indicates that the aftereffects of torture during the Algerian War are long-ranging and recurrent. While I dispute the notion of an “open secret” that resurfaced in France in the 1990s, it is clear from the fiction analyzed in Chapter One that the civil violence in Algeria in the 1990s provided a context in which to reexamine torture’s genealogy in the Franco-Algerian relationship.<sup>24</sup> Fictional texts by Djébar, Marouane, and Varenne transmit stories of torture through the disruption of narrative and genre expectations, resisting justificatory explanations of torture’s purpose of knowledge gathering, and instead remaking language in a way that allows for trauma to be written alongside history.

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<sup>24</sup> Here, I refer to the Algerian Civil War or *décennie noire*: politico-religious violence that began after the second-round presidential elections of December 1991 were canceled to prevent the election of Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) candidates. A state of emergency was declared, and military repression of FIS members and supporters was extreme. The FIS, the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), and affiliated fundamentalist groups targeted journalists, intellectuals, and other considered enemies of Islam, and carried out massacres against civilian populations. The GIA was defeated in 2002, but fighting between the military and fundamentalist groups continues in some regions of Algeria, and the state of emergency remained in place until February 2011.

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My first chapter, “Histories repeating,” examines how and why fictional accounts of torture and its aftermath tend to deliberately conflate and intertwine various historical periods. Making individual memories of physical violence the subject of fiction, the authors I discuss narrativize the historical reality of torture in order to illustrate the *longue durée* and endless repeatability of violence. Being tortured and witnessing torture affects how one is able to transmit the memory of that act, as illustrated by the use of imbricated and hallucinatory narratives in generically diverse texts. Novels by Leïla Marouane and Antonin Varenne, and a short story by Assia Djebar, reveal the persistence of the Algerian War of Independence in contemporary fiction, and oblige readers to adopt a multidirectional approach to reading, as the text employs the same strategy to remember (and forget) extreme violence. In Chapter One, I also argue that texts employing a multidirectional approach to memories of the Algerian War and its aftermaths often work to de-inscribe the law that is written onto bodies. By creating characters that are, in one way or another, survivors and narrators of torture, the texts reject the hegemonic markers of torture, and criticize the systems that uphold *victime/bourreau* identitarianism.

In Chapter Two, “The Tortured Body and the Narrativization of the Impossible,” I turn to the œuvre of Assia Djebar, whose career-long engagement with questions of history and individual and collective memory is evident in all of her texts, to discuss how the transmission of the story of torture is inscribed on the body. I refer to the *mise en récit* of these stories as a narrativization of the impossible, an impossibility that is predicated on the female body as a concrete trace of an act that is often denied or repressed by the individual. In the collection *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) and novel *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002), Djebar rejects memory as a process at the service of the post-Independence State, and the various forms of transmission of violent narratives in her texts are a movement against monolithic forms of history-making. Rather than taking up positions as *lieux de mémoire*, static sites that work towards a national conception of memory and history, the narratives I examine refuse memorialization and allow instead an open-ended narrative that must be physically passed down in order to circulate in the face of renewed violence in Algeria.

In my final chapter, “Testimonial texts: writing the obscene,” I move away from fictional accounts of the aftermath of torture to explore the testimonial genre. Looking to first-person texts by Henri Alleg, Djamila Boupacha and Louisette Ighilahriz, I argue that metropolitan French intellectuals had to intervene in their circulation and reception in order to mitigate the unacceptability of these texts that are figured as “obscene.” Ross Chambers’ analysis of testimonial writing as both “untimely” and “obscene” acts in *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial and the Rhetoric of Haunting* underpins my argument that the description of torture in testimonial narratives is an exploration of the obscene; a state of affairs that allows for continual personal and systematic denial of the existence of torture and torture victims. Thinking of the obscene as a trope that sets boundaries and therefore defines what is outside those boundaries allows for testimonial texts’ contexts and paratexts to be part of the discussion of

how torture was framed in social, political, and literary terms in France. Paratextual elements of testimonial texts – prefaces, introductions, annexes, and responses – are all the more important in this kind of writing, because it deals with the very limits and boundaries that the paratextual seeks to define. The prevalence of sexual violence and rape and its place in French and Algerian cultural and social memory is also central to Chapter Three and my discussion of the textually obscene: torture is both *hors scène*, out of sight of the public, and obscene in the kind of limit experience it means for the victim and the torturer. The contrast between private and public discourses and the dissonance that can occur when narratives try to cross the public/private divide complicate how stories of torture are made available and received by readers.

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By analyzing both Algerian and hexagonal French literature that addresses torture during the Algerian War, my dissertation frames the *Question* of state-sponsored violence as an enduring transnational topos that creates a proliferation of ghosts, unanswerable questions, and unsolvable crimes. As a project that engages with both hexagonal French and Francophone texts, my dissertation offers a new theory of how literature can engage with and defy taboos on memorial transmission and publically-recognizable grievances, and how the memory of torture is narrativized and circulated.

# Chapter 1 – Histories repeating: forgetting, remembering, and confusing torture in Algeria, from the War of Independence to today

“Est-ce une irruption ou la répétition d’un passé? L’historien ne sait jamais lequel des deux il faut dire. ... Ces langages de l’inquiétude sociale semblent récuser également les limites d’un présent et les conditions réelles de son avenir. Comme des cicatrices fixent à de nouvelles maladies la même place que les anciennes, ils donnent à l’avance ses signes et sa localisation à une fuite (ou à un retour?) du temps.”

Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun*

## INTRODUCTION

Events of the Algerian War of Independence cannot be remembered and discussed as singular, specific instances. Even in literary texts that take the Franco-Algerian conflict as their context, specific events must be written into a sequence or history that serves to screen the “reality” of these events and also to suggest that they are part of a larger narrative of secrets and unchecked violence. In the texts discussed here, writing about one act of violence seems to force others to the surface. This chapter examines why and how fictional accounts of torture (and other physical and mental suffering) in Algeria overlap and deliberately confuse history and narrative temporalities.

The *secret de polichinelle* of torture during the war was explored in works of fiction long before it was openly examined in political and legal discourses in hexagonal France. Testimonial texts, like those discussed in Chapter 3, addressed specific episodes of torture during and immediately after the war, but were not able to address the political and historical reaction to the aftermath of the Algerian War. In the 1990s, at the height of civil violence in Algeria, writers like Assia Djebar, Yasmina Khadra, Malika Mokkeddem, and Boualem Sansal all published novels that directly described (and criticized) the rise of fundamentalism in Algeria and its wide-reaching geographical and historical influences, often linking this internecine violence to the War of Independence and the colonial legacy between Algeria and France. What interests me here is not the foregrounding of the violence of the civil war, or of the War of Independence, but rather the literary places where there is deliberate confusion between the two periods, indicating the *longue durée* of violence and the process of multidirectional memory that takes place within these texts. In Antonin Varenne’s *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin* (2011), Assia Djebar’s ‘La Femme en morceaux’ (1997), and Leïla Marouane’s *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* (2001), the relationships between the War of Independence and the Civil War are written as dynamic and confusingly intertwined. One war does not uncover or explain the other; rather the two are revealed to be inseparable. I argue that what I see as a deliberate confusion of two unspeakably violent and traumatic periods in Algeria (and, by extension, in France) does not just illustrate the political and social causality between them. The texts also enter a discussion about individual and collective memory by interrogating how readers and writers think about individual physical violence and limit experiences.

The works of fiction discussed here are not about a national or collective historical project of recalling what happened during the Algerian War of Independence, but rather about constructing a narrative of particularized experiences of torture through literary transmission. The interpersonal stakes of violence and the effects that state-sponsored violence can have on the individual are central to the texts I analyze here, while questions of national identity and postcolonialism take a secondary role. In a context of violence and institutional collusion, the act of torture often comes to represent the most intimate, personal kind of violence that can be carried out on another person, as it is presumed to overtly attack both the individual's physical wholeness and their psyche. Nevertheless, the role of the state in fictional narratives of torture cannot be completely discounted, because of the structure of torture as an instrument of political power. Torture's structure also relies on us vs. them categories both inside and outside the torture chamber, categories that tend to oppose a dominant or governing ideology with a contested or marginalized one. With the role of state power in mind, Darius Rejali's definition of torture is useful in thinking about the connection between national and individual narratives in the texts of this chapter. Torture, writes Rejali, is "the systematic infliction of physical torment on detained individuals by state officials for police purposes, for confession, information, or intimidation" (35). He extends this definition to include detention and torture by organized non-governmental groups working towards the same ends, recognizing in these groups' attempts to control or manipulate individuals an "abuse of public trust" (39). Rejali's study of torture is both relevant and fascinating because it specifically addresses the use of torture and its relationship to modern democracies: these parameters establish the "us" and "them" divide that is repeated in many nationalistic discourses and in the perception of who is "torturable" and who is not. The social, political, and ethical ramifications of the decision to torture enemy bodies contains within it an attack against the wholeness or integrity of the individual body, but also an overarching statement about the status of the enemy, whether that be a distinction made between nations, religious groups, ethnicities, or social classes.

Through torture, the Other is made even more so, his or her injured body marked as part of an enemy group. As Jean Améry poignantly states, "Celui qui a été torturé, reste torturé:" the "anéantissement existentiel" of the violent act is enough to permanently change the identity and sense of belonging of the tortured person (Améry 83, 73). Questions of identitarian stability, and the individual's ability to remember and transmit traumatic events are present in all of the texts studied here. The prevalence of narrative shifts between different time periods in fictional texts reveals not only increasingly grim parallels between Algeria and France's shared history but also a need to corroborate and to construct a reliable historiographic context out of unreliable individual narratives.

One central argument of this dissertation is that the transmission of stories of torture is a complex, many-faceted theme in literature that does not usually take the form of straightforward, linear narrative. In this chapter, I analyze the turn to non-linear or otherwise fragmented narrative when it comes to the transmission of torture by closely reading several texts published in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In teasing out the focal points, thematic and structural similarities, and geographic concerns that these texts have in common, I argue that torture during the Algerian War cannot be remembered and written about as a singular event, but instead must be figured as part of a larger sequence of events that stretches from World War II to the recent rise in fundamentalist movements. The relationships between these events are dynamic and porous,

suggesting the instability of historical and historico-fictional narrative that is echoed time and again in the studied texts.

By narrativizing the historical reality of torture in a non-linear and often trauma-inflected way, authors working in very different genres and traditions, such as Assia Djebar and Antonin Varenne, highlight torture as the literal embodiment and personalization of a larger historical event. Within the text, the body is injured, dismembered, mutilated, and killed, freighting it with a significant power that influences the structure and style of the text. In this way, literature is able to move away from the depiction of torture as merely a historical phenomenon and towards a representation of an individual crime inflicted on a body. This change in focus from the persecuted group to the injured individual also calls into question the status of different kinds of bodies (Algerian or French? Male or female? Victim or perpetrator?) both in the scene of torture and as remembering agents after the fact.

The refusal of linearity when narrating torture during the Algerian War can be explained by way of contemporary interpretations of how trauma is available to the person who experienced it. Following Freud's analysis of trauma as an always-inaccessible event, 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century theorists have variously described the ways in which traumatic events can be recounted, remembered, and put into narrative without ever really revisiting the originary traumatic act. Trauma's very inaccessibility makes narrating the event, even in a work of fiction, a difficult act. Contemporary understanding of this inaccessibility necessarily influences authors' approaches to narratives about trauma, meaning that an elliptical, fragmented, or partial narrative of traumatic events is seen as a way of portraying the kind of world-changing violence that, as Elaine Scarry believes, is essentially inexpressible.<sup>25</sup> Writing torture into a novel or short story (as opposed to a first-person account or testimonial, for example) does allow for a certain remove from trauma: the author has not (usually) personally experienced the pain and trauma that he or she is seeking to convey, but even a passing knowledge of how trauma and memory are conceptualized must affect the writing of these limit experiences. While authors might choose to describe in detail the violence done to the body, the problematic expression of trauma is displaced into other aspects of the texts, notably its linearity. Stylistic and narrative moves, such as non-linearity, fragmented memories and, in Marouane's case, extensive Franco-Arabic *jeux de mots* go some way to textually expressing the difficulties of access to the traumatic event. Torture is never straightforwardly described, instead it is simultaneously present within and absent from the narrative, transmitting trauma in an indirect way.

Equally influential on literary representations of history, trauma, and torture is the social and political fixation on the politics of memory, memorialization, and reparation. Any formulation here of the prevalence and importance of discussions about how a community or a nation remembers its past is bound to be an understatement, even if one were to focus only on the case of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century France. However, several theorists of collective memory will be essential to the arguments I want to make about the writing of the Algerian War and its aftermaths. Pierre Nora and Michael Rothberg's work approaches France's relationship to the past: in the case of Nora, "histoire avec sa grande 'H'" in Perec's oft-repeated phrase, and a collective construction of relationships between historical events in the case of Rothberg. Their

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<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 2 for further discussion of theories of trauma.

work takes into account official narratives, public discourse, political movements, and literary and filmic representations of contested historical moments. Nora, famously, had startlingly little to say about the Algerian War in his initial introduction to *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984) but much of what he does say about the physical location of memorial sites and how they function is relevant to how I think about geographic location and displacement in Varenne's *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin* and Djébar's *Oran, langue morte*. For Nora, *lieux de mémoire* can guarantee the "cristallisation du souvenir et sa transmission," but only if a certain "aura symbolique" has been invested in the space or object in question (37). Additionally, these *lieux* simultaneously exist as symbolic, material and functional spaces; the various roles coexist and fluctuate in response to the personal, demographic, and geographic demands being made of the space. In the texts discussed in this chapter, Algerian and French spaces are laden with memory; official monuments alongside streets or buildings that resonate for reasons that cannot be memorialized. As I discuss in the next chapter, what I find problematic in Nora's approach to memorializing the past is the idea that creating a monument, fixing an event in geographic space, threatens to foreclose debate about that event.<sup>26</sup> However, the idea that memory (collective and personal) can be meaningfully and durably linked to a concrete place, although the symbolism and function of that place may be subjective and shifting, is one that helps to examine the importance of place and displacement in the texts discussed here. Marouane and Varenne's texts move between hexagonal France and Algeria, and use geographic markers like the *casbah* or the Parisian *banlieue* as markers of characters' social status and circumstances. These sites also work citationally, reminding the reader of previous violent events that took place within these spaces and are therefore memorialized there. Algiers' "Place Maurice Audin" also fulfills this citational role in *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, alluding to the detention and murder of Communist activist Maurice Audin in 1957 (Marouane 40). Nora himself, in later editions of his collection, allows that *lieux de mémoire* may well take on different forms than that of officially-sanctioned museums, plaques, or holidays, broadening the definition of the term in ways that are useful to this study, yet without questioning the viability of a more or less singular historical narrative for France.

Rothberg's ideas about the representation of memory in writing and film in his 2009 book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* are exceptionally useful in moving away from discussion of memory in a competitive mode, and for analyzing the echoes and intertwinements of events that I find in all the texts of this chapter. He offers the concept of multidirectional memory in literary and filmic texts as a counter to the idea of competitive memory, which operates according to a "logic of scarcity," that prioritizes certain kinds of remembering (an official, commemorative, or enshrining movement) over others (Rothberg 2). For Rothberg, allowing for the highly "anachronistic quality" of memory means that it is in continual reconstruction, and that memory shapes the "public sphere as a malleable discursive space" (5). He defines memory as "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing,

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<sup>26</sup> There is no question that Pierre Nora's work as a historian and editor has been groundbreaking and influential in the field of memory studies. Even so, many critics have addressed what they perceive as problematic absences from Nora's work in *Les Lieux de mémoire*. See for example Michael Rothberg, "Between Memory and Memory: From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Noeuds de mémoire*," *Yale French Studies* 118/119 (2010). Rothberg refers to the project as "a model for the consideration of diverse memory cultures" (3).

and borrowing; as productive and not private,” and this dynamism reveals its multidirectional nature (3). Rothberg writes that

[m]emories are not owned by groups – nor are groups “owned” by memories. Rather, the borders of memory and identity are jagged; what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant. Memory’s anachronistic quality – its bringing together of now and then, here and there – is actually the source of its powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones. (5)

The overlapping or substitution of multiple memories is, of course, highly evocative of Freud’s concept of *Deckerinnerungen*, or screen memories.<sup>27</sup> While Rothberg states that he does not wish to oppose or provide an alternative to the Freudian idea that a traumatic or difficult memory can be hidden or replaced by a more anodyne one, he does point out several distinctions between his idea of multidirectional memory and screen memory that are important when thinking about memory as part of a historical, even national, project, rather than an individual, or psychological process. Notably, with multidirectional memory, a traumatic memory is not necessarily shielded or held at bay by a more reassuring one: two problematic, difficult episodes or events can be associated and remembered in parallel, as is the case with events of the Algerian War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War.

The anachronisms and creativity of memorial processes – whether collective or individual – give rise to fictional texts that are able to hold in consideration more than one event or period. In *Multidirectional Memory*, Rothberg mostly focuses on fiction and film that addresses the Holocaust and French colonization and decolonization, looking at the way that the creation of the figure of the Holocaust survivor (and even the growing acknowledgement of the Holocaust as a singular event) allowed writers and filmmakers to explore the touchy subject of France’s continuing presence in North Africa.

Within all the texts discussed here, there is the effect of a hinge, a point at which the narrative folds in on itself, slipping from one temporality to another. I read the three principal texts of this chapter keeping in mind the various ways that the literary device that I describe as a hinge works within them. In the case of Varenne’s novel, the hinge, which holds together the novel’s two stories, one past and one present, is a shared perpetrator, making the guilty party the final focal point of the narrative, and the “solution” to the crimes committed in the text. In ‘La Femme en morceaux,’ the figure of Scheherazade and the tale from *One Thousand and One Nights* provide a connection between the distant past and the contemporary, and also point to a timelessness of violence against women. In *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* the movement between Fatima Kosra’s past and present is more personal, hinging on her shifting identity and its relationship to her wounded body. Her identity, represented by her name, changes, and, with it, the time and the place of the narrative. While these narrative hinges are quite different from text to text, they all make memory, or the recollection of the past in fictional form, work in a

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<sup>27</sup> A screen memory, in psychological terms, is a memory (sometimes false, or exaggerated) that is constructed as a compromise between repression and awareness of an unacceptable event. The significance of the traumatic event is displaced onto another event, which then screens or hides the initial site of trauma. See Freud 196, 400-1.

multidirectional way, and refuse a chronological or singular account of events, historical or fictional.

Another shared feature of the three texts, and one that relates to a multidirectional, dynamic form of making the past present through memory is their attempts at de-inscription (*désinscription*) of traces of history. Given the relative inclusivity and malleability of Rothberg's conception of multidirectional memory, it may seem surprising that these texts use deliberate erasures as part of the writing of history. Of course, fiction allows for all kinds of mutations and lapses, escaping the usual expectations of historical texts to present an event as it happened, regardless of whether or not we believe, as readers and writers, that this is possible. Djébar, Marouane, and Varenne's texts go further, however, by deliberately and at times violently rejecting the inscription of law on the body and, by extension, on the way that memories of physical violence are recounted.

Closely reading the gaps, slippages, and overlaps that feature so strikingly in these fictional texts about torture reveals its inherent disfiguring violence and its intimacy. By thinking through the use of literary memory that occurs when characters, authors, and texts "confuse" the period of the Algerian War of Independence and the more recent Civil War, a genealogy of violence emerges from the generically and stylistically diverse texts that address this difficult topos.

#### **MEMOIR VS. AMNESIA: TORTURE AND EXCEPTIONALITY IN ANTONIN VARENNE'S *LE MUR, LE KABYLE, ET LE MARIN***

In its many permutations, 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century crime fiction allows for both the presence of historical narratives as plot points and the shuttling between different events, usually drawing these events together in the resolution of a central crime against an individual. As a genre, it often focuses on the intercalation and eventual overlap of seemingly disparate narratives. In more recent subgenres, especially the related fields of film noir and *roman noir*, crimes against individuals are often shown to be connected to a wider epidemic or conspiracy of violence and collusion, often centered on institutions or figures of authority.<sup>28</sup> In her article "Didier Daeninckx and Michel de Certeau: A Historiography of Affects," Josiane Peltier puts forth a convincing argument about the importance of the detective novel to the writing of history's "surplus," the parts of a story that are not deemed significant enough, or sufficiently sanitized to enter into official discourse. This excess "is left for fiction to pick up," after historians have decided "what constitutes fiction and what belongs to a more analytic discourse" (Peltier 271). Late 20<sup>th</sup>-century crime fiction, with its focus on the unsanitized, often unsolvable aspects of society, uses the surplus elements of history not just to create a compelling backdrop for individual crimes, but also to act as an explanation for, or underlying syndrome of, extreme violence and the constant threat of lawlessness. Post-World War II crime fiction has also tended

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<sup>28</sup> For further discussion in a French-language context, see, for example, Claire Gorrara, *The Roman Noir in Post-War French Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2003, or Louise Hardwick, *New Approaches to Crime in French Literature, Culture and Film*, Peter Lang, 2009.

to center on a recuperation of traumatic historic events, and these texts are often characterized by their critical viewpoint and their depiction of a growing politicization of crime.

Writers who choose to recuperate and put into narrative the remnants of historical and archival work are often, according to Peltier, “children of Mai ‘68” who continue to question the power struggles within France (and, by extension, with its ex-colonies) after the political “failure” of Mai ‘68 (269). This political marker is helpful to periodize the kind of crime fiction mentioned here, but also highlights a limitation that I have been aware of as I read Varenne’s novel, and others in the same sub-genre: thinking about Mai ‘68 as a shared *lieu de memoire* for *écrivains engagés* of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries restricts the memory and discussion of the Algerian War to hexagonal France. It is true that there appears to be a disproportionate number of Algeria-focused crime fiction novels written by French men, which begs the question of whether this literary perspective excludes an Algerian point of view.

To indicate a rupture with more traditional forms of the detective genre, forms that generally dealt only with individual crimes (usually murder) and criminals, regardless of socio-political context, *roman policier* or *polar* author Jean-Patrick Manchette coined the term *néo-polar* in the early 1970s. Peltier defines the sub-genre in the following way:

Although the novelty assumed by the prefix “néo” is debated to this day, the generation of writers who selected the popular form of the detective novel to settle accounts with ‘la raison d’état’ (interest of the state) and its narratives, focused on the repressed episodes of the official historical accounts that have shaped French identity. ... [T]he ‘néo-polar’ recovers clues that the official narrative has chosen to ignore, and historiography questions the language, tropes, and literary devices that necessarily structure the historical discourse.” (269)

In Antonin Varenne’s 2011 novel, *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin*, the characters labor to “[recover] clues that the official narrative has chosen to ignore,” sparking questions about the role of the historian, the archive, and the possibility of forgetting the past. Two features in particular indicate the novel’s *néo-polar* status: the blurring of lines between “good” and “bad” characters and a shifting narrative point of view that destabilizes the traditional *trajet* of crime, investigation, and resolution. Like so many *néo-polars*, Varenne’s text attempts a redetermination or rewriting of history that is shown to be both necessary and impossible. The historical context of torture during the Algerian War of Independence, and the way in which memories of torture resurface in relation to contemporary crime and politics makes *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin* a text of multidirectional memory that deals directly with the aftermath of the Algerian War in France.

*Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin*, follows in the footsteps of a body of fiction that uses the crime genres to “solve,” or at least further reveal, aspects of the Algerian War of Independence and its aftermath. It shifts between two stories, fifty years apart: the eventual convergence of the two narratives is unsurprising, and is in fact a device used in several *polars* that narrativize the events of the Algerian War. The text’s references to other novels are also a generic convention, placing Varenne in a lineage of crime fiction writers fascinated with the history and the archive. The rate of recurrence of this set of interests within the genre points to an awareness of how difficult it is to address contentious historical periods and how an individual *trajet* (usually one person’s solution to a specific murder or series of murders) can uneasily represent or bring to

light a trauma that would otherwise remain hidden, untransmitted. The larger crime or trauma that is revealed remains somewhat personal, as it is not expected that the historical conspiracies that are revealed will pass into the collective memories of either the Algerian or the French public. However, in Varenne's text at least, allowances are made for traumatic memories to be transmitted between previously unconnected groups and generations, suggesting new kinds of solidarity in the face of the forgetting or repression of narratives of torture.

Crime fiction that deals with torture during the war proliferated during the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Claire Gorrara, in an article on representing the Holocaust in crime fiction, writes that "crime fiction offers the writer and reader a highly codified format in which to remember the past" (Reflections 134). The codified rules, or tropes, of crime fiction have certainly inspired many authors to use the genre to investigate and recuperate events of the Algerian War. These novels often overlap an investigation of an individual crime, usually a murder, with the revelation of the victim's or the perpetrator's involvement in torture in Algeria. In Francis Zamponi's *Mon colonel* (1999), the father of a soldier put to death because he refused to kill tortured FLN members murders the colonel who ordered his son's death. In François Muratet's *Le Pied-Rouge* (1999) a torturer turned hit-man returns to France to kill a left-wing activist, and in Gérard Strieff's *Les Caves de la Goutte d'Or* (2001) a history student uncovers documents that bear witness to police brutality against Algerians during wartime protests.<sup>29</sup> The novels mentioned here all take an interest in archival documents as forms of proof that are liable to resurface many years after the fact: letters, official memos, and photos, are all "official" proof of crimes that are made to recirculate and end up in the hands of the person who is most apt to investigate both the individual and the state. In Muratet and Strieff's novels, the press and journalists play an important role in obtaining and safeguarding archival artefacts. Interestingly, Gérard Strieff's novel was published in a series, founded by the author as a homage to Didier Daeninckx, called *Polarchives* (Editions Baleine-Le Seuil), which includes crime fiction that explicitly uses historical documentation as its backdrop, no doubt benefitting from growing public interest in "sécets d'état" and their implications.<sup>30</sup>

Didier Daeninckx's 1984 detective novel, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, has been particularly influential to the genre of politicized *néo-polars* that deal with "la raison d'état." As alluded to above, Daeninckx's novel is an influential text whose legacy hangs over late 20<sup>th</sup>-century crime novels and *romans noirs* that engage with historiography and contested events. *Meurtres pour mémoire* can certainly be seen as an antecedent to Varenne's novel, and Varenne is one of many *polar* authors who are indebted to the attention that Daeninckx bought to the sub-genre.<sup>31</sup> That said, Varenne's own engagement with the *mise en récit* of the aftermaths of the Algerian War adds an important dimension to crime fiction's recuperation of the "excess" of historical details around the war, moving away from the detective novel trope that optimistically insists that one

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<sup>29</sup> *Pieds-rouges* were a diverse group of French leftists who went to Algeria after Independence to help with the country's reconstruction. In Muratet's novel, the term reflects both hexagonal France's continuing connection with Algeria, and the bloody violence that this political legacy engenders within the narrative.

<sup>30</sup> See Introduction for a discussion of some of the laws and debates of the 1990s and 2000s in France.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Augais reads *Meurtres pour mémoire* as a "contre-coup" against the amnesty law of 1982, that made it possible to rehire civil servants fired between 1961 and 1963, and "rehabilitate" officers involved in the failed *putsch* of April 1961. Daeninckx's novel aims to "briser les tabous du refoulement collectif organisé par les pouvoirs publics" (Augais 217).

person can reveal or solve the crimes of the past by connecting them to the present. In Daeninckx's novel, a detective uncovers the connection between the murders of a father and son, twenty years apart, and in doing so reveals the figure of André Veillut, a government official responsible for the deportation of Jewish children to concentration camps during the Occupation, and for the brutal repression of the October 1961 protest of the curfew for Algerians in Paris. Veillut's character is a thinly-disguised stand-in for Maurice Papon, whose trial for crimes against humanity began in 1981 and ended only in the late 90s.<sup>32</sup> The murders of Thiraud *père et fils* are (indirectly) carried out by André Veillut as he covers up his role in these violent events, neither of which, Daeninckx suggests, had received the kind of historical attention that they merited. By connecting the deportations that followed the *rafle du Vel d'Hiv* and the October '61 massacre, Daeninckx creates a timeline of criminal violence that took place within the framework, and under the surveillance, of the French government. Like Varenne, Daeninckx manages to identify a sole "criminal" or mastermind figure who is responsible for the individual crimes at hand, but he also indicts the state and the machinations that have helped to conceal those crimes.<sup>33</sup> In both *Meurtres pour mémoire* and *Le Mur, le Kabyle, et le marin* the concurrent, interrelated crimes of the state and individuals are another form of multidirectionality at work: they shuttle the reader's attention between concern for individual victims and curiosity about what forces are the "real" agents of violence.

One problem that Margaret-Anne Hutton identifies in her discussion of crime novels that compare distinct historical periods is the risk of a "dehistoricized stance" in which "historical specificities are minimized," and therefore flattened (175). While this criticism could certainly be leveled at just about any fictional text that takes on a contested historical period, I would argue that Varenne avoids historical comparison in *Le Mur, le Kabyle, et le marin* in part by having a historical *naïf*, George, as the present-day protagonist. Because of his lack of knowledge (and memory) he is unable to make comparisons, so the past and present narratives remain interconnected, but not compared. For George, both the distant and the immediate past retain a degree of inaccessibility, and leave his attention focused on the crimes of the text, rather than the greater historical stakes of remembering the Algerian War in France. By grounding the narrative in a detached, amnesiac "present," embodied by George, Varenne himself criticizes dehistoricization and a national willingness to forget, or repress historical specificities outside of genre fiction.

*Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin* uses torture in Algeria as representative of the horrors of war, and as a repressed episode that connects the literary past and present. The novel follows the interconnected past and present lives of George Crozat, a cop and amateur boxer, Brahim Bendjema, a historian and ex-FLN militant, and Pascal Verini, a returned soldier who witnessed,

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the fictionalized portrayal of Papon, see Stephen Steele, "Daeninckx, quand le roman policier part en guerre," *French Studies Bulletin*, 71 (1999): 9-10 [10] and David Fraser, *Law after Auschwitz*, Carolina Academic Press, 2005, 207-11.

<sup>33</sup> In *French Crime Fiction 1945-2003: Investigating World War II*, Margaret-Anne Hutton discusses a number of crime novels that she calls "non-justice continuity texts" which, by creating narrative links between the events of World War II and the Algerian War, point out certain continuities between the past and the present (171). These novels include Daeninckx's *Itinéraire d'un salaud ordinaire* (2006), Boileau-Narcejac's *La Lèpre* (1976), Franck Pavloff's *Le Vent des fous* (1993), Maud Tabachnik's *La Honte leur appartient* (2002), François Joly's *La Rage*, and Maurice Gouiran's *Les vrais durs meurent aussi* (2008).

but refused to take active part in, systematic torture in Algeria. The narrative of the novel switches between the diegetic narrative of George, a patrol officer in Paris' 14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement who becomes involved with corrupt officers who want to harness his skill as a boxer for their own illegal purposes, and one enlisted officer's memories of his time in a *Dispositif opérationnel de protection* (DOP, a sub-branch of the army devoted to research and information gathering through torture) near El-Asnam, in Algeria.<sup>34</sup> Pascal Verini's refusal to participate in the torture carried out at the DOP places him as an outsider, like Crozat. During his tour of duty in Algeria, Pascal meets Rachid, the "grand Kabyle" romantically described as a Front de Libération Nationale leader and a figure who seems to transcend the violent animosity and petty rivalries of the DOP. Rachid spares Pascal's life twice, and it comes as no surprise to the reader when one of George's victims, a dignified old man who is waiting for his attack, is in fact Rachid, a historian who has lived in Paris since the end of the war (he has changed his name to Brahim).<sup>35</sup> The three titular characters' narratives intersect when Brahim forces George to help him find Pascal, who he believes can lead him to the ringleader of the torture he suffered, now a Front National politician. The narratives of "le Mur" (George) and "le marin" (Pascal) alternate throughout most of the novel, but that of the third character, Rachid/Brahim "le Kabyle," is absent. This absence is connected to Brahim's role as a historian and author: his "narrative," not of the torture that he personally underwent, but of the war as a whole, and its aftermath in Algeria, defines him as a kind of memory expert who is both personally and intellectually engaged in remembering. The title of his first book, which he finds in Pascal's house, is called "*L'Oubli et la Reconstruction*," a title that summarizes both the goal of the intertwining narratives of Varenne's novel, and the characters' opposing instincts to simultaneously reconstruct the past, all the while refusing to let go of the amnesia that has allowed them to survive (215). The books that Brahim has written exist outside the novel – readers do not get to access their narratives – but are established as one of the larger, contextual narratives that connect the events of the war and the current political situations in Algeria and France.

Rachid's survival and escape from torture is equally depicted as exceptional and singular; he is allowed to become a receptacle of memory and a narrator in his own right because he has survived particularly brutal torture. Rachid is the only survivor of torture who is portrayed in the novel. By granting the torture victim agency, by allowing him to retrace what can be seen as the *ligne directrice* that runs between Paris and Algiers, and by casting him as a historian, Varenne derails the more traditional roles of the investigator/detective and the marginalized or irrelevant Algerian victims. In *Meurtres pour mémoire*, by contrast, the Algerian protagonists are only present for the first chapter, after which they simply become secondary victims of and a backdrop for the central crime, Bernard and Roger Thiraud's murders. The initial victims of the novel, they are relegated to an incidental, non-speaking role thereafter, to emphasize that within Daeninckx's story, the solution to the crimes against Algerian protestors is found within France, and within the French political system. While Varenne's narrative also focuses on institutionalized crimes in France, by keeping Rachid/Brahim as a main character, and a survivor as well as a victim, he maintains the links to Algeria that are at the heart of the novel's crimes and coverups.

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<sup>34</sup> Orléansville, called El-Asnam since Independence, was practically destroyed by two earthquakes; one in 1954, one in 1980. Could this be a symbolic reminder by Varenne of the destruction of sites of memory?

<sup>35</sup> As in *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, the move across the Mediterranean necessitates a change of name and identity.

Although Varenne's novel features two separate narratives that are eventually revealed to hinge around a singular figure – the former *tortionnaire* and now Front National politician Paul Rubio - the real, systematic and systematized crime of the novel is torture carried out by the French Army in colonial Algeria. Torture is presented as a historical fact; it is not the secret that needs to be revealed but rather an undisputed part of the war. Given the apparent transparency of this part of the historical narrative, the description of the organization and implementation of the “strategy” of torture in the DOP, is given not to shock the reader but to help him or her identify with the character of Pascal. His experience of torture in the novel is mostly aural: he hears the screams of tortured prisoners several times, but doesn't see the act of torture firsthand. During a patrol, he hears “[u]n hurlement plus long que le premier. Un homme, pas un animal. Un cri de douleur et d'impuissance. Qui lui soulève l'estomac, traverse la cour de la maison méridionale jusqu'au milieu des orangers” (75). The screams become part of the environment, echoing through the orange groves that surround the camp, and are disconnected from any description of the torture that produces them. The “protection” that the DOP is nominally working towards is based around procuring information from prisoners of war about the enemy's plans. The “animal,” “impuissant” screams that Verini hears, however, demonstrate that this strategy is deeply flawed: tortured victims are not able to produce anything except inhuman sounds.

In another scene, the sounds of torture are once again integrated into the physical environment as the unexceptionality of torture is revealed to both Verini and the reader.

Quand Rubio est en forme, on entend ses ahanements d'ici, quand il tourne la gégène. Pascal s'en veut de penser qu'il préférerait la baignoire. Ceux qu'on noie au tuyau d'arrosage font moins le bruit.

Mais Rubio et Perret ont une préférence pour l'électricité, plus facile pour poser en même temps les questions, et moins fatigant. Pour eux la baignoire ne fait pas assez de bruit. Des oreilles rôdent autour de la Ferme. C'est une guerre psychologique.

Verini scrute la nuit, tend l'oreille en direction des arbres.

Le Kabyle hurle de plus en plus fort. (105-6)

The sounds of torture and their role in the “guerre psychologique” are foregrounded. Rubio's “ahanements” and the Kabyle's screaming “de plus en plus fort” are aligned with the repetition of “oreilles” and Pascal's concern with noise. He admits that he would hypothetically prefer inflicting a form of torture that creates “moins de bruit,” despite the “oreilles,” presumably those of hidden enemies that are part of the landscape, located beyond the trees that surround the “Ferme.” Additionally, the use of the euphemistic terms “baignoire,” “électricité,” and “gégène” reveals that torture is commonplace. Pascal, and the reader, understand the terms used as shorthand for torture techniques. The fact that Pascal imagines himself as a potential torturer – “il préférerait la baignoire” – rather than a potential victim of torture, clearly illustrate the status quo of the Farm and its power structure: as a French soldier he is unable to put himself in the position of torture victim.

Although Pascal Verini interacts with prisoners before and after they are tortured, his narrative, given in indirect discourse, never directly shows the torture that takes place. Instead, he becomes aware of the DOP's mission and the enthusiasm that some of his *camarades* have in carrying it out, through a series of scenes in which he hears torture taking place. The focus on hearing rather than seeing at first seems strange: wouldn't Pascal's impressions be more

traumatic (and dramatic) if he were present during torture sessions? However, having Pascal only hear the torture gives him another degree of remove from these crimes and allows the reader to imagine these scenes, drawing from the vast number of literary and filmic depictions of torture that 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers have available to them. Varenne's distancing move also allows Pascal to maintain some form of innocence about what is happening, although by the end of the novel he realizes that this innocence is problematic, denying even his role as a witness to atrocity. "Mon exemple," he says to Brahim, "je veux même pas qu'on s'en souvienne. ... "[J]e ne voulais pas devenir un témoin. Un témoin est impuissant et on peut toujours douter de lui. Quand j'ai essayé d'écrire, j'ai compris que c'était comme ça que je me sentais là-bas" (270-1). Being a witness means always being doubted, and doubt hangs over every case of remembering and forgetting that is recounted in the novel, to the point where one crucial scene is revisited to correct the version of the story that Pascal originally told (273-5). This part of the story is rewritten after Pascal reveals his powerlessness as a witness, even though the "true" version of events does not cast him in a favorable light, therefore giving his interlocutors more reason to doubt his memory and his testimony.

The most shocking and explicit instance of torture in the novel appears as a grisly tableau that represents the extremity of violence during the Algerian War. It marks Pascal as both a witness and accomplice and becomes the final proof of Rubio's criminality and excess as a torturer. As a *pied-noir* Rubio is shown as having a normal life that runs parallel to his military activities. His family, including his fiancée, live in a town near the DOP, where he can regularly visit them. In this way he is portrayed as both French (part of the French army, fervently invested in French Algeria) and not French, or at least nothing like Pascal (from hexagonal France, communist).

At his wedding, as a gift to his new bride, Rubio presents her with the genitals of a FLN guerilla who he tortured and killed the previous day. The wedding scene is pivotal to Pascal's war-time account as it marks without ambiguity Rubio's monstrousness and also individualizes him as worse than other torturers and therefore singular, worthy of special treatment as the main criminal of the narrative.

Sur la table, dans la tissue déplié, la bite et les couilles de l'Arabe qu'il a tué hier, au DOP. Le cadeau de Rubio à son épouse, un gage de sécurité et d'amour. Les femmes protestent, les hommes ne savent pas sur quel pied danser, les gamins accourent et reçoivent des torgnoles. Rubio titube et gueule au milieu du banquet:

"Ouais, ces putains de socialistes, c'est des couilles molles!" (147)

The dismembered body parts are clearly presented like a piece of jewelry, "dans la tissue déplié," and are as much a symbol of "sécurité" and "amour" as they are a threat to the other members of the DOP present at the wedding, the "couilles molles" who refuse to participate in torture and castration. It is Pascal, the memoirist, who sees this gruesome gift as Rubio's "gage de sécurité et d'amour," his interpretation of the gesture shows his way of understanding Rubio as a hypermasculinized figure, able to steal away the manhood of his victims. Equally, his recourse to cliché in describing the reactions of the other wedding guests ("les hommes ne savent pas sur quel pied danser"), clichés that suggest discomfort rather than horror, once again underscore the banality of torture and atrocity: it no longer has the power to shock or horrify anyone, even Pascal.

George Crozet, through the parallel narrative of *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin*, becomes a modern-day double of Pascal Verini, in a way that subtly condemns both men. George, like Pascal, is unable to comprehend all of what is happening around him, but is aware that he is being used as one part of a larger scheme that resists understanding. George's willingness to accept his role as a hit man without asking questions about the real motive for his violent acts casts new light on Pascal, who though he did not participate in torture was certainly aware of its realities and its results. It's unclear whether, or to what extent, the reader is supposed to see these positions as contextually necessary. Pascal's initial questioning of the army's methods lead to him being sent to do his tour of duty in a DOP, and George is blackmailed into service by his superior in the police department, Roman. However, these justifications of involvement in a conspiracy of systematic, deliberate violence can be read as a narrativization of the banality of evil: while Paul Rubio is the hinge between the violences of the past and present, he is certainly not wholly responsible for the atrocities of the DOP, or the casual violence of George's daily life. Instead, the system he is part of needs agents like Pascal and George to exist.

In many ways, George's character is a cautionary tale against a complete absence of historical memory, while Brahim's character cautions against its excess. In Brahim's case, history's "surplus" is not just something that is left out of his history books; it is an impassible traumatism that eventually leads to his death. George's convenient case of amnesia after he loses a boxing match represents the problems of individual memory and also the status of memories of the Algerian War for most French people who did not directly participate in the war. George actually suffers from amnesia twice in the novel: the first case seems to be "real" – he can't remember the crimes he committed for Roman against the "*intellos*" and therefore can be used by Brahim to escape Paris and get to Algeria. The second case happens after he is shot trying to kill Rubio: he pretends to be amnesiac so he doesn't have to answer for his injuries, and Rubio's death. As a representative of the police, the fact that he does truly forget and then that he forgets at will, seems especially laden with meaning. As a representative of the *forces de l'ordre* and the outsider of the trio he can "forget" what he did, the crimes he committed against those trying to remember and bring to light the criminal past of politicians who tortured during the Algerian War. Through his forgetting, George is instrumentalized by Brahim, who lies to him to get George to be his chauffeur and bodyguard. It is tempting to read George's amnesia as an allegory of the post-war amnesty that exculpated French and Algerian war criminals or, more generally, as a reminder of the nation's desire to "forget" the torture of the Algerian War of Independence. George is figured as an everyman who, amnesia or no, has no personal engagement with the episode of French history that drives the machinations of all the other characters in the novel. As a central character, therefore, he is hollowed out as a possible repository of memory.

While George's mind becomes a convenient *tabula rasa*, erasing the memory of violence, the geographical spaces in the novel remains full of traces. They are hyper-legible as spaces where things have happened and been imperfectly remembered or deliberately forgotten. In *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin*, it is not just memories that overlap in specific sites and join together in the "present day" narrative: competing versions of events and competing ideas of what memory can and should do exist alongside one another and refuse to neatly line up or resolve in an expected, generically-appropriate solution of a crime or resolution of a narrative tangle. Philip Dine, in his article "Memorial Boundaries and Textual Transgressions: The Narrative Politics of France's Algerian War," examines the political desire in France to erase all mentions of the

Algerian War in the public sphere. For Dine, this erasure imitates the kind of torture used in the Algerian War, which “strove to ‘leave no traces’ - which is to say, to immobilize time, or to function as an ahistorical structural system” (Dine 75).<sup>36</sup> As stated by Dine, and discussed here, an erasure of history was not possible. However, the strategies and machinations of the attempted erasure are interesting because of their influence on the novel’s plot, and because they have an effect on the fictionalization of the events of the war in Varenne’s text. The idea of erasure and transgression is connected to Peltier’s view of crime fiction as a place where the excesses of history can be written and, in limited, textual ways, resolved. In Varenne’s *néo-polar*, there is a recuperation of surplus and then a *mise en récit* of the surplus that defies attempts to erase mentions of the Franco-Algerian conflict. In *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin*, as well as other *néo-polars* that take the French capital as their setting, geography and the fictionalization of urban space are important both to the realism of the genre, and to the repoliticization that is carried out by creating fictional mnemonic sites with the city as a backdrop

In his article “Hybrid Memory in the City” Max Silverman addresses the city as a historical and memorial palimpsest, and states that the idea of the palimpsestic city “implies voids, illegibilities, and erasures” while marking the city as “a lived space” (63). The palimpsest, or hyper-legibility of the French capital establishes it as a place where things happen, but those events can refuse investigation or explanation because they are so overdetermined. Silverman sees this overdetermination as especially true in *Meurtres pour mémoire* where, for example, one street corner is described in three passages: characters remark the passing of time and the changing of priorities by the changing building facades. The surfeit of signification created by this literary repetition generates the “knots of memory” that are so important to the crime fiction genre, but also mean that no reading of the urban space can be complete or exhaustive (Silverman 59). Leaving Paris, the scene of George’s crimes, although not of course the location of the novel’s greater crime narrative, for the South of France allows for a process of decentralization and discovery.

As a patrol officer and jogger, George retraces the same routes every day. The familiarity with which he moves from one neighborhood to another is interrupted by his observations about the passage of time: some areas have become almost unrecognizable and he remarks the changing demographics of certain areas that make him stand out instead of “passing” as an unremarkable working class pedestrian.

Son jogging et sa casquette lui semblaient une couverture suffisante, bien que dans son souvenir, le coin de Stalingrad eût été plus populaire. Des années qu’il n’était pas venu ici; à l’époque il n’y avait pas ces cinémas et ces bars le long du bassin de la Villette. (49)

In *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin*, it is not the façade of buildings that changes, but the people that inhabit the public space. While George stays in Paris, the events that lead up to his amnesia remain mysterious to him. By leaving Paris and heading South, George draws geographically closer to Algeria and also is allowed to see the connections between the past and the present that have involved him, despite his near total ignorance of the Franco-Algerian conflict and the historical amnesia it signifies. In this respect, the figure of George Crozet is figured as a *Français moyen* whose engagement with recent history is inexistent. For him, the urban space of

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<sup>36</sup> Dine is citing Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, 122.

Paris juxtaposes order (his role as a police officer) and crime (his paid work as a henchman): Paris's legible spaces or mnemonic sites are entirely unread. The itineraries he traces within Paris are, then, by proxy: he works for someone who works for someone else, a politician who wants to eliminate witnesses to and traces of the wartime past.

In crime fiction, the preoccupation with the past and its narrative resolution is hardly surprising, but the *engagement* and experiments with point of view that characterize the *néo-polar* change the horizons of the genre. Despite its *néo-polar* status, Varenne's novel avoids many of the genre's touchstones. There is no ordinary murder or crime to investigate, rather a long-ignored period of torture and concealment of that torture that none of the characters have the ability to "solve." There is no linear investigation that spans the novel or, more specifically in this meta-historical narrative, events do not align and answer to or for one another once the hinge or common ground of the two narratives is explained. George's faked amnesia at the end of the novel, which absolves him of responsibility and of his role as a narrator to the police who are now investigating Rubio and Roman's deaths, is also a way of refusing an ongoing engagement with the past. The fact that the events that Pascal and Brahim recount find their nexus in the figure of an extreme right politician underscores the political stakes of the novel, but there is not an impression of *devoir* or bringing to light, rather a resignation that a solution, even one that will be hushed up or deliberately forgotten, is impossible.

#### **"LE CORPS, LA TÊTE." REPETITION AND THE *LONGUE DURÉE* OF SYSTEMATIZED VIOLENCE**

The "anachronistic quality" of memory, the "bringing together of now and then, here and there" that, according to Michael Rothberg, characterizes its multidirectional nature, is apparent in Varenne's text as it brings together events that are temporally and geographically removed from each other, yet causally related (Rothberg 5). In Assia Djébar's 'La Femme en morceaux,' the divide between narrative events that memory is asked to bridge is much wider. Whereas *néo-polars* are structured to condense history, Djébar's work addresses transcultural and transnational memory by bringing into narrative parallel events that are thematically related, and that evoke centuries of shared moments of violence and the need to transmit the stories of violence.

In Djébar's 1997 collection of thematically connected short stories, *Oran, langue morte*, 'La Femme en morceaux' is the only story of the collection referred to as a *conte* and serves as a bridge between the first and second parts of the work. Divided in two parts, the collection's stories first take Algeria as their setting ("Algérie, entre désir et mort") and then tell stories of characters moving between France and Algeria ("Entre France et Algérie"). The repetition of the preposition "entre" in the two subtitles shorthands the importance of liminality and movement between places and states in the texts that make up *Oran, langue morte*, themes that are especially illustrated in 'La Femme en morceaux.' In the *conte*, the multidirectional memory of the text spans not just several historical events, but many centuries, and works allegorically as well as multidirectionally to criticize the factional, fundamentalist violence of Algeria in the 1990s. As Djébar reminds the reader in a note, 'La Femme en morceaux' borrows its title and one of its intercalated narratives from *One Thousand and One Nights*, placing the absent Scheherazade as a persistent narrator and interlocutor of Djébar's text. The original story, usually

referred to as “The Three Apples,” contains an embedded narrative, as two characters who are accused of murder tell their stories to exculpate themselves. It is often cited as an early predecessor of the crime fiction genre, as it presents a murder victim and conflicting narratives/explanations of a crime that is, finally, solved.<sup>37</sup> While Djébar’s retelling of “The Three Apples” within ‘La Femme en morceaux’ is relatively faithful to the original tale, her focus, emphasized in the story’s parallels with the modern-day frame story, is on the victim, the woman in pieces. This story is sometimes referred to in translation as “The tale of the murdered young woman,” which is closer to Djébar’s title, although she uses the more conventional title “Les Trois Pommes” in her own note (Marzolph 240).<sup>38</sup>

Djébar’s tale is the frame story for a retelling of “The Three Apples” as a young French literature teacher, Atyka, recites it to her high school class. Atyka tells the story faithfully, beginning with the discovery of a woman’s body in pieces in a trunk at the bottom of the Tigris River. What changes the *One Thousand and One Nights* story into that of ‘La Femme en morceaux’ is that it is now interwoven with a story of contemporary Algeria that makes the unjust death of the wife in the tale echo the murder that takes place in the frame story. In drawing parallels between the classical story and 1990s Algeria, Djébar evokes the tragedy of interminable violence against women and foregrounds the result of that violence: dismembered bodies that continue to speak after death. Atyka recites the story that, like that of Scheherazade, is interrupted by the end of the lesson each day. This intercalation creates a *récit en morceaux* that already reflects the title, but the story is violently abridged when armed men enter the classroom and kill and behead Atyka. Her head is placed on the desk in front of the classroom, and Atyka continues to tell the story, watched only by Omar, the only student who witnesses this uncanny voice.

The typographical setup of the short story helps to distinguish between the various threads of narrative, and also points to a possible reading of this multidirectionality. The *One Thousand and One Nights* story is given in regular text, although it is supposed to be narrated by Atyka, and the modern-day story, which is mostly given over to Atyka’s internal monologue, is in italics. However, when the frame story shifts to description, when three men enter the classroom and kill Atyka, the text returns to regular text, a shift that underscores the correspondences between Atyka’s fate and that of the anonymous young woman. This shift also blurs the line between what is being narrated within the short story – the embedded tale – and the narrative itself: is Atyka’s murder more or less “real” whether it is being recounted to us first or second hand? The storyteller Scheherazade is often described as an ancestor or patron of North African and Middle Eastern women writers. This identification sexualizes the role of the narrator and is therefore evoked with ironic remove by authors like Leïla Marouane and Djébar. The suggestion of sex and sexuality immediately endangers women (narrators, characters, and authors), and any mention of Scheherazade evokes not only storytelling, and the liminal position of the threatened woman, but also the connection between storytelling and sexuality:

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the genre and influence of “The Three Apples,” see Ulrich Marzolph, *The Arabian Nights Reader*, 2006, 240–2 and David Pinault, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights*, 93–97.

<sup>38</sup> Antoine Galland’s 18<sup>th</sup>-century translation of *Mille et Une Nuits* contains the story “Les Trois Pommes,” as do much more recent translations that return to earlier manuscripts, such as Husein Haddawy’s 1990 translation of a 14<sup>th</sup>-century Syrian manuscript (*The Arabian Nights*, Muhsin Mahdi & Husain Haddawy, Norton, 1990).

Scheherazade is her royal captor's wife and lover for 1001 nights and bears several children while she is sentenced to death: her ability to entertain the *calife* is tied to her skill as a storyteller but also to the sexual desire that he has for her.<sup>39</sup>

In 'La Femme en morceaux,' Atyka takes Scheherazade's place, drawing out the lesson on "The Three Apples" over several days. The opening passage of 'La Femme en morceaux' announces several of the issues that *Oran, langue morte*, and Djébar's work as a whole, take as central themes of the representation of Algerian women.

Une nuit à Bagdad. Au fond, tout au fond du cours large, légèrement en pente du fleuve, un endroit entre la ville et le palais. Là, au fond de ce fleuve, le Tigre, dort un corps de jeune femme. Un jeune corps coupé en morceaux.

Les morceaux sont soigneusement enveloppés d'un voile. D'un voile blanc de citadine. Un voile de lin à peine entaché. A peine ensanglanté.

Le voile est plié dans un tapis. Un tapis du Kurdistan. Un tapis de soie et de fils d'or. Un tapis précieux. Le tapis, à demi roulé, est mis à l'abri dans une couffe. Une large couffe faite de feuilles de palmier. Feuilles récemment coupées. Coupées cet automne même. La saison d'hiver n'est pas encore commencée.

La couffe de feuilles de palmier est cousue soigneusement de fil de laine. De laine rouge de bonne qualité. Cousue vigoureusement.

La couffe, enfin, est conservée à l'intérieur d'une caisse de bois d'olivier. Une caisse scellée. Une caisse lourde à la serrure ouvragée. Achetée chez le meilleur artisan des souks de la ville.

La caisse gît au fond de Tigre. Au fond de son lit. Le courant l'a poussée insensiblement de quelques mètres. Peut-être davantage, entre la ville en bas et le palais du calife surplombant le passage où la pente est la forte.

Peut-être la caisse a-t-elle été entraînée, malgré son poids, là où le Tigre entre dans la ville ... Dans la caisse, dans la couffe de feuilles de palmier, à l'intérieur du tapis roulé, enveloppé du voile de lin blanc, le corps de l'inconnu dort.

Le corps de la femme coupée en morceaux. (FM 163-4)

The most notable feature of the opening passage is its repetition of nouns. A rhythmic repetition structures the first page of the story, in which the final noun of each sentence is echoed at the beginning of the following one, often qualified by an adjective. "Un voile," for example, becomes "un voile blanc de citadine" and, later, "un voile de lin ... à peine ensanglanté." The short, almost sing-song nature of the sentences also emphasizes the repetition of key words in the text: "Le tapis, à demi roulé, est mis à l'abri dans une couffe. Une large couffe faite de feuilles de palmier. Feuilles récemment coupées. Coupées cet automne même. La saison d'hiver n'est pas encore commencée." The proliferation of short, staccato sentences creates a textual image of layers of description unfolding around each object, be it shroud, trunk, palm leaves, or rug. What is notably absent from this passage, or rather concealed and deferred for several pages, is the woman in pieces of the title, the discovery of whose body provides the central narrative of the story, and is the pivot that connects the frame story with Djébar's retelling of "The Three Apples." Initially, the woman's body is said to be "sleeping" at the bottom of the river. The next

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<sup>39</sup> For further discussion of the literary figure of Scheherazade, and eroticism in *One Thousand and One Nights*, see Paul McMichael Nurse, *Eastern Dreams: how the Arabian nights came to the world* (Viking, 2010) and Mushin Jasim al-Musawi, *The Islamic Context of the Thousand and One Nights* (Columbia University Press, 2009)

sentence elides the body's gender and leaves merely "[u]n corps coupé en morceaux," making the initial impression of the mutilated body one that is ungendered. Most readers will elide these two sentences and presume that the sleeping body of a woman is the same "corps coupé en morceaux," but this avoidance of identification is noteworthy because of the deferral it triggers and because of the mystery, or at least ambiguity, that it immediately creates. After navigating the repetition and layering effect of the following paragraphs, readers are finally presented with "l'inconnue ... Le corps de la femme coupée en morceaux." After this long deferral, the dead woman remains nameless throughout the story: "La jeune épousée (*"elle restera hélas sans prénom, se dit Atyka, comment prénommer un personnage qui se présente d'abord en morceaux ?"* ...) est mariée depuis six ans, peut-être sept" (169). She is repeatedly referred to as "l'inconnue," underlining her anonymity at the same time as all the other characters of the various stories are named and described. Although she is the central figure of the story, pointing out her namelessness ironizes the fact that her body remains "Non inhumé. Non pleuré." while competing narratives of guilt and innocence are constructed around her death (193). Similarly, in the following paragraph, the murdered woman is described as "ce fait divers," using the media language of quotidian violence to minimize the event (164).

By beginning the story with the detailed revelation of the titular woman in pieces, Djébar seems to be gesturing towards several very different genres that find a tentative connection in "The Three Apples." As a *récit*, one that pretends to be a written transcription of Scheherazade's oral tale, told to her bloodthirsty husband, the short sentences, repetition, and rhythmic cadence of the opening passage are unsurprising. The repetition of key nouns could easily be seen as a way of painting a vivid picture for the listener, and also providing an *aide-mémoire* for the storyteller. The delay in presenting the woman's dead body also works as a lure for readers and listeners: although we know from the outset that a dead body is lying on the bed of the Tigris River, the association of the "inconnue" and the body in pieces is forestalled so as to pique interest. The accumulation of concrete nouns – "voile," "tapis," "couffe," "feuilles," "laine," "caisse," – between the first mention of the dead body and the subsequent return to the subject of the tale builds suspense and also suggests the accretion of meaning around the dead body.

Aside from suggesting the oral origins of the story, the initial "discovery" of a woman's corpse is a frequent convention of mystery stories or police procedurals. This feature of the story could be a nod by Djébar towards "The Three Apples" tale's role as an early ancestor of the modern detective story. The investigation and *coups de théâtre* that take place in the original story, as the *calife* tries to establish who is responsible for the woman's death, has led some critics to argue that it sets out many of the familiar tropes from 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century stories that begin with the discovery of one or more bodies, and end with the solution to the crime.<sup>40</sup> Evidently, one major factor is absent from "The Three Apples": the detective who provides the solution for the murder. Could it be that Djébar, opening with a scene of murder's discovery, and weaving in and out of the story of Atyka's murder, in which the murderers are known, slyly tilts the original story by recognizing its investigatory underpinnings and subsequently denying the possibility of investigation and resolution in Atyka's story?

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<sup>40</sup> See for example Roger Allen, "An Analysis of the 'Tale of the Three Apples' from The Thousand and One Nights" in *The Arabian Nights Reader*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph. Allen describes "The Three Apples" as the "quintessential murder mystery" (240).

Each story in *Oran, langue morte* is influenced by the violence of Algeria's civil war, a violence that is often brought into parallel with the War of Independence. The men who kill Atyka, accusing her of teaching "des histoires obscènes" before summarily executing her, are rapidly sketched as young fundamentalists, although this identity is made clear contextually rather than directly (FM 209). In 'La Femme en morceaux,' the war is a backdrop to the story because it is pointed out, in the opening pages, that Atyka was "née l'année même de l'indépendance," and that her parents met in "l'école coloniale," which is why they now address each other in French rather than Arabic or Berber (167). No direct link between the violence of the War of Independence and the civil violence of the 1990s is made in this short story, but Atyka exists as a reminder of this history, and her death is an allegorical destruction of the possibilities inherent in the expression "l'année même de l'indépendance:" as a child born of independence, she is unable to survive in the society that exists thirty years later.

In *One Thousand and One Nights*, what mediates Scheherazade's stories is their urgency; the telling of each story, or rather the suspension of each story at a crucial point, allows Scheherazade to avoid death and therefore control both time and narrative. In 'La Femme en morceaux,' however, the unfinished narrative does not have any protective power. Atyka is murdered and cut into pieces, *even though* she hasn't finished her story. The blurring of the two women in pieces, a process through which Atyka is conflated with the anonymous wife, is a function of the contagion and uncontainability of violence. Atyka is murdered and becomes part of the told story, as signaled in the text by a shift from italics to regular text, which elsewhere in the story marks the change between the retelling of "The Three Apples" and the frame story:

"Demain, aurai-je fini le conte?"

Un bruit violent et rythmé de pas se rapproche à l'extérieur. Les battants de la porte s'ouvrent grand, dans une poussée. La classe entière s'immobilise.

Ils sont entrés, cinq hommes : quatre imposants, en uniforme de gendarmes ou de soldats, et le cinquième, maigrelet, seul à être sans barbe et sans armes, seulement un couteau, ou plutôt un poignard court dans la main.

...

Le buste d'Atyka est tombé en avant, sur la table du bureau. Les hommes armés ont reculé. Le fou, qui brandissait son poignard, s'est avancé vers elle. Oui, Omar, du coin le plus reculé de la classe, le seul à rester assis, a vu. Il voit et il a vu le bossu s'approcher du corps basculé d'Atyka, d'une main lui relever la tête en la soulevant par ses longs cheveux – ses longs cheveux roux, flamboyants, vivants. Son autre main, d'un geste long et sûr, dans un même mouvement, tranche le cou d'Atyka. Sa tête est brandie une seconde. Il la pose droite, sur le bureau. Il rit, le fou, comme sort d'un cauchemar, se dit Omar qui regarde.

...

Atyka, tête coupée, nouvelle conteuse. Atyka parle de sa voix ferme. Une mare de sang s'étale sur le bois de la table, autour de sa nuque. Atyka continue le conte.

Atyka, femme en morceaux. (207-11)

Although she is killed quickly, Atyka's death is described as a "long martyr," emphasizing its perceived duration for her students who are forced to watch her death (210). By calling this murder a "long martyr," Djebbar connects the sectarian, religiously-motivated violence of the

Civil War to the kind of suffering undergone by victims of torture. Atyka's death is described not as a brief, brutal act, but as a drawn-out suffering to which Omar and, by extension, the reader, become witnesses. Atyka's assassination is made to be part of a lineage or *longue durée* of violence against enemy bodies that is designed to be both mutilating and silencing: the excuse of punishing her "obscene" behavior functions in the same way as the justificatory gesture towards information gathering works in the torture chamber, lending reason to a systematized form of physical and psychological violence. Seemingly conflicting discourses of making the torture victim speak – the stated justification for torture of detainees – and of silencing Atyka's voice can be glimpsed in the few sentences that describe Atyka's death. The irony of the sustained battle between voice and silence for women in Algeria is underscored by Djébar in many of her texts, and 'La Femme en morceaux' is no exception.<sup>41</sup>

Further extending the parallel between Atyka and the woman in pieces of Scheherazade's story, the noise that announces the women's murders is the same. In the *One Thousand and One Nights* story, "au fond du patio, les battants de la porte lourde claquent, tel un glas" (189). In Atyka's classroom, "les battants de la porte s'ouvrent grand, dans une poussée." In the first case, however, the narrative point of view changes, to give voice to the murderer, the husband, and to add another layer of imbricated story to the tale. In the husband's account, he is "emporté" by "fureur jalouse" and "rage aveugle" when he stabs his wife, and it is only when these emotions are transformed into a "froideur nouvelle" that he is able to cut her into pieces and dispose of the corpse (190). In both killings, the women are found guilty of sexual impiety, *l'inconnue* is suspected of adultery and Atyka is accused of telling "histoires obscènes," like "The Three Apples," in which the husband's desire for his wife, which eventually leads to her murder, is described in detail. It is perhaps considered more shocking that the wife's sexual desire is described too, although Atyka's choice of words foreshadows the wife's, and her own, end. The unnamed woman wishes "que tu me transperces," clearly a sexual metaphor, continuing a lexical field of masculine desire as a sharp weapon ("lancinant" and "pointer," 173-4), but it is eventually a real weapon that will enter her: "je plongeai un couteau dans la gorge de celle que je crus infidèle" (190). Continuing the symbolism of threatened male sexuality, when Atyka's head is cut off it is placed "droite, sur le bureau," with its "longs cheveux roux, flamboyants, vivants," she appears momentarily as a kind of Medusa, a threat to those who look at her even after death. Although Atyka can no longer defend herself, she is clearly granted power in death through her continued presence and voice. After Atyka is killed, the tale becomes a fantasy of disembodied voice as she finishes her story. Finally, she is the anti-Scheherazade because if her story can be told after death, what kind of talismanic or protective powers does a tale now have? The post-mortem female voice as an indication of the violence of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Algerian history is taken up again in *La Femme sans sépulture*. In *Oran, langue morte*, the intercalation of the *One Thousand and One Nights* tale and Atyka's story gives the voice a geographical and historical place, a heritage of violence that is no longer controlled or controllable. While Algeria as a nation is remembered in the text – "née l'année même de l'indépendance" – it is also threatened by the violence that threatens storytellers.

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<sup>41</sup> See for example "Regard interdit, voix coupée," in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) or *Ces voix qui m'assiègent* (1999).

In 'La Femme en morceaux,' memory is presented as allegorical as multiple parallels and intersections are drawn between Djébar's narrative and the framed retelling of "The Three Apples." Any reworking of stories from *One Thousand and One Nights* is accompanied by any number of intertexts, translations, and interpretations, signposting both a tradition of storytelling within the Islamic world and, as Djébar suggests in the structure of *Oran, langue morte*, a tradition of influence and relationship between Algeria and France. Atyka's characterization further underscores the fraught relationship between the two countries, insisting on Atyka's choice to teach French rather than Arabic. This choice comes about because she grew up hearing her parents speak to one another in French, but will also be one of the implicit motives for her death (209).

The dismemberment of the body in Djébar's text makes a political statement about trauma's collective role. While the *inconnue* and Atyka's bodies are not dismantled by the intimate, disturbingly sexual act of torture – defined by Joshua Cole as an "intimate violation" – the fact that they are presented in pieces, dismembered, marks their relationship to the process of remembering and narrativizing after trauma by which Djébar is so interested (Cole 133). Although Atyka is executed rather than tortured, the description of her death as a "long martyr" connects it to the drawn-out physical suffering of the torture chamber. Torture, when it is the focus in Djébar's later work, such as *La Femme sans sépulture*, performs the same taking-apart of the person, and the same reconstruction through storytelling is imagined. However, while the pieces of the bodies of Atyka and the anonymous Algerian woman are gruesomely present in 'La Femme en morceaux,' in *La Femme sans sépulture*, as I discuss in Chapter Two, the tortured body is the empty space around which the plot is built. This shift in visibility reveals the level of secrecy and shame regarding torture carried out during the Algerian war as if, despite the uncovering and unearthing that Djébar often carries out in her texts, tortured bodies are more difficult to put back together, even on a narrative level.

A similar conception of dismemberment and anonymity as powerful political and historical metaphors is present in Djébar's 1985 text *L'Amour, la fantasia*. One of the most often-commented passages of Djébar's œuvre appears at the end of the novel:

En juin 1853, lorsqu'il quitte le Sahel pour une descente aux portes du désert, il visite Laghouat occupée après un terrible siège. Il évoque alors un détail sinistre: au sortir de l'oasis que le massacre, six mois après, empuantit, Fromentin ramasse, dans la poussière, une main coupée d'Algérienne anonyme. Il la jette ensuite sur son chemin.

Plus tard, je me saisis de cette main vivante, main de la mutilation et du souvenir et je tente de lui faire porter le "qalam". (AF 313)

The severed hand, the *main coupée*, writes in spite of injury and torture. Of course, the dismembered hand is symbolic, it marks the separation of writing from the rest of the body, but it is also as a part of a once-whole body that the hand exists, that it can go on to hold the pen. By focusing on the hand, the massacre and siege at Laghouat are left only as historical context. Within *L'Amour, la fantasia*, this relativization of violent historical events seems strange at first, but this passage in fact illustrates how physical violence and memory interact in Djébar's writing and also indicates a careful juxtaposition between historical event and individual trauma. The hand is picked up and then discarded by Fromentin "sur son chemin," thereby becoming part of his version of events and the history he will write about his time in Algeria. The hand is both a

“détail sinistre” of that history and a “souvenir,” a word that points to both collective and individual memory, as a souvenir is a metonymy for a place or an event. It can also be both a concrete or abstract thing, an object or thought, underlining the hand’s dual role as a physical reminder of mutilation and as a symbol of the female writer. The “Algérienne anonyme” to whom the hand belonged is absent, like the nameless “femme coupée en morceaux,” presumably killed in the massacre and now replaced by Fromentin, who picks up (“ramasse”) her hand and by Djébar who grabs (“saisis”) the hand and uses it as a kind of prosthesis: it is unclear in the phrase “je tente de lui faire porter le “qalam” if she is helping the severed hand write, or if she is trying to have it write in her stead.

In ‘La Femme en morceaux’ the dismembered women do not write, but Atyka is given a post-mortem voice that is able to bring her own story, and the story of the unnamed woman, to an end, if not a resolution. This is, in part, done by Atyka’s narrative ability to belong to two different temporalities and geographies at the same time. As her *bourreaux* enter the classroom she is described as “à la fois là-bas, à Bagdad – où s’agitaient le vizir et son maître fantasque – mais aussi dans ce présent de sa ville,” and “à tournée la tête vers les arrivants” (208). Her ability to simultaneously inhabit the past and present, to look in both directions, allows for an understanding of violence against women as an endlessly repeating and uncontainable phenomenon. As a multidirectional storyteller, Atyka is able to tell the tale of her own death and afterlife.

#### **DÉSINSCRIPTION AND HALLUCINATION: THE FEMALE BODY AS SITE OF LAW AND LAWLESSNESS IN LE CHÂTIMENT DES HYPOCRITES**

Leïla Marouane’s 2001 novel, *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* addresses the same historical events as ‘La Femme en morceaux’ does, the War of Independence and the Algerian Civil War, and the ramifications of that violence for young women. In Marouane’s text, the multidirectionality of the narrative hinges not around a literary figure, as Djébar’s does with Scheherazade, but around the central character of Fatima. Her shifting identity, connected to both her name and her physical situation, shuttles the novel between two countries, and between moments of lucid narrative and hyperbolic, violent monologue that seemingly mirrors the past violence that Fatima is unsuccessfully attempting to repress. The character rejects memory as a mode of transmission, but her efforts to erase historic and personal memories does not remove them from the novel’s narrative.

In *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, the action shifts from very recent history – a kidnapping in modern-day Algiers five years prior – to scenes of contemporary Algiers and Paris. Like, ‘La Femme en morceaux,’ Marouane’s novel is an overt criticism of the rise of fundamentalist Islam in Algeria and elsewhere. The novel’s central narrative spans just five years, the space between Fatima Kosra reuniting with Rachid Amor, her betrothed since before she was born, and her killing him in their apartment in Paris. However, while the contemporary contexts of Algeria, increasingly in the grip of Muslim extremists, and France loom large in the novel’s imaginary, the Algerian War of Independence is a subtext that resurfaces and influences the characters’ language and psyches in surprising ways. Fatima, whose point of view and identity shapes the

narrative and the spaces of the novel, is kidnapped by extremists while she is driving home from work and taken to be a “nurse” for a group of “frères,” as she repeatedly refers to them. She is released, months later, pregnant and mutilated, and instead of reuniting with her family, who have repudiated her because of the perceived shame of her evident lack of virginity, lives first in a kind of halfway home for unmarried mothers, and then in a series of hotels in the casbah of Algiers, earning a living through prostitution. While walking in the casbah, however, Fatima runs into Rachid Amor, her childhood neighbor, who is eager to make good on the betrothal agreed upon by their mothers decades earlier. Fatima, initially entranced by Rachid and his European ways, agrees to marry him and return with him to Paris. Of course, the implausibility of this fairytale romance is clear from the novel’s opening pages, when Fatima Kosra, first called “Mme Amor” is shown, “[c]inq années de mariage plus tard ... barbotant dans une mare de sang” (Marouane 9). This paratext, which precedes the *Livre Premier*, like a prologue, or horrifying *mise en garde* against the physical cruelty to come, precludes the possibility of a happy ending or any kind of rehabilitation for Fatima Kosra.

The full horror of Fatima’s treatment during her kidnapping is made clear through the deliberate “forgetting” or repression of these events, and the few explicit details that are shared through dreams, flashbacks, and Fatima’s aversions to certain things. The endless insistence on the color red throughout the novel is another detail that subconsciously reveals Fatima’s repressed memory of the rape, torture, and mutilation she experienced: it is the color that dominates all the decoration and objects in Fatima and Rachid’s apartment, and is used repeatedly to describe Fatima’s clothes and makeup, a reminder of the violence her body had already undergone, and a foreshadowing of the violence to come.

In *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, without describing the scene of torture or exposing the details of her imprisonment, Fatima is clearly portrayed as a survivor of brutal torture. From the novel’s opening chapter, the toe missing from her right foot comes to signify the fundamentalist “law” that has been inscribed on her body, and remains a physical sign both of the torture she has suffered and the result of this torture. She is no longer “whole,” but instead mutilated and deflowered, her missing toe standing in also, for her missing hymen, a fact that turns her into a criminalized outcast in the eyes of her family, rather than a victim. While the context of Fatima’s torture and its aftermath is extremely specific, in some respects the novel is part of a genre of female rape revenge fantasy. As the reader pieces together over the course of the novel, Mille Kosra, as a sex worker and “l’errante des avenues d’Alger,” uses her medical knowledge to drug, castrate, and rob her clients as a way of de-inscribing, or avenging the violence done to her (122).

In Marouane’s novel, the way in which Fatima’s body and the violence done to it is portrayed is striking in its elusive, haphazard nature. It seems that fiction, the confines of a novel, cannot contain a description of what has been done to Fatima, and so a series of symbols and half-remembered episodes stand in for the full horror of that violence. Because the atrocities within the novel are both individual and connected to systematized, state-sponsored or politically-affiliated violence, it’s also important to think about how these acts and their effects literally inscribe law or a legal code on the body. The permanent marking of the body serves to cast the victim as an outsider, permanently different from the non-marked. I read this inscription, and attempts at de-inscription, as strongly connected to the recollection of the Algerian War of

Independence that takes place within the text. While *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* does not vacillate between two separate narratives, as is the case in *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin* and ‘*La Femme en morceaux*,’ the division that takes place between the literary past and present, and the period of “forgetting” that occurs in the interim, suggest how memory can behave multidirectionally on a personal level. In the case of Marouane’s text, the Algerian War of Independence is not merely an aspect of the novel’s context, but a significant subtext that is shown to influence Fatima’s life and Marouane’s portrayal of Algeria’s political situation as well as its relationship to France. Significantly, Fatima and Rachid are both born in July 1962;

Une vingtaine d’années auparavant, peut-être un peu plus, ils habitaient la même maison, avec patio commun, dans la casbah d’Alger. Ils y étaient nés, un mois de juillet, elle le matin, lui le soir du même jour, dans l’euphorie de la décolonisation. (44)

Near the end of the novel, Fatima tells Cathie/Khadija, her rival, that they were born on the very day that independence was proclaimed, restating her and Rachid’s relationship to a specific period of Algerian history, and echoing the predestined marriage that both their families are so invested in (208). Their shared birthdate suggests fairytale element to their union, even though the narrator tells us that Fatima “aurait dû naître trois mois plus tôt,” and that her mother, through force of will, has delayed her birth to assure her a star-crossed husband. The juxtaposition of romantic superstition and the “euphorie” of independence, marking a new era, reveals an intergenerational conflict that is not resolved when Monsieur and Madame Amor move to Paris: both of them vacillate between rejecting tradition (in the form of religion or superstition) and turning to it in times of need.

Additionally, by linking Fatima’s birth to the birth of the independent Algerian nation, Marouane does two things: firstly, she creates a link to Assia Djebar’s text and therefore enters into a genealogy of texts about gendered violence in Algeria. The allusion to the Algerian War of Independence establishes this historical event as a causal, underlying story to what happens to Fatima. In this way, Algerian independence is figured as a catalyst for social change a place of beginning (literally, as the moment of birth for Fatima, Rachid, and Atyka) and as a shared time and space, a *lieu commun* and *lieu de mémoire* that connects fictional characters to a real context. Because of Djebar’s prominence as an Algerian writer, I see this shared date as an intertextual nod to her early work, *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962), which, even before the end of the war, posits the new Algerian nation as a place of birth and generational change. Secondly, Fatima and Rachid’s birth date is also an ironic reference to the perceived failure of the movement for women’s rights that was part of the struggle for independence. Fatima is supposed to belong to the generation that benefited from post-war social advances, but is instead caught up in a kind of violence that repeats and intensifies certain aspects of the war. The war is often referred to in an offhand, incidental way, so that the reader glimpses its importance without it having to be spelled out. As previously noted, one casual allusion to the events of the war, specifically torture and disappearances, is made when Fatima passes by the “Place Maurice Audin,” linking urban geography to the recent past (40).

Another reminder of the ever-present historical context is the presence of veterans and references to involvement in the war. The casual, almost offhand references to the Algerian War of Independence within the text demonstrate its omnipresence in the minds of the characters. It finds its way into conversations and descriptions, as an aspect of a collective memory that is

indelible. Fatima's friend and occasional roommate, Lola Marsa, plans to go to France, a country with which she has a complicated relationship because of her father's role in the war. Her father, who is otherwise completely absent from the narrative, is described as having given "sept ans de sa vie, sa jambe droite et son âme pour la souveraineté d'un pays" (31). Fatima's father is also depicted as someone who has been damaged by the war. Fatima calls her mother every week but her father refuses to talk to her, persuaded that the telephone is an instrument of torture. His paranoia seems like a relic of the war, and also conflates the pre-independence government with the current one: "il se planquait dans un placard, croyant dur comme fer que le gouvernement, colonial ou actuel, même lucide il ne différencierait pas, avait placé un système de torture sous leur toit" (161). He mistakes the telephone for a *gégène*, suggesting that he was tortured during the war. The war has marked these men and, by association, an entire generation, with physical and psychological souvenirs of the war which are so common as to be alluded to in passing by Marouane.

Though Fatima does not suffer the same confusion as her father, it is a telephone call with her mother that seems to trigger her final violent episode. The psychological damage and dismemberment experienced by the two fathers of the text is an echo of Fatima's suffering during her abduction, but the mention of others' injuries (physical and mental) also suggests that *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* takes place in a context in which dismemberment and paranoia are common, unexceptional afflictions. By referencing the War of Independence, the text is always looking backwards, towards both the repressed originary myth of the War of Independence, and towards Fatima's unsuccessfully forgotten period at the hands of fundamentalists.

*Le Châtiment des hypocrites* opens with a short, untitled paratext, or false start, in which Fatima Kosra is kidnapped and imprisoned by Islamic fundamentalists and released eighteen months later "l'utérus plein à craquer," now mutilated and pregnant.

Six ou sept mois plus tard, libérée des griffes de ses ravisseurs (sur cette partie de l'histoire, relevant du miracle, s'il en est, Mme Amor resterait peu loquace), profanée, mutilée, l'utérus plein à craquer, retardant le moment des retrouvailles avec sa famille, s'en remettant à Lola Marsa, son amie de toujours, cette pédopsychiatre, plus agitée que ses malades, elle trouva refuge dans une espèce d'hospice, une maison des hauteurs de la ville, aménagée dans l'urgence pour accueillir et abriter les femmes et leurs traumatismes. (26-7)

This one sentence, that marks the beginning of the present-day narrative, gives an idea of the frantic syntactic multiplication of the post-traumatic narrative. The sentence's principal subject and verb ("elle trouva refuge") is not introduced until after a number of clauses that introduce a number of other people with possessive adjectives: "ses ravisseurs," "sa famille," "son amie de toujours." This deferral seems to bury Fatima Kosra among a proliferation of other names, including her own married name, "Mme Amor," that is yet to be explained by the novel's narrative. The sentence, which begins after a paragraph break, does not, as might be expected, open a new chapter, but instead follows a paragraph that describes, with understatement and *sang-froid*, her family's reaction to her long disappearance, chalked up to a "fugue." The men in her family, along with the authorities, seems resigned to the status quo – "une de plus ou de moins, dirait on," "se-méfier-de-l'eau-qui-dort devint la devise essentielle" – rather than concerned about finding Fatima (26). The temporal indication "[s]ix ou sept mois plus tard" both indicates the kind of lapsus that the reader sees occur repeatedly in the text, and reconfirms the

family's indifference to Fatima's absence, as they are unaware of exactly how much time has passed. Although not all of them are used to describe the escaped kidnap victim, the feminine adjectives in this sentence are telling: "profanée, mutilée," "agitée," "aménagée dans l'urgence," signify the emotional and physical state of Fatima and the liminal world she now resides in. She takes shelter in an "espèce d'hospice," above and outside Algiers, a place that has been established to look after the women, supposedly numerous, who find themselves in the same situation as Fatima. Tellingly, the reader is left to decide if the "espèce d'hospice" is for women pregnant outside of marriage, or whether it has been "aménagée dans l'urgence" to shelter female victims of fundamentalist violence.

The manic quality of this one sentence, that adds clause after clause, each one heightening the desperate situation in which Fatima finds herself, echoes the fragmentary and buried way that memory works in *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*. Fatima has escaped from her kidnappers but how she has done so has been forgotten, deliberately or as a result of her "traumatismes," and is referred to only parenthetically: "(sur cette partie de l'histoire, relevant du miracle, s'il en est, Mme Amor resterait peu loquace)." It is not Fatima, Mlle Kosra, but the future "Mme Amor" who is, or will be, "peu loquace" on the subject of her escape, the "miracle" that allows the central story of the novel to exist.<sup>42</sup> Shifting between various identities and past and present temporalities, the reader is simultaneously told something about Fatima's ordeal, and had further revelations silenced by an absence of memory which is ambiguously described: the phrase "peu loquace" leaves the reader unsure if this forgetting is deliberate or imposed by trauma. The event that creates Fatima Kosra's splintered identity and leads to her own violent acts, her ordeal as a "nurse" for a clandestine militant group, is excluded from the novel. The episode is completely absent from the text, but it is the trauma that defines the protagonist and her narration of events.

After Fatima's return and her transformation into Mme Amor the entire narration takes place in a literary style that is extremely difficult to categorize: is her account of her marriage to Rachid Amor and life in Paris supposed to be believable, a realist fiction, or is it a delusional fantasy of sexual and domestic cruelty? In the novel's *Livre deuxième* the narrative shifts to Paris, where it is almost exclusively restricted to the interior of Mme Amor's apartment. The second, post-marriage part of the novel is concerned with secrets and revelations, and the potential horror that revelation can hold. The anxiety around Fatima's violent "secret" is expressed in the *Livre deuxième*'s epigraph, which cites a Qur'anic verse in which Cain is struck with remorse for killing his brother, and for failing to "cacher l'horreur" of his brother's corpse (93). As in the first book, the narration continues as Fatima's indirect discourse, blurring the lines between her thoughts and her actions. Although Rachid comes and goes from the apartment, and Fatima is obsessed with her relationship with him, he often seems incidental, and his motivations for mistreating Fatima are never clear. Over the course of the second part of the novel, the passage of time accelerates dramatically, leaving the reader wondering how much time has passed and even if the events that Fatima describes are possible. Beginning to suspect Rachid of both infidelity and a conversion to fundamentalist Islam (fears that may or may not be borne out by his desire to divorce and deport his wife), Fatima enters a kind of fugue state in which she

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<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of her changing name/identity, see Jane E. Evans. "Re-Inscribing the Body: A Study of Leïla Marouane's *Le Châtiment des Hypocrites*."

tears apart the apartment, hits herself, and begins to miscarry. The violence of her miscarriage – Fatima removes the fetus from her womb, which leaves her “barbot[ant] dans une mare de sang,” as the novel’s opening passage foresaw – marks a further break with the narrative logic, but also somehow closes what Fatima describes as a “parenthèse” of the past:

Les larmes lui troublent la vue, lui inondent le visage, s’infiltrèrent dans ses narines, traversent sa gorge, dégoutent de son menton. Des larmes à n’en plus finir, des eaux salées comme elle n’en avait plus produit, qui la secouent de la tête aux pieds, qui l’éjectent hors de cette parenthèse, qui l’installent dans cet instant de transition entre le passé et l’avenir, où elle aurait dû se mettre dès le moment où il l’avait interpellée dans la rue, *ravie à son milieu*.

Voilà, ressasse-t-elle, la parenthèse ouverte quand elle fut extirpée de cette vieille voiture pour être jetée dans la géhenne est à présent fermée. Définitivement fermée. La voici enfin dans le présent. (188)

Fatima finds herself in the present for the first time since she was kidnapped. However, this does not indicate a move towards lucidity for the narrator or the narration. Instead, Fatima begins to plan the murder and castration of her husband, which she hopes to accomplish after he impregnates her again, to replace the miscarried fetus. Fatima recognizes herself as “*ravie à son milieu*,” unable to reattach to the *milieu* of the present moment but also unable to escape the “géhenne” of her kidnapping. In the moment where the character and the reader are the most aware of the violent, traumatic nature of the hinge between temporalities, Fatima’s hallucinatory inner monologue fixates on violent revenge. Her memories somehow crystallize as she miscarries and therefore fails at her new role of wife and mother, and “Mme Amor se remémore enfin Mlle Kosra,” the woman who was free of all family ties and able to do whatever she pleased, including acts of vengeful violence (189).

As previously mentioned, Marouane connects her novel to other texts as a way of establishing a genealogy of violence and trauma that is uncontrollable and, to some extent, indescribable, within a fictional text. As in Djébar’s ‘La Femme en morceaux,’ Scheherazade, often a problematic or contentious figure, appears as a symbol of female storytelling in the face of danger. In *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, however, Scheherazade’s role is treated with deliberate irony, called on to embellish Fatima’s lies to her husband. The narrator’s connection to Scheherazade is less established and sustained than it is in Djébar’s short story, but is present all the same. Like Scheherazade, Fatima somehow escapes death at the hand of her captors. While her narration begins after she is returned to Algiers, her identity and psyche are so dramatically changed by her sequestration that it is as if she has died and, after giving birth to a baby that is another embodiment of sexual violence, come back to life as Mlle Kosra, and then Mme Amor. This return is described as a “miracle,” underscoring Fatima’s stranger than fiction survival. Like Zoulikha, in *La Femme sans sépulture* she is portrayed as a *revenant*, one who returns from beyond the grave. Fatima explicitly refers to her role as “conteuse” – a teller of tales – when she lies to her husband about how she came to be covered in scars:

Elle l’aimait comptant, auscultant les stigmates qui criblaient son dos, ses cuisses, ses bras, la priant de lui raconter, une fois encore, une fois de plus, comment, ce jour de grande averse, sous les cieus d’Alger, une horde de chiens méchants s’était jetée sur elle. C’est alors que la petite voix intervenait, la prévenant qu’il savait qu’elle inventait. L’ignorant, la petite voix, ce trouble-fête, s’enferrant

d'avantage dans le mensonge, s'incarnant en une conteuse des *Mille et Une Nuits*, calmement, docilement, elle s'exécutait. Et, comme par magie, s'effaçait la frayeur des assauts subis. (160)

For Rachid, Fatima becomes a kind of Scheherazade, delaying his eventual discovery of her past with her own “contes” about her injuries. Her role as a storyteller is not keeping her alive, but it does allow her to reassure her husband, and therefore continue her “new life” with him in Paris, and to process the trauma that she has undergone by lying about the origin of her scars. By invoking Scheherazade, Fatima legitimizes her lying as part of a tradition of storytelling (to husbands) and as a survival tactic.

### **CONCLUSION: DÉSINSCRIPTION, TEXTUAL REFUSALS OF VIOLENCE**

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau states that “[t]here is no law that is not inscribed on bodies. Every law has a hold on the body.” This inscription, carried out by social and political institutions, serves to make the body itself legible and normative as it enters into a recognizable social system (or moral code). In light of Certeau’s theories on the relationship between the body and hegemonic and legal systems, I read the texts discussed here as deploying strategies of de-inscription that are a response to the structuring, restricting, and punishing role that the law has for bodies. By erasing certain historical traces, through memory loss, inconsistent identity, or post-mortem narration, the bodies within these texts suggest that an unwriting (*désinscription*) of history, and its effects on the body, may be possible, even in deeply cynical texts. De-inscription represents textual attempts to reject typical or straightforward historical narratives, and gestures towards a different, more difficult, and more narratively violent way of transmitting stories of torture. For Certeau, the body that is marked by the law is part of a Foucauldian social system that strives for normativity. He writes;

[t]he very idea of an individual that can be isolated from the group was established along with the necessity, in penal justice, of having a body that could be marked by punishment, and in matrimonial law, of having a body that could be marked with a price in transactions among collectivities. From birth to mourning after death, law “takes hold of” bodies in order to make them its text. ... In order for the law to be written on bodies, an apparatus is required that can mediate the relation between the former and the latter. From the instruments of scarification, tattooing, and primitive initiation to those of penal justice, tools work on the body. Formerly the tool was a flint knife or a needle. Today the instruments range from the policeman’s billyclub to handcuffs and the box reserved for the accused in the courtroom. These tools compose a series of objects whose purpose is to inscribe the force of the law on its subject, to tattoo him in order to make him demonstrate the rule, to produce a “copy” that makes the norm legible. This series forms an in-between; it borders on the law (it is the law that provides it with weapons) and it aims at the body (in order to mark it.) An offensive frontier, it organizes social space: it separates the text and the body, but it also links them, by permitting the acts that will make the textual “fiction” of the model reproduced and realized by the body. (139-41)

Within these fictional texts, the apparatus that mediates between the law and the body is the writing of traumatic violence. However, I contend that all three texts attempt a rejection, or de-inscription of the “offensive frontier” that aims to make the body a reproducible subject. In Certeau’s terms, torture, an action that quite literally marks the body, like a tattoo or a scar, is an ideal example of the way in which bodies are used to demonstrate the force of law.<sup>43</sup>

In *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* and ‘La Femme en morceaux’ attempts to de-inscribe the body constitute a gendered response to gendered violence: the body undergoes trauma and is therefore “removed” from normal social spaces and its typical connection to identity, and can now speak in a way that escapes juridical law, and also laws of time and space. The shift away from linear, realistic narratives, towards fantastic, even hallucinatory ones makes it easier for these texts to draw parallels between the violence of the colonial period (specifically, the War of Independence) and the more recent religious violence in Algeria. In both these texts, the code being inscribed on the characters’ bodies is the extremist religious beliefs of fundamentalists; the violence is therefore, in military terms, a “civil” one, an interior threat to the women’s bodily integrity and autonomy.

The female body is used as a site of violence that can later be “read” by those who see the body (whether or not the violence is survived). In Fatima’s case, her mutilated body is supposed to signify that she is no longer a virgin and no longer marriageable. Her numerous miscarriages and inability to have a child repeatedly confirm her departure from the “normal” order of things.<sup>44</sup> Fatima, confusedly, seems to share the view that she is in rupture with her expected role; although she provokes her own miscarriage, she also recognizes that a full-term pregnancy will save her marriage and allow her to remain in France. In *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, the violence done to Fatima’s body is depicted as both an embodiment of an external logic of (moral) crime and punishment, and a way of emphasizing the femininity, and therefore socially perceived weakness and inferiority - of the injured body. Additionally, Fatima’s ability to narrate after the social death of rape and repudiation performs a de-inscription that attempts to challenge the idea that the female body must be a site of law and punishment. While her continued narration of the novel confirms the possibility of escaping the finality of this social death, her rebirth as Mme Amor is not without its own problematic instances of violence as a way of inscribing the body.

Fatima’s recourse to vengeful violence, on men who solicited her in the *casbah* and, finally, on her errant husband, can be read as an ultimate expression of counter violence, or de-inscription that attempts to erase the acts of the past by revisiting those acts on others. By castrating Rachid, Fatima condemns him to the same sterile, outsider position that she occupies. Her revenge simultaneously unwrites what has been done to her, and reinscribes violence, absence, and incapacity onto Rachid’s body, signaling the impossibility of escape from violence.

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<sup>43</sup> Certeau may well have been thinking of Franz Kafka’s ‘In der Strafkolonie’ (‘In the Penal Colony’), a short story in which condemned prisoners have their sentences carved on their bodies by a kind of giant tattooing machine. Kafka’s story certainly provides a vivid illustration of the kind of inscription that Certeau discusses in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

<sup>44</sup> In *Le Corps dans la tradition au Maghreb*, Malek Chebel describes infertility as a “catastrophe irréparable,” a “vide incoercible et inadmissible,” an absence that ironically marks the female body as unsuccessful and condemnable (31-2).

In Atyka's case, the storytelling voice that continues after death alludes to an exaggerated departure from the norm, and also confirms the legibility of her dead body. Once beheaded, Atyka's body is marked as a punishment and a warning that her story of violence against desiring women only serves to underscore. Both Marouane and Djebbar set out to de-inscribe gendered violence in their fictional texts by thematically, stylistically, and symbolically erasing the laws or codes inscribed on the body.

In Varenne's novel, the de-inscription that takes place is not in response to gendered violence, but instead a way of exposing the systematic violences of French and Algerian history. The inscription of violent law is what happens in the past narrative and what is brought to life by Pascal's memories. Rachid, and other victims of torture, are scarred by torture, which once again stands as an extreme example of the state's power to inscribe itself on enemy bodies. Brahim's brain tumor, described as both a mental and physical wound, is a reminder of his time in the DOP, and an inscription that attacks his ability to remember and to write. George's role as an agent of the state, and his ability to alter bodies that he comes in contact with, is also a very literal interpretation of the "offensive frontier" that Certeau delineates. He attacks and beats up those investigating past crimes in order to silence them and to mark their bodies in a way that borders the law: he is a police officer but is not acting as one when he carries out the attacks. Nevertheless, he unknowingly continues to enforce the (unwritten) rules of collaboration and silence that his institution upholds.

The repeated cases of amnesia and conflicting memory in *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin* are narrative strategies that attempt to displace historical agency in the narrative and disrupt the straightforward recollection of the past. While all bodies are shown as being inscribed to some extent, the way that narratives overlap and are forgotten makes de-inscription seem like a possible way out of systematic violence, even if this possibility is somewhat foreclosed by the *polar* narrative structure that tends towards resolution rather than disruption.

In all these texts, de-inscription is a process, an attempt, rather than a teleological outcome or success for the characters. The institutionalized violence in Varenne, the centuries-old cycle of violence on Djebbar, and the reciprocal, hallucinatory violence in Marouane all persist as forms of social and political law that mark individual bodies and create multidirectional narratives that tend to blur the lines between memoir, fiction, and historical fact. In doing so, these authors interrogate the victim role and provide forms of counter violence in their texts, defying not just the violently inscribed laws, but also laws of narrative logic and, ultimately, questioning the boundaries of the fictional text.

As discussed in the next chapter, the ways in which the body is marked will influence the way that it is later read both within a text, by other characters, and outside it, as a source of transmission of torture narratives. As such, I move away from the inscription of bodies through torture, and the overlapping of historical events and narratives that is inherent in fiction that discusses torture, to the reading of those inscriptions on the bodies of female characters in Assia Djebbar's fiction.

In the final chapter of *Multidirectional Memory*, Rothberg examines Michael Haneke's often-discussed 2005 film, *Caché*, a text set in contemporary France that addresses the forgetting

of colonial episodes and the subsequent violent reminder of them that interrupts the previously “normal” life of Georges Laurent, the protagonist. *Caché* is a particularly significant text because it so explicitly narrativizes the way that individuals are able to forget or repress their part in collective traumas, and how violence is often genealogical, or a self-fulfilling prophecy from one generation to the next. A 21<sup>st</sup>-century backdrop of the Iraq War and the undercurrent of racial and socio-economic tensions in France frame the tragic reunion of Georges and his “adopted” Algerian brother whose parents disappeared during the October 1961 demonstrations in Paris. This framing demonstrates that one memory does not hide another, as the film’s title might lead us to believe, but instead that memory works as a multiplicity, allowing individuals to constantly catch glimpses of and connect various events. That which is “caché” – Georges’ memory of his own past – is finally, violently revealed by his adopted brother’s suicide. Many instances in the film suggest that these memories were, in fact, hiding in plain sight, as the viewer is compelled to scrutinize each scene more and more closely, hunting for clues of Georges’ guilt.<sup>45</sup>

Haneke’s *Caché*, as a text of multidirectional memory, has much in common with the texts I analyze here, aside from its engagement with the recent interest in France, at least in fictional texts, with the events of the Algerian War of Independence. Its preoccupation with forms of proof, or evidence, its insistence on the transmission of narrative from one generation to the next, and, most obviously, the hinging together of two temporally disparate narratives that are discovered to coincide with and even map onto one another within the film’s “master” narrative are all features that emphasize a particular kind of engagement with memory, one that allows for incompleteness and disruption. Haneke connects the memory of the October 1961 massacre, during which Algerians protesting the government-enforced curfew on North African residents, were violently dispersed, arrested, and beaten by the *forces de l’ordre*, to contemporary concerns about surveillance and terrorism. Georges and Anne, *Caché*’s main characters, are sure they have nothing to reproach themselves for, and yet feel guilty and nervous when they find out they are being accused of some unnamed violence: the post-9/11 climate of fear and the intrusion of terrorism and measures taken to prevent it form a crucial context for the film’s paranoid ambiance.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, in ‘La Femme en morceaux,’ *Le Mur, le Kabyle et le marin*, and *Le Châtiment des hypocrites*, the central atrocities of the text (Atyka’s beheading, the injustices of the torture camp, and Fatima’s kidnapping) are framed as being caused not by individual agency, but by a malignant *air du temps* that encourages certain kinds of crime to occur. The context of violence, mistrust, and secrets lead to these atrocities, and also make it nearly impossible to remember or recount them without recourse to other, related events that help make sense of and transmit these narratives of violence.

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<sup>45</sup> See *Screen*, 48:2, a volume devoted to Haneke’s film, especially Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars, “‘Hidden’ in plain sight: bringing terror home,” and Ranjana Khanna “From Rue Morgue to Rue Iris.”

<sup>46</sup> It might be more accurate to say that this climate had been part of the French context since the mid-1990s, when a series of bombings, assassinations, and other terroristic attacks, attributed to the *Groupe islamique armé* took place in France. A number of anti-terrorist measures, including increased surveillance of public spaces, were introduced throughout France after the attacks.

## Chapter 2 - Assia Djebar: The Tortured Body and the Narrativization of the Impossible

“La mémoire est corps de femme voilée. Seul son œil libre fixe notre présent.”

- Assia Djebar, *La Zerda ou les chants de l'oubli*

### INTRODUCTION

In works by Assia Djebar, the female body is a reminder of psychological individuality and also a place of memory, often one that bears traces of the events that created that memory. These scars have a palimpsestic role, inscribed as they are on bodies that tell and retell stories, as if repeated narratives of torture and trauma were both a way of transmitting a limit experience and restating the impossibility of straightforward storytelling in the aftermath of physical suffering. Markings on the bodies of Djebar's characters are there to be read, but the trauma that creates the scar also makes for a deconstructed or fragmented narrative, one that signals a narrativization of the impossible. Many critics, notably Mireille Calle-Gruber, have written about Djebar's "nomadic approach to narrative and genre," and it is this non-linear, repetitive and often participatory approach to storytelling that is located in female voices and bodies (Calle-Gruber 9-10). In this chapter, I argue that Djebar, in several of her texts, rejects the idea of simple narrative identity, as the shifts between different voices and genres often mirror the disorientation of the historical, political and social violence that are the backdrop for her fiction. These shifts also destabilize the idea of a single narrative voice. The tension between individuality, seen in the image of the scar, and in the problematically sexualized relationship between torturer and victim, and collective memory, as shown by the palimpsestic, shared voice that narrates the injured body, is the crux of this chapter. The scar also marks the intrusion of the other and the inscription of otherness, which is emblematic of the embodied violence of torture and, more disturbingly, of the sexualized nature of the encounter with violence in Djebar's texts. Whereas the wound, inflicted and felt at the moment of trauma, is a violent act connected to a specific time and place, the scar is a violent inscription that provokes memory and requires that the story of violence be retold. The paradox of the pain that caused it and the subsequent lack of feeling that often comes with the formation of scar tissue, as well as the way the scar can permanently disfigure or alter the body, allow it to symbolize the shifting, multilayered and durable memory discussed in the previous chapter. In contrast to the texts by Leila Marouane and Djebar discussed in the previous chapter, inscription on the body in the texts discussed here is used as a *point de départ* and narrative focus, creating a physical locus for trauma that is often absent from the greater context of the community or nation.

The centrality of Algerian history in Djebar's work, with an emphasis on violent, polarizing events, makes the writing of violence unavoidable, and links it repeatedly to memory and bearing witness. Through Djebar's frequently metafictional description of the remembering and transmission of violence, the ability of a narrative to refer to bodies, especially tortured

bodies, comes into question.<sup>47</sup> If narratives struggle to describe and come to terms with the injured body, how can they be read as attempts to create a national – or nationalistic – memory of violence? I argue that in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980, 2002) and *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002) Djébar rejects contemporary arguments about the construction of national and collective memory and resists the reification of the (female) body for state purposes.<sup>48</sup> Making the tortured body speak is, in Djébar's œuvre, a way of problematizing any narrative that claims to be about Algerian history or the commemoration of how scars came to be on the body. By introducing narratives of injury and suffering obliquely, through post-mortem voices, through contact with scar tissue, through sexual contact and even in dream or hallucination, Djébar reveals that these stories can never be representations of history or stable accounts, they can only be personal narratives that are transmitted partially or fragmentedly from one character to another and – sometimes in a way that is incidental – to the reader. As living bodies begin to disappear in Djébar's fictional texts, the specter of haunting as a form of remembering and retelling appears as the only solace available for characters. Without the living body as the center of narrative and the trigger for stories of torture and other pain, the idea of surviving the War of Independence and the Civil War (as well as other acts of violence outside the Algerian border) seems more and more improbable. Being tortured and going on to transmit the story of torture, is an act that defies the narrative of the War of Independence as something that was won or lost, and yet remains an act that takes place in an aftermath of that war.

A historian by training, Djébar is interested in how historical events are accessed and passed along by female characters, how these events are retold during, and especially after, trauma, and how the narratives created draw on, construct and deconstruct a national history. Many of her characters – notably Sarah in 'Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement' – are involved in memory work of some kind. Djébar's work acknowledges history's traditional focus on violent events, but at the same time introduces a subjectivity and multivocality that is usually not permitted in historical texts. The fragmented nature of many of Djébar's narratives mirrors the act of torture, and its destructive effect on language and memory, and also how these texts rely on and reflect a partial, sometimes unknown or willfully obscured archive. Physical trauma, in Djébar's œuvre, exists in many forms, but the political act of torture seems to me the most apt to examine the evolving idea of the possibility of national memory in her work because state-sanctioned torture during the War of Independence is such a part of both Algerian and French memories of these events, and has consequently become part of national identity more so than other, non-systematized violences.

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<sup>47</sup> By metafictional, I refer to Assia Djébar's speaking and writing about her own works of fiction. She has repeatedly tied the completion of *La Femme sans sépulture* to the trauma of the World Trade Center attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, for example in the preface to the novel and in a speech given at Georgetown University in 2002, and cited by Florence Martin in 'The Poetics of Memory in Assia Djébar's *La Femme sans sépulture*; a study in paradoxes' in *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism; Legacies of French Colonialism*, edited by Alec G. Hargreaves, 160.

<sup>48</sup> *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* was originally published in 1980; a slightly different version of the collection was published by Albin Michel in 2002. For a discussion of the significances of the differences between the two versions, see Carine Bourget, 'La Réédition de *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*.' *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol 48:4 (2008), 92-103.

Not all of Djébar's female characters are victims of torture, nor is it a topic addressed in all of her texts. In this chapter, I will focus mainly on three of Djébar's texts which include victims of torture whose bodies trigger memory and storytelling, the short stories 'Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement' and 'La Femme qui pleure,' from the collection *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* and the novel *La Femme sans sépulture*. Injured bodies are catalysts of reemergence of memory. Bodies in the Djébarian texts discussed here are individual but also carry collective meaning and memory in the stories that they transmit. Private and public spheres are conflated, as they are in the act of torture but, unlike texts in the previous chapter, one event does not consistently reflect or refer to another. Rather, various characters' memories are shown to be shared and voiced by characters other than those who experienced the event of injury itself.

### 'PORTEUSES DE FEU': 'FEMMES D'ALGER DANS LEUR APPARTEMENT'

In Djébar's collection of short stories *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, the scar on the body is an outward mark of trauma to be read by other characters and also a reminder to the bearer of the scar of a story to be told, most often a story of traumatic experience. The collection's eponymous story provides a starting point for talking about the role of the scar in Djébar's work, as well as a place where the scar's relation to body and memory can be defined. Another important issue raised in 'Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement' is the inextricability of past and present violences. Djébar suggests that the violence of torture (or any other event) may be able to be closed off in terms of time but that its duration as a physical and emotional memory will be apparent in any narration of trauma.

In the story, several characters share the narration of events that take place over a period of several days in Algiers. Knowingly referencing the Delacroix work of the same name, Djébar draws back the curtain on everyday vignettes that bring characters together and provoke storytelling, beginning with a visiting French woman's suicide attempt and ending with her departure from Algiers for Paris. The Delacroix oil painting was completed in 1834, based on preliminary sketches and paintings made by Eugène Delacroix during his time in Algeria in the entourage of diplomat Charles de Mornay.<sup>49</sup> Because of the difficulty of access to such a scene in the Islamic world – women in a harem would have been secluded from all men except their husband and other immediate family members – it is believed that Delacroix based his painting on the household of a former Christian who had converted to Islam and was collaborating with the French government.<sup>50</sup> The delicate socio-political context of the painting, which allows the viewer to gaze inside the exoticized and eroticized harem, was an important aspect of the painting's success in Paris. The painting inspired a series of paintings, 'Les Femmes d'Alger' by

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<sup>49</sup> Eugène Delacroix, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*. 1834. Oil on canvas. Louvre, Paris.

<sup>50</sup> This account of Delacroix's voyeuristic encounter with Algerian women is cast into doubt by some critics, including Ranjana Khanna in *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present*. "It is also interesting to note that doubt surrounding the authenticity of this story is cited by many art historians. The available sources cite not Delacroix but [French painter] Cournauld, who claims that this is a story told by Delacroix. The art historians themselves, it seems, are caught up in their own myth of authenticity" (278, n.4). The layered, doubt-generating aspect of the anecdote mirrors the multiple borrowings and repetitions of Delacroix and Picasso's images.

Pablo Picasso, in the 1950s.<sup>51</sup> By joining the title of her *recueil* to this series of works by male artists working between countries, Djébar reinforces the themes of reinscription and seriality that occur in her work. Picasso takes up the work of Delacroix and produces fifteen paintings as a reworking of and homage to the original ‘Femmes’; Djébar uses the Delacroix painting as cover art for her collection and as a sly reference to the agency of the gaze in her and Delacroix’s work and then engages with Picasso’s work once again in another story of the collection, ‘La Femme qui pleure.’ In the collection’s postface, ‘Regard interdit, son coupé,’ Djébar tells the story of Delacroix’s voyage in the Maghreb and his visual engagement with the world of the harem, and connects his “stolen” gaze on the Algerian women to the perceived threat of the gaze of the veiled woman that endangers the “male prerogative” of seeing, of existing outside, in movement (FA 245-6).<sup>52</sup> Through this multimedia intertextuality, the ability to see, and subsequently narrate that what is seen, is established as a threat that evolves with the role of the beholder: first Delacroix, the European interloper, then the Algerian woman who dares circulate with one eye, then both, emerging from her white veil, then the women who go outside “exposées,” “denudées,” that is to say unveiled (FA 247).

Within the short story, ‘Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement,’ multiple voices recount the present and past of Sarah, a *mujahida* and her surgeon husband, Ali, Leila, a *mujahida* and heroin addict, Fatma, a water carrier in the neighborhood hammam, Anna, a French woman who has come to Algiers to die, and Baya, a cytologist studying sex differentiation in children. The stories intertwine, without establishing one neatly chronological narrative, as they move between private residences and the two interstitial spaces of the hammam and the hospital.

The idea of the palimpsest - a new text that is written or rewritten over an erased text, whose trace still lingers and is more or less visible - is crucial to my reading of the scarred body in Djébar’s work. The retelling and revoicing of traumatic history means that narratives are layered and are never being told for the first or last time. There is an important difference of duration and repeatability between the permanent scar that marks the body, and perhaps changes its physical parameters and, the fluctuating, impermanent way that memory is made accessible by the characters in Djébar’s work. The scar is a constant marker on the body while the narratives that it creates are far more ephemeral and difficult to parse. This explains why, in the texts I discuss in this chapter, instances in which a body’s scars are “read” or trigger memory and storytelling involve another person, or interlocutor. The person whose body is scarred feels the wound as permanent whereas for the outside “reader” or spectator it is something new that needs to be explained and, in most cases, touched. The novelty and strangeness of the scar creates a connection with the other’s physical body and its parameters. The scar can be talked about, the story of its violence told and retold in part or in whole, but, paradoxically, the scar tissue that is seen and touched by the other is less sensitive than other skin, creating a disparity between the visual and the physical for the person with the scar that gestures towards the instability of memory that Djébar’s characters often demonstrate. The scar is the underlying, partially erased text over which new narrative and new events can be written.

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<sup>51</sup> Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d’Alger* (series). 1954-5.

<sup>52</sup> See also William J. Berg, *Imagery and Ideology: Fiction and Painting in Nineteenth-Century France*, University of Delaware Press, 2007, Chapter 9, “Kaleidoscopic Images of Algerian Women, Delacroix, Picasso, and Djébar.”



Figure 1 - Eugène Delacroix, Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement, 1834 (Louvre, Paris)

'Femmes d'Alger' makes it clear that the "original" violence of the Algerian War of Independence, during which Sarah, the short story's main character, is tortured and imprisoned, is not the final or only violence that the bodies in this text undergo. Djébar refuses to create a hierarchy of violent acts amongst her characters, instead insisting on the repetition and inescapability of violence, and the necessity of sharing trauma through storytelling. Indeed, the idea of hearing and inscribing the stories of women is a recurring one in the short story. Sarah works as a musicologist, transcribing and translating folk songs, an explicit example of the work of memory that occurs often in the Djébarian œuvre. Seemingly all of the songs she listens to for her project, "Comment mettre en musique une ville entière," are sung by women; "des paroles quelquefois incertaines, comme si leur mémoire, par instants, faiblissait" (FA 23). Sarah's project as a musical ethnologist is a reminder of Djébar's work as a filmmaker, and of the importance of musical forms in her work. Her films, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* (1979) and *La Zerda ou les chants de l'oubli* (1982) are about women's history in Algeria, the *nouba* of the title is a traditional song form. Djébar's role is not as a collector of songs, but as a historian, filmmaker and novelist who can read into the story of the songs and make it available for a different kind of public. The notion of "mettre en musique une ville

entière” is also a reminder of one of the opening scenes of *L'Amour, la fantasia*, in which the “L'Armada française” looks at Algiers from their position on the water: “[L]a Ville Imprenable se dévoile, blancheur fantomatique, à travers un poudrolement de bleus et de gris mêlés. [...] Silence de l'affrontement, instant solennel, suspendu en une apnée d'attente, comme avant une ouverture d'opéra. Qui dès lors constitue le spectacle, de quel côté se trouve vraiment le public?” (*L'Amour, la fantasia* 14) In *L'Amour, la fantasia* it is the outside eye of the European invaders that frames the city, while in ‘Femmes d'Alger’ it is an “insider,” Sarah, who is performing the same act.

The proliferation of women’s voices in ‘Femmes d'Alger’ ironizes the Delacroix painting that it evokes by reversing the direction of the gaze and the voice. Painted from the point of view of an interloper with a privileged view of Algerian women’s half-naked bodies, the Delacroix paintings do not suggest that these bodies can speak, that they are allowed to tell the stories that the painter is illustrating. Another complicating view of the female body is introduced on the story’s first page, when Ali, Sarah’s husband, has a nightmare about a woman being tortured:

Tête de jeune femme aux yeux bandés, cou renversé, cheveux tires ... La moitié gauche de la face au bandeau (bandeau blanc, pas noir, elle n'est pas condamnée) ... Masque de la jeune femme immobilisée, tombé de côté, sans cou peut-être, enfin la table se découvre avec latéralement des flacons suspendus, et des tuyaux, un matériel de cuisine ? ... “Ma” table, “ma” salle, non, je n'opère pas car je ne suis pas là, à l'intérieur, cerne moi de même, je regarde, mais je ne suis pas avec eux, Sarah se réveillera-t-elle, l'anesthésie, début ou fin de l'opération ... une chèvre blanche avec un cou tendu ... Enfant de nouveau qui geint tout près, ou serait-ce Sarah, les yeux bandés, les yeux troués ... Le moteur se met en marche dangereusement, la gégène ...

Ali saut du lit d'un bond. (FA 61-3).

Ali’s nightmare confuses the victim of the “gégène” and hesitates between a scene of torture or a scene in an operating room (Ali is a surgeon). The mention of torture by electricity and the fact that this aspect of Algeria’s history is remembered subconsciously, in dream form, immediately contextualizes the characters of the story and gestures towards the overlapping of past and present events in the stories told by the female characters. Torture is here, also, both an individual and collective trauma: individual because it is being experienced by one person as a singular act and collective because it is being dreamed (perhaps remembered) by Ali, who did not experience the torture himself. The “jeune femme” is compared to an animal, a sacrificial goat, and a child, explicitly dehumanizing the figure being “operated” on. Ali’s nightmare fits in with the notion of trauma as made up of a series of flashbacks and uncontrolled remembering, as it is described in Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience; Trauma, Narrative and History*. Ali’s nightmare and his reaction to it also bring into question his agency and his role as a survivor. Is he remembering Sarah’s torture for her? Has she been able somehow to transmit her lived experience to her husband? Ali is absent from his dream – “je n'opère pas car je ne suis pas là, à l'intérieur” – and unable to intervene in the torture or operation that is happening.

The question must be asked, though, in a story that insists on the multivocalic nature of storytelling and remembering done by women, why it is Ali’s dream that opens the narration? Certainly, the dream sequence evokes the difficulty of drawing the line between real and imagined that accompanies limit-experiences that violently separate the self from the subject, but

does it position Ali as a survivor of torture, along with Leila and Sarah, his wife, or does it illustrate the communicability of trauma?<sup>53</sup> Ali may experience guilt not as the victim of trauma who has survived but “fail[ed] to have seen in time” but as a witness to the survival of others who is experiencing the “repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” as an act of guilt and sympathy (Caruth 108, 91). Trauma exists in a place where remembering a past event means not having completely understood it or experienced it at the time of its happening, making it difficult to perceive whether the memory of an event is accurate or not. For Freud, and later theorists of memory and trauma, it is not the accuracy of traumatic memories that is important, but the repetitive, world-changing nature of trauma. Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, defines trauma as “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth 91). Caruth also states that the underlying question of narratives of trauma – in her book she refers to both testimonial texts and fictional narratives – is whether trauma is “the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?” (7). That is, whether what is closer to trauma is either the fear of having nearly died, or the guilt of not having died, when many others have. This question is clearly relevant to discussions of the Holocaust, where survivors could only write narratives because they were alive and because so many others died. This question is more complicated in post-torture narratives, because while those who have undergone torture are aware that many others have experienced similar pain and suffering, the act of torture is most often performed in a separate space, in a one-on-one encounter, or in an encounter where there is one victim and several torturers. This experience makes the collective voice, or the feeling “we experienced the same trauma, but I lived, while they died” an expression that is once-removed from torture. Writers may well be aware that countless others faced torture, but this knowledge is not part of the traumatic event, as it might be argued to be in a concentration camp, where atrocities were more often carried out on groups of people, and because they belonged to a group of people, not because they possessed individual, specific knowledge.

While I agree with Caruth that there is the question, in both testimonial and fictional texts, about the relationship between trauma and fear, and especially trauma and survivors’ guilt, it is important to point out that, despite the brutality and horror of the act of torture, its goal is not the death of the subject. As Elaine Scarry so eloquently argues in *The Body in Pain*, torture takes place within a false justification of “information-gathering”. What is sought after, according to this justification, is not pain, or death, or trauma, but facts. She writes that: “It is crucial to see that the interrogation does not stand outside an episode of torture as its motive or justification: it is internal to the structure of torture, exists there because of its intimate connections to and interactions with physical pain” (Scarry 29). This misdescription, or how torture “comes to be described,” as Scarry calls it, emphasizing that this is a process that takes place over time and after the fact, is made possible because of how difficult it is to describe experiences of pain. It serves not only as a justification, but as a logic that allows torture to have a purpose and a result: namely, to be a success or a failure which, for the torturer, is not measured in pain, or in death, but in quantifiable information. Raphaëlle Branche, in her book *La torture et l’armée pendant la*

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<sup>53</sup> I refer here to Michel Foucault’s description in *Madness and Civilization* of the limit-experience as both a splitting of the subject/self, and as a kind of rejection of normative cultural gestures and acts. Both of these divisions are useful in reference to the system of torture and the trauma of surviving and remembering it (Foucault 161).

*guerre d'Algérie* states from the outset that definitions of torture that allow it an “fin extérieure,” such as obtaining information, carry with them “l’euphémisation de ces violences”(15). While in the aftermath and the analysis of torture, this justification of torture as a means to an end may seem like an ethical perversion, easily dismissed, guilt for the survivor of torture may still be located in his or her “failure” to stay silent under torture. Guilt may also be centered on the very idea of having entered into this false logic of the torturer: that information or “intelligence-gathering” is the real reason for torture, and that information has some kind of value within the space of torture that might even be carried over into the world outside the “interrogation” room. An understanding of the euphemization and misreading of torture and its physical and semantic maneuvers helps to think through the way that survivors of torture are able to remember it, and how that memory is transmitted to others. It also points to the relationship between Ali’s nightmare, supposedly a reflection of his guilt or incomplete processing of an event, and his relationship with Sarah, a *porteuse de feu* and torture survivor.

Interestingly, in the Djébar texts addressed in this chapter, the information gleaned from torture is irrelevant to the portrayal of the act of torture: what characters know or do not know, what they tell or do not tell, is not mentioned. This absence highlights the speciousness of the idea of torture as a means of obtaining information, and points to Djébar’s interest in putting into narrative the aftermath of torture – how torture is remembered and relived, and how that memory is transmitted – rather than an interest in the original event of torture. With regards to *La Femme sans sépulture* and ‘Femmes d’Alger,’ Caruth’s definition of trauma as a delayed and repetitive response to an earlier violent event is apt, yet, because it is not necessarily focused on torture in fiction, misses an element that I consider essential to Djébar’s work: the transmission of the narrative of torture. The term “transmission,” rather than “telling” or “account” is most suited to this kind of communication because this sharing of knowledge does not take place in a straightforward, narrative way between women or between speaker and interlocutor in these texts. Ali’s dream is but one example of a transmission of trauma in which the roles of victim, torturer, and spectator (or transmitter and transmittee) are difficult to distinguish. The way in which the experience of torture is communicated between characters and to the reader emphasizes Djébar’s interest in the body, the role of the scar, and the importance of the transmission of personal and national history.<sup>54</sup>

While the stories of the characters of ‘Femmes d’Alger’ are focused primarily on the tortured body – specifically on the body that has survived and been marked by torture – there is another discourse around the body and physicality that recurs in the text; that of medicine and the hospital. The opening paragraphs of the story, Ali’s nightmare of the woman with the “yeux bandés” confuses the operating theatre with the interrogation room, a slippage that indicates a troubling parallel between modern technology and torture practices. The hospital is a place where people are operated on and presumably get better, but it is also a place of sickness and death that some never leave. By conflating the hospital and the prison of Sarah’s memories of the war, the short story emphasizes the state’s role in the wartime act of torture, glimpsed in the allusion to the “ombre des prisons vides” that falls over Algiers, for example (FA 98). It is also a

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<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the transmission of trauma in *La Femme sans sépulture* see Anne Donadey, “L’expression littéraire de la transmission du traumatisme dans *La Femme sans sépulture* d’Assia Djébar” in *Assia Djébar, littérature et transmission*, eds Asholt, Calle-Gruber and Combe, Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010.

reminder of the durability of torture through scarring and memory: the city of Algiers is still a dangerous place, where one kind of institution or building can hide another. Just as the euphemisms of “la question” or “la corvée de bois” masked the brutal reality of torture, so too did the metaphors of treatment, of curing the “cancer” of nationalist uprisings, of “surgical” strikes against Front de Libération Nationale cells. The hospital is a literal reminder of the shift in language and practices that took place during the war. In Ali’s operating room, a “vieux notable nationaliste” is having his liver operated on, but he dies on the operating table, another “tête aux yeux bandés” (FA 82). Ali suggests to the man’s three sons – three sons, all “hauts fonctionnaires,” as if in a modern-day fairytale – that they refer to their father’s death as a “cancer généralisé” rather than alcohol-related cirrhosis (FA 83). The repetition and suggested circulation of these face-saving euphemisms at Ali’s clinic, said to be the capital’s most modern facility, gestures towards a larger comment by Djébar on the nature of the national use of euphemism, and suggests the failed operation on this “vieux nationaliste” as a metaphor for the gap between language and reality in post-Independence Algeria.

The modernity of the hospital, and the disturbing euphemisms it suggests, are a reminder of the misappropriation of elements of technological progress in the torture chamber. The parallel between modernity and supposedly “modern” forms of torture is something remarked upon by many early critics and historians of torture, including Pierre Vidal-Naquet,:

before and after the Algerian War, torturers boasted about employing a clean torture, one that didn’t leave any traces, and, to the extent that there was ‘progress’ in the techniques of repression, it’s obviously there that it took place: the use of electricity leaves fewer traces than pulling out a tooth or a fingernail (Vidal-Naquet, *Torture dans la république*, 13).

A metonymic reminder similar to the connection made between the hospital and the torture chamber occurs in ‘Femmes d’Alger’ with the repeated returns to the hospital and the connection explicitly made between the blindfolded woman in Ali’s nightmare and the man with his eyes covered on the operating table. Furthermore, by moving between scenes of diagnosis and sickness and those of survival, the emphasis on the body being exposed and read is restated repeatedly in the story, aligning this exposure with the presence of medical progress and surveillance, like Ali’s son Nasir watching his father operate via cameras set up in the operating room. Torture during the Algerian War took many forms, but perhaps the most emotionally charged torture, and that which is evoked the most often by survivors, is the *gégène*, or electrical torture. Leila’s mention of electrical torture as something that she and Sarah have in common, underscores its prevalence. The lie of this “clean” torture is made apparent in the scars on the characters’ bodies, and in the way in which physical and mental trauma is written about in ‘Femmes d’Alger,’ showing that the duration and transmission of the traces left by it are far from clean-cut or readily defined and limited.

The extent of torture carried out by the French police and military forces in Algeria and in France during the war is extremely difficult to quantify. What is made clear by historical accounts by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Benjamin Stora, Mohammed Harbi and Marie-Monique Robin, is that the torture of suspected members of the Front de Libération Nationale and their sympathizers was systematic, widespread and largely ineffective against the kind of urban

warfare that is referenced in ‘Femmes d’Alger.’<sup>55</sup> In the rural areas of Algeria, the system of “quadrillage” divided the country up into sections for more effective surveillance, effectively preventing the inhabitants’ freedom of movement and forcing them to denounce the FLN cells in their areas.

Torture against women, as demonstrated by personal accounts like those of Djamila Boupacha and Louise Ighilahriz, often involved rape and sexual degradation. Marnia Lazreg, in *Torture and the Twilight of Empire* frames this rape as a “military strategy,” used to reinforce the colonizer/colonized dynamic that the French military were trying to uphold (Lazreg, 155-9).<sup>56</sup> In ‘Femmes d’Alger,’ the specter of systematized rape is not raised by the women, but is implicitly conjured by Ali’s opening nightmare and the *demi-mots* with which Leila and Sarah discuss their imprisonment and injuries.

Neil Macmaster posits the (female) *fidayate*, the urban guerilla as “[t]he single most enduring and iconic image associated with the Algerian War,” in part because of the images of women as bomb carriers in Gillo Pontecorvo’s film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). His excellent analysis of the role of women in the FLN during and after the war continues,

[i]t is easy to lose sight of the extent to which the detection and arrest of female terrorists from late 1956 onwards caused a shocked and astonished response among both French and international public opinion. Here were veiled women engaging, according to one’s point of view, in horrific acts of indiscriminate and bloody violence or in deeds of heroic bravery that seemed to defy all stereotypes of Muslim women as cloistered and supine creatures totally lacking in willpower and autonomy. Did the activities of young female bombers in the streets of Algiers mark a turning point in the assertion of women’s power or position in Algerian society? (Macmaster 316-7)

In his reading of the position of women in Algeria in the aftermath of the war, the answer to this question is a resounding ‘no’. Despite talk during the war of a program for women’s rights that would be implemented when the FLN came to power, party leadership in fact advocated an extremely conservative socio-cultural position for women, argues Macmaster, especially those who had fought and been tortured alongside men.<sup>57</sup>

Many *moudjahidate* internalized the masculine logic of the female warrior: theirs was only a temporary status, not proof of a lasting transformation of gender roles, and with the coming of independence in 1962 they quietly ‘demobilized’ by withdrawing from public life back into the private, domestic sphere of the home. (Macmaster 319)

This return to the private sphere, a division of male and female spaces that was ultimately upheld and reinforced during the colonial period in Algeria, is dramatized in ‘Femmes d’Alger,’ by the

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<sup>55</sup> Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *La torture dans la République : essai d’histoire et de politique contemporaine, 1954-1962*, Minuit, Paris, 1998 ; Benjamin Stora and Mohammed Harbi, *La Guerre d’Algérie - 1934-2004 La fin de l’amnésie* Robert Laffont, Paris, 2004; Marie-Monique Robin, *Escadrons de la mort, l’école française*, La Découverte, Paris, 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Lazreg asserts that “[t]he “pacification” of the female population included the use of torture as a tool of resocialization into the colonial social project. Although rape could take place without torture, torture seldom took place without rape.” *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*, 160.

<sup>57</sup> For further discussion of the role of female combatants, see Lazreg, 146-154.

preoccupation with different enclosed spaces and the way that they are gendered, and by the troubled status of *moudjahidate* who are relegated to non-public spaces. Sarah's musicology project seems a way of countering traditional conceptions of history, but also underscores the fact that there is a separate realm of knowledge that only women have access to, because they have been assigned such different roles. Leila's drug addiction and withdrawal also gesture towards the difficulty of surviving as a *porteuse de feu* in a post-war community that has no use for these "heroines" except as a "fortress of identity" and "bastion of Algerian social and religious-cultural identity" (Macmaster 337-9).

By implication if women should try and encroach on the sphere of men, the public domain of politics, they would risk weakening the walls built around the domestic space which was a guarantee of the purity, integrity and continuity of tradition: emancipation could only be the work of the devil and subversive western design. (341)

Ultimately, Macmaster believes that this return to a segregated identity after the war has not been sufficiently problematized, because of the difficulty for Algerians in "conceptualizing the post-independence order." It seems to me that in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, as well as in her Algerian quartet and her non-fiction works, Djébar is examining the implications of the failure of the FLN in terms of women's rights. The protagonist's refusal of memorialization in *La Femme sans sépulture* also appears to be part of a dialogue in fiction about how the "hero/heroine" position is impossible after the fraught gender politics of post-independence Algeria.

The image of the *porteuses de feu*, members of the FLN using their traditional dress and relatively protected status as a way of moving bombs or weapons, is one that plays on the stereotype of the veiled Muslim woman within 'Femmes d'Alger.' However, the agency and violence of the act simultaneously suggests a reframing of the stereotype and a changing relationship between the female body and terrorist violence. Women are able to be *porteuses de feu* because of their "privileged" status that was (and arguably still is) seen as a submissive role. In this "terrorist" role, the veil and *chadri* are not only chosen rather than prescribed, they allow for the women to pass unseen as agents of the independence movement. The bomb, the *feu*, is hidden, strapped to the body as if the body under the *chadri* did not really exist, especially as an "enemy body." Calling attention to the women's role as *porteuses* both foregrounds the role of the body and reminds the reader of its invisibility and unreadability to outsiders.

The telling and retelling of the past is strongly linked to the body in 'Femmes d'Alger,' and particularly to the uncovering of the scar as a *point de départ*. The hammam, often imagined by Djébar as a paradoxical space of both freedom and sequestration is the place where the characters are able to tell their stories.<sup>58</sup> When Leila, Sarah, Anne and Baya visit the hammam together, the noises and voices of the hammam provide a backdrop for the stories.

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<sup>58</sup> The hammam is frequently an intermediary space of public/private life in Djébar's writing. *Vaste est la prison* (Albin Michel, 1995) opens with a conversation in a hammam that positions the women's husbands as "the enemy," for example. In her chapter 'In Dialogue with Irigaray: *Ombre Sultane*, Priscilla Ringrose discusses the "hammam-womb" as an "inverted harem, where, as in Irigaray's maternal genealogy, feminine ritual (if not fertility) allows for transformation and renewal." Ringrose, *Assia Djébar; In Dialogue with Feminisms*, New York, Rodopi, 2006.

Sarah reste attentive en même temps au ruissellement toujours présent de l'eau qui transforme ici les nuits en murmure liquide ... Une porte s'entrouvre: le temps d'une ponctuation sonore, bidons que l'on heurte, éther troué d'un rire ou d'un gémississement. (FA 95)

The half-opened door and the air "pierced" by laughter insist on the kind of space in which women can transmit stories to one another; one that remains opaque and somewhat closed off from the outside world.

Sarah, a former political prisoner, reveals her wound "une cicatrice large et bleuâtre" to Anne. The sight of Sarah's scar identifies her as a victim and survivor of war and necessitates storytelling; the scar must have a story behind it, an episode that will explain Sarah's life to Anne, the French woman who "ignorait tout de la ville au cours de la période passée de feu et de meurtres: femmes dehors sous la mitraille, voiles blancs que trouaient des taches de sang..." (FA 98). Anne's point of view exemplifies the European spectator's paradoxical knowledge of Algeria. She "ignorait tout" but thinks immediately of "femmes dehors sous la mitraille, voiles blancs que trouaient des taches de sang." This imagined scene could be taken from a movie or a news item, but it shows that Anne does know **something**, even if it is connected to the public, street-level violence, rather than the hidden war of torture. Her denial, while at the same time alluding to the "feu" and "meurtres" of the period, is a fleeting acknowledgement of how the war (in this case, the urban war that took place in the streets of Algiers) is simultaneously remembered and repressed by the French population.

Therefore, by touching the scar on Sarah's abdomen, Anne evokes a past that is simultaneously known and unknown to her and triggers Sarah's memory. This shared experience is demonstrated by the merging of the two characters' internal dialogues.

Anne, quand Sarah la rejoignit et que, assise sur les genoux, elle fit glisser son pagne, aperçut la cicatrice large et bleuâtre de son amie.

- Une brûlure? demanda-t-elle en la touchant lentement, tout le long de l'abdomen.

Sarah ne répondit pas. "Blessure de guerre," devrait-elle dire, probablement sur un ton mélodramatique. Anne ignorait tout de la ville au cours de la période passée de feu et de meurtres: femmes dehors sous la mitraille, voiles blancs que trouaient des taches de sang... Comment Sarah avait épuisé sa jeunesse? Quelque part, ainsi, dans ces rues ouvertes puis dans une prison où des adolescentes avaient été entassées ... Était-ce pour répondre à cette interrogation qui s'était mise ces temps-ci à l'habiter qu'elle travaillait à ce projet, apparemment artistique, d'un documentaire sur la ville? Ses murs, ses balcons, l'ombre des prisons vides ... (FA 98)

This confusion of narrative points of view (which is shared between characters elsewhere in the story, but is usually clearly distinguished) makes it unclear whether or not Sarah actually replies to Anne's question – "Une brûlure?" – or whether her response is transmitted to the other woman by seeing and touching the scar, or whether it is Anne or Sarah who wonders about the personal motivations for Sarah's musical project. Anne appears to "see" the "prison où des adolescentes avaient été entassées" despite the absence of spoken response, revealing another, non-verbal way in which experience can be communicated. Does Sarah's scar work bidirectionally in this exchange, making Sarah flashback to her wartime experiences in a repetitive, traumatic way, **and**

revealing to Anne the images of Algiers that were previously unknown to her? The precision “Sarah ne répondit pas” indicates that the transmission that takes place is non-verbal but still narrative and revelatory.

In the case of Fatma, the water carrier, it is the moment of injury itself, rather than the revealed scar, that triggers her story. She falls in the hammam while the other women are there, badly fracturing her hand, and is transported to the hospital. Djebar’s narrative, like Russian dolls, contains other, smaller narratives awaiting the chance to unfold. ‘Pour un *diwan* de la porteuse d’eau’ is Fatma’s semi-delirious *récit* as she is allowed to speak for the first time, in a trance-like state due to pain and anesthesia: “Endormie, je suis l’endormie et l’on m’emporte, qui m’emporte”.<sup>59</sup> Her repeated question and response “Je suis ... suis-je” is the statement and question that form a refrain that threads through her narrative, which could be one of the songs that Sarah collects:

Au fond, géologie des mots perdus, mots-foetus à jamais engloutis, s’échapperont-ils, élytres noirs, se réveilleront pour m’écharder alors que je ne porte plus, plus jamais, de masque sur le visage dehors, des bidons sur la tête dedans, c’est fini, sont-ils noyés, la douleur des strates, voix seconde, sans tonalité ni vibration. (FA 110)

The concealed nature of the woman’s narrative, emphasized repeatedly with the terms “géologie,” “strates,” “au fond,” “engloutis,” and “noyés,” demonstrates the difficulty of access to this kind of story. The different connections between violence and narrative in this short story are apparent here: torture is a past, widespread violence, whose telling is remembered through the scar, whereas the water carrier’s narrative of poverty and disappointment is triggered by a singular, jarring fall. The archaic verbal form “écharder,” meaning to prick with thorns, exposes the kind of potentially violent risks that the woman is exposed to in this hallucinatory state in the hammam **and** if she ventures outside. Transported from the hammam to the hospital – the two major spaces of ‘Femmes d’Alger’ – Fatma’s story is liberated but, like the dialogue between Sarah and Anne, is not definitively voiced as she is hallucinating and then anesthetized. Her *diwan* is “englouti” and “noyé,” even in the midst of other female voices. Additionally, as in the exchange between Anne and Sarah, it is unclear whether Fatma speaks her story aloud or whether it comes to her in fragments or in a dream as she is taken to the hospital and remains unspoken.

The water carrier’s story of her escape from an arranged marriage and life as an “exclue” has the same quality of uncertainty as the “faltering” voices on Sarah’s tapes, as she fades in and out of consciousness. Her story may not be recorded, however, if her words are an internal monologue rather than a voiced *récit*. This unheard, unnarrated memory, the water carrier’s *diwan*, is an essential part of ‘Femmes d’Alger,’ insisting as it does on the long genealogy of pain that the War of Independence does nothing to alter; “Fêtes de l’indépendance: maisons ouvertes, rue en joie, je sors, je me crois libre. Mon visage dans une vitrine: “vieille, je suis vieille ... et j’ai faim!” (FA 116-7). The initial futility of the *porteur*’s story, indicated here by the ironic “je me crois” that casts doubt on her freedom, is somewhat transformed by being

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<sup>59</sup> A *diwan* (or *divan*) usually refers to a collection of poems written by the same poet. The *diwan* tradition often combines ascetic or mystical themes with themes of love or eroticism.

written into and set alongside other women's stories: this juxtaposition signals that the fleeting freedom expressed by Fatma is also part of a collective story of emancipation. The passage of time, however, is also inscribed on her body, as she registers both the change in her appearance and the physical hunger that corresponds to the longing for freedom that she feels even after her country has been "freed" by independence. Fatma represents an older generation of women whose experience of the war and independence is vastly different to that of the *porteuses de feu*, as well as a woman of a different class who must participate in subaltern work as a prostitute and hammam attendant. Additionally, the figure of the *porteuse d'eau* is a textual reminder of the servant figure in Delacroix's paintings from which the collection takes its name. In the 1832 painting, a servant pulls aside a curtain, allowing the spectator to see inside the harem. Djebar gives Fatma a similar role, as the class-differentiated woman who is allowed access and provides access, through her *diwan*, to the female space of the hammam.

The lament of the injured woman is contrasted with Leila's account of her time as a *porteuse de feu*, which begins, "Ils l'ont proclamé partout que j'avais été torturée ... L'électricité, tu sais toi aussi ce que c'est!..." (FA 111). As in Sarah's case, the injured body is the starting point for the story. "Le feu" carried by Leila and the other characters takes several forms; the electricity used to power the *gégène*, and the risk of explosion from the bombs strapped to the bodies of the women who act as *porteuses de feu*, bombs hidden under their *chadri*. The obvious lexical symmetry between the *porteuse d'eau* and the *porteuses de feu* is coupled with the fact that both Fatma and Leila are also carriers of stories that are individual but also emblematic of certain roles that the women have occupied. Leila, like Fatma, is in an altered state as she speaks, in withdrawal from heroin abuse. Their storytelling is one triggered by scars, by trauma, and emerges from an extreme physical state, giving the impression that some stories can only be told urgently, almost without the full participation of the storyteller. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry anchors the connection between individual pain and the public knowledge of the pain in doubt, in the inexpressibility of pain that affects the public's understanding. The often-quoted aphorism "to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has great pain is to have doubt" is usually given without the parenthetical coda: "(The doubt of other persons, here as elsewhere, amplifies the suffering of those already in pain.)" (Scarry 7). In her discussion of how the experience of pain is structured and read politically and socially in the aftermath of war, Scarry sees the wounded body as a form of remembrance: "What is remembered in the body is well remembered: the bodies of massive numbers of participants are deeply altered; those new alterations are carried forward into peace" (Scarry 112-3). These soldiers' wounds are "quietly displayed" and "permanently memorialize" the history of warfare.

While the display of the *porteuses de feu*'s scars is an important narratological aspect of 'Femmes d'Alger,' the questions of what they memorialize and how they memorialize it are more complicated than in Scarry's account, in part because she is referring (in this part of *The Body in Pain*) to battlefield injuries of (male) veterans. Unable to overtly memorialize specific battles or victories during the War of Independence, the women's scars in 'Femmes d'Alger' are more like reminders of a clandestine war that must be physically remembered and wordlessly transmitted because it cannot enter into the national history due to the rejection of the role of women as combatants during the war. Additionally, the scars memorialize a failed attempt at liberation for Algerian women like Sarah and Leila who are now located "dans leur appartement" rather than in the public space of Algiers.

Scarry's perception of the doubt that surrounds the account of another person's pain is complicated by Talal Asad's reading of her work in *Formations of the Secular*. Beginning with Scarry's assertion that pain is ultimately un conveyable, Asad discusses whether or not a person can have certainty or some other, less certain, knowledge of another's pain, and how this doubt-filled communication of pain translates into a shared event. He locates the making of narrative and the remaking of self after trauma in the responses of others, in having an audience who can and will listen to one's account of pain. Pain is communicated both relationally and socially. Asad writes that

[s]ufferers are also social persons (animals) and their suffering is partly constituted by the way they inhabit, or are constrained to inhabit, their relationships with others. Pain is not always an insufferable agony or a chronic condition. There are varieties of incommensurable experiences we collect together under the label "pain" (or "suffering") as though it were, like agency, a single thing, an ultimate vindication of corporeal reality. But as a social relationship pain is more than an experience. It is part of what creates the conditions of action and experience (Asad 84-5).<sup>60</sup>

That pain is "more than an experience," and that it can create conditions of identity and relationships after the fact helps to demonstrate how the interactions around wounded bodies work in 'Femmes d'Alger,' and why the experience of torture can only be communicated through another: the "incommensurable experiences" that Asad describes are based in "corporeal reality," yet have another social reality that Djébar's characters show not by relinquishing agency but by revealing the non-singularity of agency. This shared experience of pain is not necessarily a positive attribute, or a solution to anything, but does reveal a less doubtful, more collective way of talking about the body's memory of pain. The sharedness, or mutual readability of trauma in 'Femmes d'Alger' is revealed in the way that stories overlap or rely on the transmittee to complete or fill in the blanks of the narrative. Leila's story implicates her interlocutor, Sarah, with the exclamation "L'électricité, tu sais toi aussi ce que c'est!," just as Sarah's story interpellates Anne's foggy or nonexistent "memories" of Algiers during the war. The reader is reminded of the opening pages of the story, of Ali's dream where the sound of a motor threatens a blindfolded woman, perhaps Sarah herself. The "ils" of Leila's opening sentence in the above passage is ambiguous. She is not avoiding naming her torturers – presumably French soldiers – but those who announced to others that she had been tortured. We are given a glimpse of how the public narrative of torture is transmitted: as gossip. It is difficult to gauge whether Leila is angered by this circulation of information, or why "they" spread the news: to defame Leila or to make her a heroine.

The idea that trauma can only be voiced through or during another extreme experience – Anne's suicide attempt, Leila's withdrawal, Fatma's broken hand – is problematic. This layered and repeated experience of pain and suffering that the female characters of 'Femmes d'Alger'

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<sup>60</sup> Asad cites Susan Brison's chapter 'Outliving Ourselves: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity' to further the idea of sharing pain with the other: "In order to construct self-narratives, we need not only the words with which to tell our stories but also as audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. This aspect of remaking a self in the aftermath of trauma highlights the dependency of the self on others and helps to explain why it is so difficult for survivors to recover when others are unwilling (or unable?) to listen to what they endured". Brison in *Feminists Rethink the Self*, ed. Diana T. Meyers. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997: 21-2.

share highlights the extremely pessimistic view that Djébar takes on the social position of women in post-Independence Algeria. The experience of trauma is transmitted, but not with relief or nostalgia for an event that is in the past, but in the repetition of and reference to a present that is equally fraught. With this overlapping of traumatic and painful events, Djébar narrativizes both the constant return and repetition of the traumatic event, and the way in which one event can come to represent or stand in for another. In *La Femme sans sépulture*, a novel written twenty-two years after the initial publication of *Femmes d'Alger*, the transmission of torture will become even more liminal and hallucinatory, as the tortured body speaks from beyond death.

Narration of the wartime event will “always cling” to the scarred body part (Scarry 113). In *The Body in Pain*, the acknowledgement of the singular body as entering into a familial and then a national discourse of war demonstrates how personal and public spheres become confused with regards to the body. The exterior sign of torture inflicted by another can be seen and interpreted by others, an act which necessarily puts the body into narrative. In the case of tortured female bodies in Djébar’s texts, several points complicate this relationship between the body and history. Firstly, the characters’ belonging to the “successful” nationalist cause makes their bodies heroic and therefore part of a narrative of martyrdom.<sup>61</sup> In ‘Femmes d’Alger,’ the rejection of a nationalistic narrative is less explicit, seen in Fatma’s failed “escape” at the end of the war, and in Leila’s addiction, which is portrayed as a kind of prison. In *La Femme sans sépulture*, Zoulikha rejects this narrative, all the while realizing that it is an inevitable process. Her dead body will be taken up in peacetime as a symbol of torture revisited; she is a “good” victim of torture, in that she died rather than speak. In ‘Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement,’ there is also a narrative of martyrdom, but it is contextualized by the overwhelmingly negative social situations in which the female characters, several of whom are *mujahidate*, find themselves. Again, the public narrative that is supposed to “cling” to Sarah and Leila’s scars is heroic, but the validity and legibility of that reading is criticized. The all-female space of the hammam, where the scar is displayed, also questions the clear-cut division between a private and public space, as the hammam occupies a space between the two: it allows for privacy but also is a place where public narratives about bodies are on display.

### THE SCARRED MALE BODY IN ‘LA FEMME QUI PLEURE’

‘La Femme qui pleure,’ the short story that follows ‘Femmes d’Alger,’ reveals the male body as the site of another latent story connected to a scar. In the title and epigraph of this story, a complicated intersection between European culture and personal storytelling takes place, as it previously has between the narrative of ‘Femmes d’Alger’ and the Delacroix painting. The story’s epigraph reads “‘Cette danse ininterrompue de lignes brisées.’” A. Adamov, à propos du tableau de Picasso: *La femme qui pleure*” (FA 131). Here, Djébar cites Arthur Adamov, a

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<sup>61</sup> For a historical analysis of the role of women in the Algerian War of Independence and its aftermath, see Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the ‘Emancipation’ of Muslim Women, 1954-62*, Manchester University Press, 2010.

Russian playwright and immigrant, talking about Picasso, a Spanish immigrant to France, many of whose paintings remain in French museums.<sup>62</sup> Djébar's borrowing of Picasso's series of portraits, all named *La Femme qui pleure* for the title and epigraph of the story uses its "lignes brisées" and "danse ininterrompue" as an allegory for Algerian post-war bodies and stories. On a beach, an unnamed woman and man sit and recount their lives. Although it is the woman who tells the man (her lover? a stranger?) of the violence she has suffered at the hands of her husband, it is **his** body that is marked by violence. The irony of the epigraph becomes apparent when the two characters' "dance" is interrupted by the man's arrest. The short story is marked by two oppositional moments; one of covering up, as the woman veils herself before leaving the beach, and becomes anonymous and safe within the veil, and another of uncovering, as she imagines touching the scar on the man's leg.

Elle s'enveloppe entièrement de l'étoffe qui résiste puis qui, en se froissant, crissa imperceptiblement: l'homme, toujours silencieux, nota malgré le grondement diffuse de la mer ces bruissements (il avait avivé son ouïe, après toutes ces années de prison). ... Du sac encore, elle sortit une sorte de mouchoir, à moitié couvert de dentelle blanche, qu'elle plia en triangle. Elle le posa sur l'arête du nez, le noua sur la nuque, rabattant le haut du drap soyeux sur ses cheveux coupés très courts (FA 124-5).

Within the description of the woman covering her body in order to return to the city, the narrator reveals that the man has been a prisoner. This parenthesized revelation resonates on several levels; it connects this story historically and geographically to the previous stories of the collection, which all mention the War of Independence and its attendant deaths and imprisonments; it offers an explanation for the scar on the man's body, intimating that it was inflicted during his time in prison; and it makes a glancing comparison between the "années de prison" that have heightened the man's sense of hearing, and the fabric "prison" that the woman must take on in order to appear in public.

Her veiling is further nuanced by the scene of uncovering that reveals the man's scar, and by the final paragraphs of the story, where the man is taken away by the police while the woman is left "free," secure underneath her veil. By establishing a tension between the binary of freedom and imprisonment, Djébar moves away from a condemnation of the veil and invites a reading of the veiled body that is necessarily complex and hesitant; while questions of imprisonment and restriction are central in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, it is not the case that wearing the veil is inherently a restrictive move.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Picasso's *La Femme qui pleure* exists in several versions, an oil painting (1937, Tate Gallery, Liverpool) and in several etchings and prints (1937). The figure from the portrait is integrated into Picasso's large oil on canvas *Guernica* (1937), initially shown at the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris International Exposition. Picasso's mistress, Dora Maar, was the model for the portrait, and Picasso spoke several times about her identity as a "weeping woman": "For me she's the weeping woman. For years I've painted her in tortured forms, not through sadism, and not with pleasure, either; just obeying a vision that forced itself on me. It was the deep reality, not the superficial one." Brigitte Léal, "Portraits of Dora Maar," 396; "Dora, for me, was always a weeping woman.... And it's important, because women are suffering machines." Malraux, André: *Picasso's Mask*, 138.

<sup>63</sup> For a further analysis of the role of the veil during the Algerian War of Independence, see Frantz Fanon, "L'Algérie se dévoile" in *L'An V de la révolution algérienne*.

Assia Djébar's writing about the veil – at least in her fictional texts – has tended towards a relatively Eurocentric point of view that posits the veil as a social and political restriction for those who wear it. In *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962) and *Ombre sultane* (1987), for example, being unaccompanied, but veiled in the city streets conjures both fear of *dévoilement* (as happens to Cherifa in *Les Enfants*) and a sense of freedom from the gaze. In later fictional works, such as *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* (1997) and *Vaste est la prison* (1995), the veil seems more explicitly rejected as a marker of gender inequality and otherness. In *Les Nuits de Strasbourg*, a novel that explores the erotics of otherness, the veil is one of the elements that appears to be rejected in Thelja's journey – perceived by her as an escape - to Strasbourg and her affair with François.<sup>64</sup>

In *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*'s final text, 'Regard interdit, son coupé' she describes the post-Independence *dévoilement* as a conflicted experience for many women: L'évolution la plus visible des femmes arabes, tout au moins dans les villes, a donc été d'enlever le voile. Nombre de femmes, souvent après une adolescence ou toute une jeunesse cloîtrée, ont vécu concrètement l'expérience du dévoilement. Le corps avance hors de la maison et pour la première fois il est ressenti comme "exposé" à tous les regards: la démarche devient raidie, le pas hâtif, l'expression du regard contractée. L'arabe dialectal transcrit l'expérience d'une façon significative: "je ne sors plus *protégée* (C'est à dire voilée, recouverte)," dira la femme qui se libère du drap; "je sors *déshabillée* ou même *dénudée*". Le voile qui soustrayait aux regards et de fait ressenti comme "habit en soi," ne plus l'avoir, c'est être totalement exposée. (FA 232-3)<sup>65</sup>

Wearing a veil, as the woman in 'La Femme qui pleure' does, is not a simple case of imprisonment, or necessarily a restriction, but a form of protection, of concealing not just the body, but the perceived threat of sexuality that it contains. In 'Femmes d'Alger' the idea of going out in public, of the paradox of freedom and exposure in the postface is echoed in the water carrier's story, in which she refers to herself as the "dévoilée," when she flees a forced marriage to move to the city, where she is imprisoned in a number of low-paying jobs. At Independence she "feels free" but recognizes that she has aged when she sees her unveiled reflection in a window (FS 110-7). The woman's veiling functions in the story as a reversal of the movement of the uncovering of the man's scar. It also reverses the story within a story that the woman has just narrated, that of the violence she has undergone. As she covers her mouth and ties the scarf around her neck, a symbolic silencing takes place, erasing the narrative unveiling that had previously occurred.

To return to the uncovering of the man's scar is to examine both the narrative drive of the injured body and its sensuality. The description of the unnamed man's scar is the focal point of the story (it takes place on the second day of the couple's three days of meeting on the beach), and represents the threat of surveillance and violence that is carried out by his subsequent arrest.

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<sup>64</sup> For further discussion of the veil in Djébar's work, see Gordon Bigelow, "Revolution and Modernity: Assia Djébar's *Les Enfants du nouveau monde*", *Research in African Literature*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer 2003):13-37, Anne Rocca, *Assia Djébar, le corps invisible: voir sans être vue*, Paris, Harmattan, 2003.

<sup>65</sup> A similar scene of exposure to the public eye, even when the veil is worn, is described in *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962), Chapter 4.

As in 'Femmes d'Alger,' the scar allows a space to talk about oneself; "L'eau salée avait cicatrisé sa blessure; une ligne brunâtre traversait le côté droit de son dos. Elle posa son regard sur ce trait irrégulier quand elle parla." (FA 125-6). As in 'Femmes d'Alger,' looking at or touching the scar allows for narrative to take place. The scar is also an identifying feature, one which establishes (unspecified) information about the character's past. The verb "poser" suggests that the women's gaze is almost equivalent to physical touch.

Je passerai ma bouche sèche sur cette cicatrice du dos, je prendrai mon temps, je dessinerai la trace de la blessure avec ma langue ... On m'a "cassé la face," on ne m'a pas défigurée, j'ai de nouveau une bouche, j'ai de nouveau des lèvres, une langue. (FA 128)

As well as allowing the woman to speak, the man's scar also becomes the point of sexual contact that the woman imagines, as if it were an erogenous zone: "Imaginant qu'à peine l'œil, et à sa suite, le corps, débarrassé de la voilette, puis de voile entière, la femme ne peut passer qu'au stade du risque fatal, découvrir l'autre œil, l'œil-sexe" (FA 133).<sup>66</sup> With this contact, the "tracing" of the wound, the woman's body can be put back together, re-membered. Her "broken" face and body are reconstructed by the man's gaze and, crucially, by her own narrative that is created by the man's scar. Being put back together, or re-membered, is a result of the story that is made available through contact with the scar, and is a movement that can occur, according to the women, because she has not been "défigurée"; that is, the idea of herself as a "figure," as a person capable of figuring in a narrative and then retelling that narrative, has not been destroyed by violence. As well as the oppositional movements of covering and uncovering, the seemingly paradoxical role of violence is also in operation in this short story. Violence dismantles but the trace of (another's) violence also allows for a restructuring to take place.

Just as the title of Delacroix's painting was ironized and the gaze on Algerian women subverted in 'Femmes d'Alger,' the reference here to Picasso's painting helps define the bodies in this story. It also adds historical context that reveals Djébar's concern for collective memory and the depiction of the traumatic scenes in art and literature. Picasso's *La Femme qui pleure* is not one but a series of paintings that are thematically and visually linked to the much larger painting, *Guernica*. In both the *Femme qui pleure* series and *Guernica* – one given without historical context, the other with the specific referent of the 1937 German bombing of Guernica – the subject's body and face are fractured by grief, dismantled to the point of abstraction. In the story 'La Femme qui pleure,' the woman has also undergone this kind of destructuring violence: she reveals that she has been beaten by her husband. Her face has been broken – "on m'a cassé la face" – but has not been "défigurée," she has not completely lost face.<sup>67</sup> The "on a cassé" here parallels the similarly evasive "ils ont proclamé" in 'Femmes d'Alger'; both impersonal pronouns deny agency to the person committing the violent act. The former term suggests that what has been broken can be put back together again, just as the viewer's eye works on the Picasso painting to reconstruct the woman's face, reduced to lines and shapes. Once again, the

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<sup>66</sup> See Malek Chebel, *Le Corps dans la tradition au Maghreb*, Chapter VI "Le corps et la séduction" for analysis of the gaze and its eroticism. Djébar also outlines the erotic potential of the eye and the body's other, symbolic eyes in 'Regard interdit, son coupé': "Il suffit d'un rien ... pour que les autres yeux du corps (seins, sexe et nombril) risquent à leur tour d'être exposés dévisagés." (FA 246)

<sup>67</sup> See earlier discussion of *The Body in Pain*, and also Scarry 36-7.

scar is the starting point for this reconstruction; the mouth and tongue that trace the scar are recreated by the gesture; “j’ai de nouveau une bouche, j’ai de nouveau des lèvres, une langue”. The scar is clearly eroticized in this restructuring encounter, as the woman imagines touching the scar with her mouth and tongue, sensitive and sexualized zones. Does the scar remain cicatrized and unfeeling in this encounter, or is the pleasure of touch mutual? This question goes to issues of agency and gender in the story too: is the man himself a text to be somehow read by the woman’s touch, and an interlocuteur for her story of violence, or does he also take up the role of storyteller/transmitter through his scarred body? The re-memberment that takes place between the couple does not mean a healing of the tortured body, but appears as a way of reuniting the female body with authority and the ability to speak.

By looking at the man’s scar, the woman is able to speak and although the narrative shifts between the woman’s speech and thoughts and the man’s perspective of her dressing, it is her story that is told thanks to (*grace à*) the scar. In ‘La Femme qui pleure’ it is not specified whether the scar is a result of torture, or some other kind of violence, but the appearance of the police and their dogs hints strongly at some kind of state-sanctioned violence, that the man has temporarily escaped from a prison to which he is returned at the end of the story. As the woman watches and cries, “les silhouettes des militaires s’éloignèrent, entourant l’homme au torse nu” (FA 138), his own public presence as a naked figure continues as the woman is covered up and therefore ignored by the police who take him. At this point the woman becomes the figure of the Picasso portrait. In the portrait ‘La Femme qui pleure,’ grief is destructuring and renders the mourner unrecognizable.

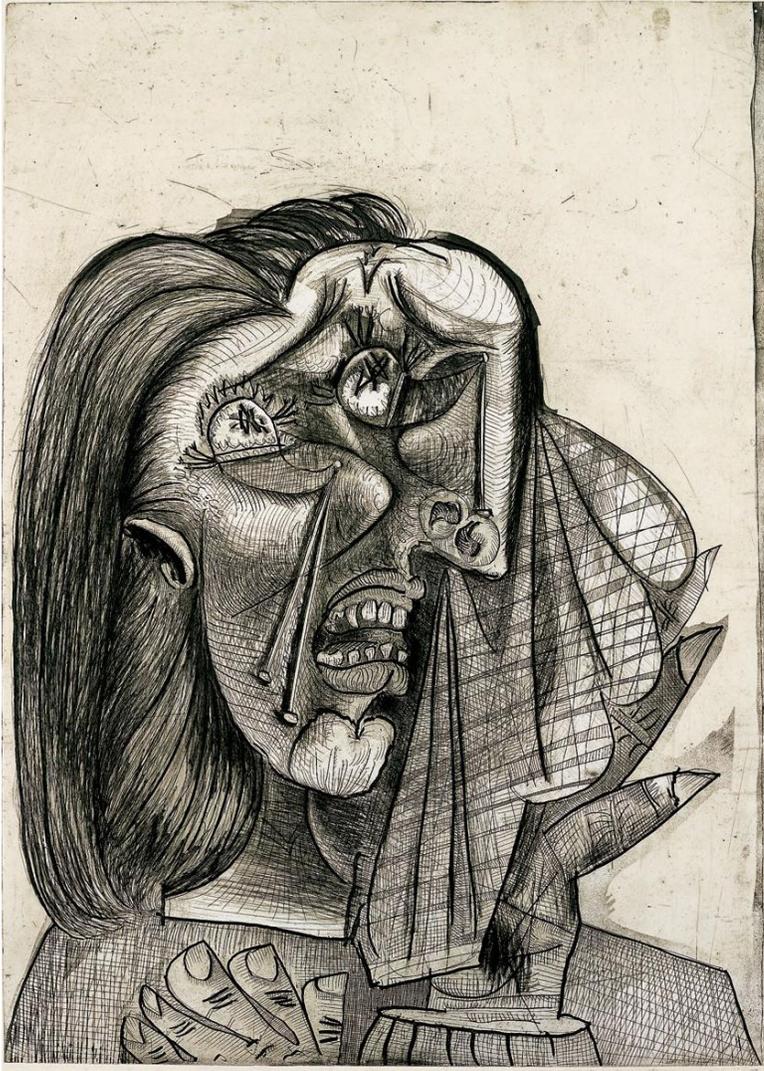


Figure 2 - Pablo Picasso, *La Femme qui pleure I*, 1937 (Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland)

In the final section of *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, 'Regard interdit, son coupé,' Djebbar returns to the connection between the body and violence. The *porteuses de feu* are those who have left the stereotypical harem of daily life to participate, bodily, in the War of Independence, but they are also those whose bodies were the most at risk as sites of violence that was aimed not only at the individual, but at the institution of Algerian tradition. Djebbar makes a final allusion to Picasso's paintings and drawings of crying women, images that celebrate the unveiling of bodies as a "renaissance de ces femmes à leur corps" (FA 260). In contrast to the possible depiction of emancipation by a European painter, however, the focus of the postface is on the question of agency and choice for these women.

Il s'agit de se demander si les porteuses de bombes, en sortant du harem, ont choisi par pur hasard leur mode d'expression le plus direct: leurs corps exposés dehors et elles-mêmes s'attaquant aux autres corps. En fait elles ont sorti ces

bombes comme si elles sortaient leurs propres seins, et ces grenades ont éclaté contre elles, tout contre. Certaines d'entre elles se sont retrouvées sexes électrocutés, écorchés par la torture. (FA 261)

The exposure of the female body to violence and to the gaze of those who will see their breasts and genitals in the aftermath of the explosion of the bombs they are carrying is a reminder of the intimacy of this violence act. The phrase “tout contre,” one that resonates elsewhere in Djébar’s writing, draws attention once again to the hand or lips of the other touching the scar, the trace of the act of heroism (if this term can ever be used in Djébar’s later work) and the act of barbarity on and towards the body.<sup>68</sup> The question of the scarred body as evidence, and that of the violated body as a sexual object and desiring subject, will be taken up frequently in testimonial texts written after torture.

*Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement* and *La Femme sans sépulture* were both written before the escalation of violence in Algeria in the 1990s, following cancelled presidential elections in the face of rising support for the fundamentalist Islamic party, but are also, because of their complicated stories of publication, responses to this violence. *Femmes d’Alger* was originally published in 1980, then again, with the addition of one story, in 2002. *La Femme sans sépulture* was written in the early 80s, but remained unfinished and unpublished until 2002.<sup>69</sup> As texts that respond to civil violence in Algeria, both refuse the idea of the scar as “carried forward into peace” as the very notion of peace – a period free of war and the threat of violence – proves impossible in almost all of Djébar’s writing, aware as she is about the continuity of violence in one form or another in the society she describes (Scarry 113). The same confusion between the private and the public, political sphere takes place in reading the scarred body as it has already been read or understood in the act of torture, during which the intimate act of one person inflicting pain on another is allegedly carried out as a way for the state to obtain knowledge for the “public good.” While Scarry condemns this false justification of torture as the “fiction of power” in which “it is not the pain but the regime that is incontestably real, not the pain but the regime that is total, not the pain but the regime that is able to eclipse all else,” the same conflation is criticized as being projected onto the scarred body in the aftermath of torture (Scarry 56). I return to the issue of how the nationalistic discourse establishes a fiction of power in Djébar’s texts later in this chapter.

#### **“LE PASSAGE SOUS LA TENTE”: THE TORTURED BODY AS RECOVERABLE SITE OF MEMORY IN *LA FEMME SANS SÉPULTURE***

In Assia Djébar’s 2002 novel, *La Femme sans sépulture* the tortured female body becomes the central lack of the text, a novel about mourning and the connection between identity, family and a sense of place. In contrast to ‘*Femmes d’Alger*,’ in which the protagonists are framed as survivors of violence, the main characters of *La Femme sans sépulture*, Zoulikha, her daughters, and the narrator, are not survivors but people who exist only in terms of aftermath.

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<sup>68</sup> See for example *Ces voix qui m’assiègent : en marge de ma francophonie*, Albin Michel, 1999.

<sup>69</sup> As Anne Donadey points out in “L’expression littéraire de la transmission du traumatisme dans *La Femme sans sépulture* d’Assia Djébar”, Djébar’s epilogue is a kind of shadow response to the violence of the attacks against the US of September 11, 2001. The epilogue is dated “June 1981, Paris, septembre 2001, New York.”

Their identity and stories emerge from the death of Zoulikha, underscoring the fact that it is not uniquely survivors whose bodies take on narrative ability. The dead and mourners are given this role in the novel, although the emphasis is on their status as port-mortem figures in the wake of trauma and death that they have not survived, precisely because they are unable to do the kind of grief work that would need a body/corpse as a locus of mourning. The absence of Zoulikha's body is the central point around which the narrative is structured, although her voice persists beyond death in the form of several monologues directed at her daughters, her body is what both her family and the text attempt to recuperate. The retelling and transmission of Zoulikha's story in *La Femme sans sépulture*, which pivots around an incident of extreme violation and violence – Zoulikha's torture and death – works towards a remaking of self and narrative through the writing of trauma. Djébar does not argue for a positive reading or recuperation of trauma, stressed by Zoulikha's refusal of a site of memory in her name, but her turn to a narrative that is often liminal and ambiguous suggests that its transmission can be read as a way of remaking bodies and stories that have been unmade – by which I mean fragmented, disallowed or lost - by a traumatic event.

Zoulikha, the “woman without a burial place” was a *moujahida* in Césarée who took to the *maquis* during the War of Independence and disappeared.<sup>70</sup> At the novel's outset, she is presumed dead; arrested and killed by French soldiers, although the absence of her body makes mourning her death difficult, if not impossible for those who remain: her daughters, Hania and Mina and her friend, Dame Lionne, as well as the narrator, the “étrangère pas si étrangère,” who has returned to Césarée, her birthplace, to make a film.<sup>71</sup> The narrator and the other women of Césarée who knew Zoulikha attempt to remember and recuperate her by telling stories about her. Their narratives are intercalated with Zoulikha's monologues as her dead body is able to give voice to her own story of death. Zoulikha's narrative interruptions are not exactly flashbacks, although the novel does not have a linear progression. It is unclear whether the voice emanates from a distinct place and time in the past – the days following Zoulikha's murder – or from a narrative present. Is Zoulikha's voice transmitted through her daughters or does it even exist outside any temporality defined within the text, since her monologues are delivered from the non-space and non-time of death? The difficulty in locating the position of Zoulikha as a speaker adds to the irreality and haunting quality of her words. Zoulikha is referred to throughout the novel as “sans sepulture”; the dead woman's identity is tied to the lack of a tombstone. However, Zoulikha, in her monologues, defines the absence of a memorial differently; by defying attempts to affix her body to one identity of place, through torture, but also through memorialization, she rejects instrumentalization as a hero and *mujahida* and retains some measure of freedom. This rejection is seemingly linked to the post-war refusal to recognize the role of woman as combatants during the War of Independence, an issue that resurfaced during the 1990s, when Djébar was writing *La Femme sans sépulture*, amongst the violent actions of the Front Islamique du Salut and its sympathizers and the equally violent repressions carried out by the FLN.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Zoulikha Oudai was a real-life *moujahida* from Césarée who became an almost mythical figure of heroism after her disappearance.

<sup>71</sup> The narrator is a stand-in for Djébar, as she explains in the preface to *La Femme sans sépulture*. The text's narrative point of view changes, and so she is alternatively referred to in the first and third persons, although never by name. In the novel's prologue and epilogue, the narrator/Djébar refers to her time spent in Césarée filming *La Zerda, ou les chants de l'oubli*, which was released in 1983.

<sup>72</sup> See Benjamin Stora, *La Guerre invisible : Algérie années 90*, Presses de Sciences-Po, Paris, 2001.

*La Femme sans sépulture* has as backdrop both the Algerian Civil War and its attendant violences and also the revived interest in torture in French public discourse.<sup>73</sup> Despite (or perhaps because of) this unprecedented discourse around torture, Zoulikha avoids describing her torture in detail during her monologues. The absence of scenes of torture – another absence in *La Femme sans sépulture* that paradoxically takes up a lot of space – is problematic in that it leaves open the possibility (to the reader, to her interlocutors within the text) to imagine what happened to Zoulikha. She addresses her daughter directly, speaking about the moment of her death.

Ne songe pas plus tard, ma chérie, à mon passage sous la tente: il fut ordinaire, il fut inévitable. Ton père est mort, la poitrine mitraillée et le sourire aux lèvres: il était pur, le feu l'a préservé au dernier éclair. Moi, si je n'ai pas eu cette chance de mourir en combattant, c'est sans doute parce que mon corps leur faisait peur.

Normal qu'ils s'y acharnent, qu'ils tentent de le morceler!...

Je ne me souviens même pas de leur liste de questions inlassables. (FS 199)

With the macabre irony of the expression, “il fut ordinaire, il fut inévitable,” the fear of Zoulikha’s body is translated into occluded, euphemized sexual violence. The “fear” that she describes is linked to her female body, juxtaposed here with the body of her husband, “lucky” enough to have been killed in combat rather than under torture. Using the phrase “passage sous la tente” to describe the movement from life to death equally flattens the horror of torture, the preposition “sous” suggesting that the “longue durée” of the torture was merely a passage from one place to another, hidden and/or sheltered by the tent (FS 197). The account continues:

Dès qu'ils ont commencé à me mettre à la question – dans une tente, dans une cabane, je ne sais, aveuglée étais-je en descendant de l'hélicoptère, j'avais, il est vrai, délibérément, par instinct irréductible, oui, j'avais fermé les paupières. Dès qu'ils m'ont interrogée, une première fois – une phrase inutile, inefficace, j'ai su la nécessité du rite: ils posaient bien déjà les fils de la gégène, ils apportaient les bidons d'eau pour la baignoire, ils aiguisaient les couteaux dans le crissement convenu, tout cela, au fond, pour prendre les mesures de mon corps. (FS 199-200)

The euphemization of torture continues with the expression “la question,” and the verb “put to” (me mettre à), that once again suggests a movement towards something, rather than a passive victim position. The unsurprising evocations of the *gégène* and the *baignoire* are, as in ‘Femmes d’Alger,’ reminders of the pervasiveness and collectivity of torture carried out by the French army. Zoulikha describes her torture as something “necessary,” a “rite” during which the body is measured and found to be “convenu” conventional, or fitting to the occasion. The body is measured in its ability to tolerate pain, but the expression “prendre les mesures” also refers to the sizing up of Zoulikha’s body in which the torturers take part.

The torture victim/torturer roles that would be expected are further confused, as is the agency that goes along with being able to speak and bear witness to the act of torture. Zoulikha closes her eyes, even though she is already “aveuglée”: this gesture, along with her own silencing of her voice illustrate her refusal of the stakes of torture, of the “phrase inutile” that claims to be the “question” of torture, the answer to which will supposedly put an end to the passage from life to death. Zoulikha’s disdain for this ideology is clear, and is amply demonstrated by her repeated refusal to recount the details of the torture carried out on her body.

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<sup>73</sup> See Introduction, and also Mireille Rosello, ‘Farança-Algéries ou Djazaïr-frances?: Fractales et mésententes fructueuses,’ *Modern Language Notes* 118.4 (2003): 787-806

De la longue durée de la torture et des sévices, ne te dire que le noir qui m'enveloppait. Peut-être étais-je étendue dans une tente, peut-être dans une cahute de campagne – le camp immense des suspects, des arrêtés pour les interrogatoires, ne semblait pas loin. Ils s'étaient querellés entre eux, moi couchée: l'un d'eux dont je n'avais pas reconnu la voix avait crié, par deux fois (la seconde fois, plus bas, ou avais-je peut-être, entre-temps, perdu conscience), que ma détention était "illégal," qu'au camp (je n'ai pas retenu le nom) je devais être transportée! (FS 197)

Further, the non-description ("ne te dire **que** le noir"), or rather the description that **only** tells of nothingness/darkness, along with the injunction not to think about her torture ("ne songe pas") alludes to the work of memory and forgetting that has taken place during the war. Reminding someone to forget something – as Zoulikha does to Mina – is a different way of defining traumatic memory. The trauma, and the "darkness" that often surrounds it are made present in Zoulikha's monologue through the refusal to narrate them. This refusal is a way of sparing her daughter, but also a vivid way of recounting her own refusal of trauma at the moment of the torture itself. Zoulikha closes her eyes, refusing to be fully present to what is happening to her.

In spite of the linguistic *esquisses* that Zoulikha's disembodied voice makes to avoid describing her torture in physical terms, the euphemism of the "passage sous la tente" is not an avoidance of suffering on her part, but a way to shield her daughters' eyes from the moment of death. In this way, Zoulikha's storytelling is always within her control; she refuses to recount her body's loss of agency, her passivity at the hands of the torturers, but reclaims her voice, her "monologue." Zoulikha's *prise de parole* lessens the tragedy of her epithet "sans sépulture" and makes the reader wonder if a physical marker of her death is what the novel's characters are looking for. Instead of a corpse/*corps*, a memorial, Zoulikha's legacy is her ability to narrate and hold onto her voice long after it has been taken from her. Her determination to hold onto her voice is connected to the physical reality of torture: the "reche et humide" rope that she bites down on is an attachment to the material world of the makeshift torture chamber and a way of keeping her voice to herself.

Ma voix qui m'avait échappée; qui gémissait, seule, comme sans lien ni racines; qui hurla une seule fois, la seconde d'après, je me souviens que je réussis à mordre, tout près, une corde reche et humide. Ma voix ... Ma voix ... (FS 200).

The strength of her monologue resides also in its repeatability, an important aspect of the personal, oral story that is explicitly stated by the narrator in *La Femme sans sépulture*; "L'histoire contée la première fois, c'est pour la curiosité, les autres fois, c'est pour ... pour la délivrance" (FS 171).

The violent, visceral description of the disposal and decomposition of Zoulikha's body is made more disturbing by the juxtaposition of the dead, tortured body and the erotic body.

Je n'ai plus entendu mes bourreaux, je ne percevais plus mes rôles... Est-ce que, si cela continuait, la torture sur mon corps aurait le même effet que presque trois ans de nuits d'amour avec trois époux successif? Ou cette confusion était-elle sacrilège? Torture ou volupté, ainsi réduite soudain à rien, un corps – peau jetée en dépouille, à même le sol gras –, la mémoire des derniers instants malaxe tout monstrueusement: torture ou volupté, mon corps – peut-être parce que corps de femme et ayant enfanté tant de fois – se met à ouvrir ses plaies, ses issues, à

déverser son flux, en somme il s'exhale, s'émiette, se vide sans pour autant s'épuiser! Du moins pas encore... Peut-être qu'il cherche dans le noir, et hors du temps, quelque métamorphose ? (FS 219)

The rejection of enregistrement of the traumatic event continues (“Je n’ai plus entendu ... je ne percevais plus”) but there is a slippage from pain to sexual pleasure within the space of one sentence, so that the inability to hear is perhaps caused by an excess of pleasure rather than pain. The question “Torture ou volupté” hangs over the description of her death and subsequent monologues, as her body, figured here as a sexual and a maternal body, literally comes apart. How does this “sacrilège” change Zoulikha’s role as a transmitter of a torture narrative or as a lost heroine? Is this language designed to distant her from the role of heroine and maternal figure that her daughters wish to emphasize, or does it underscore once again her gender, and, simultaneously, that of the men who tortured her to death? Her exhalation and the emptying of her body in erotic terms blurs the lines between different categories of experience, and suggests once more, in a disturbing way, the difficulty in narrativizing torture in terms that can be appropriated for a larger, more palatable story.

The fact that Zoulikha can tell her own story after death, and that she is conscious of the ends to which her body and her memory may be put, adds an ironic dimension to her haunting of her daughters and the text. The dead woman is remade in her daughter Hania – whose name ironically means “at peace” or “at rest” – who looks like her and takes over her role as a mother after Zoulikha is taken. Hania’s haunting, the fact that the dead can communicate and exist after death, is represented by Hania as both a positive and negative situation, the presence of a ghost can be a harassment or a deliverance. After searching unsuccessfully for Zoulikha’s body, Hania says of her illness, seemingly caused by the post-mortem presence of her mother:

Etre habitée: d’autres femmes autrefois, disait-on, étaient “peuplées,” “habitées” - en arabe, on les surnommait les *meskounates* – mais il s’agissait à l’époque d’un djinn, bon ou mauvais esprit avec lequel ces malheureuses devaient composer, ou se soumettre en silence, quelquefois tout au long de leur vie. Une sorte d’amant invisible, maléfique, les dominant, les harcelant de l’intérieur. Les autres femmes alors savaient, se taisaient, en complices effrayés malgré elles. (FS 65)

The good or bad spirit that is like a lover, but also malevolent, who is singular, but also somehow plural as it “populates” the haunted woman, embodies the ambivalence that Hania feels about what finding Zoulikha will mean to her. Along with certain physical symptoms that suggest a haunting, a physical presence that connects Hania to her mother, there is also a sharing of knowledge between the two. Hania is in many ways allowed to speak for her mother and to stand in for her, even though Zoulikha’s own voice is also present. But Hania and Zoulikha disagree on the issue of commemoration: the former wants to establish a grave for a mother, a place where she can be remembered and mourned as a hero of the war of independence. This kind of physical location assigned to her death would allow for Hania to get rid of her mother’s ghost, to literally “lay her to rest.” Zoulikha, however, does not want to be relegated to History in this way. She refuses the idea of becoming a statue. Her preference would have been to be left outside, her body, “opened up” by torture emitting a “blinding white midday light.” Zoulikha does not ask for a complete absence of physical/concrete remembrance, but that her own body, not an object that would act as a placeholder or a metonym for the person it commemorates, that would be the

thing that remains. Hania's quest in the forest to find her mother's body, after Algeria's independence is declared several years after her death, echoes this need for the body to be seen (and heard) rather than replaced by something else that would, in Zoulikha's terms, silence her voice and make invisible her (tortured, female) body.

The same ambivalence that Hania feels about finding her mother's corpse holds true for the absence of a tombstone and a concrete site of memory. The refusal of memorialization and the presence of a voice after death suggest that the remaking of memory and identity after trauma resides in transmission, in telling stories to those who can be "inhabited" or possessed by them, rather than in the stable exteriority of officially sanctioned memorials or immobile objects.

Historian Pierre Nora, in his influential collection of essays *Les Lieux de mémoire*, examines the problematic connections between memory and memorial, between the abstract noun of memory and the desire to create a concrete reminder of events or people. In the collection's introduction, 'La fin de l'histoire-mémoire,' written for its 1992 re-edition, Nora writes that that; "La mémoire s'enracine dans le concret, dans l'espace, le geste, l'image et l'objet" (Nora 25), emphasizing both the importance of the concrete, and the paradox inherent in creating memorials. The fact that "le sacré s'est investi dans la trace qui en est la négation," that it is impossible to judge what must be remembered without reinscribing, or even erasing the initial trace of an event, is pertinent to *La Femme sans sépulture*, a novel that asks similar questions of the individual quest for memorial and monument (Nora 30). Nora figures national memory as collective memory, in that it is a shared construct among those who believe they have a common history, but the kind of collective memory that the novel is concerned with is not one that is national.<sup>74</sup> Zoulikha refuses the post-mortem role of the heroine, of living on as a statue or as part of a monument, that her position as a member of the FLN would allow her. The distance between the state's concern with the protection of Zoulikha's memory and her family's impossible desire for the recuperation of her body critiques the fact that Zoulikha's family is primarily concerned with how she can once again be physically present and therefore more successfully mourned and remembered.

For Nora, the link that ties remembering to the symbolic real is often defined by its ability to shift according to the needs of those who have created the monument:

Car s'il est vrai que la raison d'être fondamentale d'un lieu de mémoire est d'arrêter le temps, de bloquer le travail de l'oubli, de fixer un état des choses, d'immortaliser la mort, de matérialiser l'immatériel pour – l'or est la seule mémoire de l'argent – enfermer le maximum de sens dans le minimum de signes, il est clair, et c'est ce qui les rend passionnants, que les lieux de mémoire ne vivent que de leur aptitude à la métamorphose, dans l'incessant rebondissement de leurs significations et le buissonnement imprévisible de leurs ramifications (Nora 38).

In Nora's terms, making a memory into a symbol or sign is part of being able to forget. The work of mourning is not carried out by the act of memorializing or creating monuments to the dead, instead, collective mourning and the "capital" that it represents is "anchored, condensed and expressed" in these places (Nora 43). Creating a monument forecloses the need for process: it

stops “le travail de l’oubli,” but also makes memory work unnecessary as the memory site (artificially) claims to encapsulate all that needs to be said and done with regards to a remembered event or person. In his preface, Nora is aware of the problems that refusing the metamorphoses of memory raises, but the list of verbs of fixity that build up in this paragraph – “arrêter,” “bloquer,” “fixer,” “immortaliser,” “enfermer” – reveal one of the inherent drawbacks of memory sites as concrete memorials.

The tensions around memorialization are echoed in *La Femme sans sépulture*. In her final monologue, Zoulikha refuses her potential status as a site of memory:

Ils disent: mon “cadavre”; l’indépendance venue, peut-être diront-ils ma “statue,” comme si on statufiait un corps de femme, n’importe lequel, comme si, simplement, pour le dresser dehors, contre un horizon plat, il ne fallait pas de siècles de silence bâillonné pour nous, les femmes! En tout cas, chez nous. (FS 227-8)

The consecration of a statue as a measure of memory or recognition, and Zoulikha’s rejection of the image of her body being “statufied,” is mirrored in the text by the visit to the mosaic of Césarée. The sirens of the mosaic, mythological figures taken from an episode of the *Odyssey* are “demi-effacé[es],” their fate as fixed, monolithic objects, is to fade and be written over. The narrator compares the fate of the bird-women of the mosaic to that of the woman of Césarée, post-Independence: “la torpeur, depuis 1962, s’est réinstallée, écrasante ... une poussière de cendres en suspens, après le feu d’autrefois!” (FS 119), underlining the role that women were able to play as *moujahidate* and hinting at the subsequent loss of rights and mobility now open to them.<sup>75</sup> The fact that any part of the mosaic could have survived for centuries seems incredible, but the text also highlights the remove from reality at which these figures of women exist. They are not human, barely recognizable, consigned to remind passers-by constantly of the past in a passive, one-dimensional way. Zoulikha refuses this kind of commemoration, and links this refusal to the historical silencing of women. Zoulikha’s monologue suggests that her post-mortem voice can only exist if she is not turned into a statue, if her recoverable body (or remains) is allowed to remain outside of history and of official celebration of the events of the War of Independence.

While Pierre Nora’s description of how memory and sites of memory work alongside and against history help to define and theorize the desire for a grave for Zoulikha’s body, it is less useful when we consider what Hania is really looking for; her mother’s “intact” body. This fantasy of immortality (or of some kind of sanctity after her martyrdom) refuses memory as a process accomplished over time and denies the reality of war’s effects on the body. In Zoulikha’s monologues, we learn that her body is no longer intact, so damaged is it by torture and having gone unburied for several days. Because of this refusal, Hania and Mina’s quest (to find their mother’s body and to re-member her by telling her story to the visitor) is a kind of melancholia, as described by Anne Donadey in her article “Introjection and Incorporation in Assia Djébar’s *La Femme sans sépulture*.”

Djébar’s text is not looking to achieve a mourning or introjection that ends with Zoulikha finding her rightful gravesite; neither is the text seeking to become that

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<sup>75</sup> See Michael F. O’Riley, “Place, Position, and Postcolonial Haunting in Assia Djébar’s *La Femme sans sépulture*,” *Research in African Literatures* 35.1 (2004): 66-86.

gravesite. ... The question that gives its impetus to the narrative is Hania's desire for a body to bury, as she repeatedly asks, "Où trouver le corps de ma mère?" (60). She has a recurring dream of finding her mother's mausoleum, "un monument superbe" (58). But as the title indicates, the ghost's body is never found. Indeed, to ensure that memory does not become frozen, the body cannot, must never, be found. Instead, it becomes transmuted into the body of the text itself, and language (including the voice of Zoulikha) is all that remains. Instead of burying the dead, Djébar's project revolves around ensuring that the dead continue to *dé-ranger*, unsettle the living so that history is never buried. (Donadey 86)

Introjection, a process of repetition and replication, insures that the dead are not laid to rest, and this unfinished working through of what Hélène Cixous refers to as the "unmournable" event allows for the production of the text but also underpins the impossibility of its project (Cixous 163). Torture – simultaneously the secret and central event of Zoulikha's story – means that the body can never be found intact, cannot be reconstructed through remembering. Torture is the event that stands in the way of remembering or forgetting history.

If the debate on torture during the Algerian War is, as Sylvie Durmelat claims, a "non-consensual public site of memory," then Zoulikha's body/corpse strives to uphold this non-consentuality by refusing to become a site of memory herself (Durmelat 142). Buried in an unmarked grave in the forest, Zoulikha's corpse is freed from being turned into a statue or a tomb to visit once the war is over. This refusal lends a literal interpretation to de Certeau's idea of writing history as a sepulchral act or a "burial site" (Certeau 100). While Zoulikha is celebrated as a hero without having a grave or a tombstone, she also escapes being turned into a statue by a post-mortem instrumentalization of her person. Elsewhere in Assia Djébar's work, dead bodies occupy various positions in the narrative, but none are static, at rest or allowed to be symbolic of anything, even after death.

In *La Femme sans sépulture*, the circulation of information – all of it spoken or somehow shared psychically or in visions or dreams – cannot be contained or cut off. Although the information about Zoulikha's life and death is all presented to the reader within the small town of Césarée, the presence of the narrator, and the proliferation of voices that come forward to inform her, suggests that the stories being told will find a way – in oral story form or as part of a documentary – out of the town and find a place not in the Algerian nationalist narrative of women like Zoulikha, but in a larger, French-language discussion about the role of women in war, and the afterlife of the tortured body. With this movement, Djébar renders irrelevant the sites of memory described by Pierre Nora and other historians interested in commemoration as a public and political issue and displays her doubt in a coherent post-Independence discourse of Algeria. The family romance of the novel – which circulates around the central, quasi-mythical character of Zoulikha – is shown as contagious and difficult to corral, as well as being a way of transmitting a narrative of trauma and trauma itself.

Making the dead speak is a narrativization of the impossible. The *mise en récit* of Zoulikha's words questions the status of truth and of the real in the novel and, ultimately, in the greater mythology of *moujahidate* stories that seek to establish memory, to commemorate the dead. *La Femme sans sépulture* registers the decomposition of Zoulikha's body, but this physical

dismemberment does not affect the body's ability to voice itself. Memory can be recovered as story, but that story is composed of several female voices, as if even Zoulikha herself is not able to tell the "whole" story, but only speak from "the space of death," of her passage from life to death. It is not the absence of a body or of a grave marker or monument that signifies that the work of mourning has been unsuccessful in the novel. That work is in the repetition of stories about Zoulikha, and her continued presence among the living, rather than a more traditional Freudian idea, as outlined by Cathy Caruth, for example, in which repeated remembering of the lost loved one would be traumatic rather than part of a grieving process (Caruth 91-110). The resuscitation of Zoulikha's voice is not a solution against the "amnésie" that Djébar mentions in the novel's epilogue, but it does assure the transmission of certain stories, and therefore a continued process of mourning and remembering an individual who died during the War of Independence. Zoulikha's refusal to be the subject of a statue or monument calls into question the nationalist movement that is suggested by the project of recording martyrs' stories. Djébar's ambiguous narrative evokes a remaking of sorts: Zoulikha's body is remade with her own words, and her daughters' participation in the legacy is valorized by becoming a public narrative, a film to be shown on national television, made by the narrator/filmmaker who stands in for Djébar.<sup>76</sup>

#### **TAKING REMEMBERING SERIOUSLY: THE TRANSMISSION OF VIOLENCE AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF NATIONAL MEMORY**

As in Picasso's series of paintings 'Femmes d'Alger,' the female body in Djébar's fiction is often fragmented, broken up or cut into pieces. In its simplest terms, the dismembering of the body is a metaphor for the civil violence that has been "tearing apart" Algeria for decades, but the body – *le corps violenté* – is not only a metaphor for the nation and to leave a reading there would be to oversimplify Djébar's use of narrative and remembering as physical acts, acts in which the characters' bodies are necessarily implicated.<sup>77</sup> While a parallel is drawn between the violence carried out on Zoulikha's body and the fate of Algeria as a nation after the war, this comparison is not a simple metaphor or allegory. Firstly, the violence of Zoulikha's torture is sexualized in a way that makes it strikingly individualized, connected to her roles as a wife and mother. This sexualized violence also takes place between representatives of the French state and one individual who will not become emblematic of the country as a whole, but for a group of women who want to defy the country's *retour en arrière* by keeping her name and her story in circulation. The presence of the narrator-as-filmmaker insures that this circulation will take

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<sup>76</sup> For an interesting analysis of one narrative of the war that did get made into a television drama, see Mireille Rosello's 'Repentance and Detective Fiction: Legal Powerlessness and the Power of Narratives,' in her book *The Reparative in Narrative: Works of Mourning in Progress*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2010.

<sup>77</sup> Khanna on citation and repetition:

Although repetition of an action, an utterance, or an image installs a moment of stasis into a text when the inorganic past, or that which is lost, is brought into the present, this drive toward stasis (which we know as the death drive) holds within it an attempt to assimilate its meaning into another context. Citation, when it is recognizable, enacts the very difficulty of assimilation. Citation as a psychoanalytic process resembles that of mourning and melancholia. Both mourning and melancholia involve the ingestion of a lost object ... Through citation, the subject reiterates that signifier of loss, re-citing it in a way which is reflected with one's tongue ... Inexpressible mourning erects a tomb inside the subject. (147)

place, but makes no suggestion that Zoulikha's image as a torture victim can be made symbolic for the nation as a whole. Secondly, Zoulikha herself categorically refuses the metaphor of her body as the body of the nation, in her desire to decompose and "dissipate" rather than become a statue. Djébar's engagement with national discourse, through metaphor, iteration or citation – such as her use of *One Thousand and One Nights* in 'La Femme en morceaux' – and the comparison of that discourse with personal, intimate stories that have the tortured female body as their starting point reveals the centrality of the body but also the importance of torture as the traumatic event that must be spoken and written about.

In *Algeria Cuts*, Ranjanna Khanna plays on the double meaning of the word "cut" in a way that echoes Djébar's complex use of national metaphor in her writing. A cut can be a wound, and therefore a trauma (wound, in Greek) but also the place in a film where things are spliced, brought together, and where that join may be more or less noticeable to the viewer. Both these meanings of "to cut" are at play in Djébar's work and, as Khanna states in *Algeria Cuts*, lead to a reclaiming of images and events that acknowledges trauma but also counters it through performativity and repeatability. Khanna argues that:

Djébar's iteration of interiors, public discourses and various languages dramatizes the slippage between the artistic and the political, designation and arbitration, and private and public. The phantom emerges and is articulated, and that which was marked by silence now speaks, thus instituting a model of politics based on melancholia rather than a nationalism based on mourning. In this way, we do not simply remember to forget, but we take remembering seriously as an imaginative and a political act ... Through the process of rejecting the mourning model of nationalism that seeks to erase differences, Djébar's story dramatizes the breakdown of a crypt: the initial realization of the lie of assimilation. (Khanna 166)

My emphasis here is on the connection made between fragmentation or cutting up and the process of remembering traumatic events as part of a national history. Khanna sees this "counternarrative" – a narrative that is necessarily and metaphorically dismembered – as one that coexists with modernism, "not as a response to it but as a constituent part of it" (Khanna 99). As with the instances of dismemberment and violence in Assia Djébar and Leila Marouane's work discussed in the previous chapter, the destruction of the body is mirrored in the narrative as a countering, a strategy against inscription. The cutting or wounding that takes place physically, symbolically, and metaphorically, does, of course, connect to a certain idea about Algeria and its post-Independence nationalism, but within this connection lies an emphatic rejection of tropes of heroism, martyrdom, and gender roles that were once again being circulated in the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Djébar's later novels (especially *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*) relate a similarly negative view of the possibility of a national narrative or the positive recuperation of history. In *La Disparition de la langue française*, to give one example, the narrator, Berkane, remembers a childhood episode where he drew a picture of the clandestine Algerian flag in his pre-war classroom and was reprimanded by his teachers and praised by his father ("Tu es mon véritable fils, puisque tu connais notre drapeau ... Mais il faut être patient. Il arrivera, le moment où le drapeau flottera là, devant nous" (DLF 65). But this story of fervor for the nationalist cause is told with a sense of nostalgia, relegating it firmly to the past. The episode will appear ironic, later in the novel, when

Berkane disappears during the violent partisan clashes of 1993. This novel produces another absent body/corpse that is a victim of seemingly irremediable violence.

## CONCLUSION

The public discourse of the scarred body exists alongside the understanding of the scar as a marker of an intimate act, an individual trauma. Alongside this juxtaposition of public and private spaces, the problematically sexualized relationship between the torture victim and the torturer is also a facet of the individuality or intimacy of torture. In Djébar's 2002 novel *La Femme sans sépulture*, the sexualized nature of the act of torture is disturbing but essential to the circulation of the narrative: there is a suggestion that sexual contact and, further, a continuing parent-child relationship produced by sex, allows for transmission of the torture victims' words. In this way, sexual intimacy is a connection between individual and collective knowledge, a connection that is related to the depiction of trauma in Djébar's work. Existing as they do between intimate and public forms of narration, the two texts discussed in depth in this chapter, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* and *La Femme sans sépulture* are also linked to ideas about the writing of trauma and extreme experience. They help define what might be considered as a female post-torture narrative, while acknowledging the discomfort and inadequacy of such a genre.

Djébar is involved in transmitting and reconstructing narratives, rather than accepting the demolition of language and the impossibility of coherence post-torture that some theorists of trauma describe. The reconstruction of a difficult-to-locate narrative voice is a way of reading texts about the tortured female body as different from other post-traumatic writings because that reconstruction is also a refusal of a return to the pre-traumatic state and a movement that clearly shows that while the body is re-membered, it is not put back together as a member of a political entity or as a symbolic "victim." The body of the tortured woman, in Djébar, is not a *lieu de mémoire*. In some ways, this view of the writing of torture is a refutation of Elaine Scarry's thesis that violence is language-destroying (and therefore world-destroying). Instead, violence destroys language in the moment of extreme experience, but allows for it once outside the space of torture. This argument of ownership, and its relationship to the female body, is central to many postcolonial discussions, and needs to be taken up with regards to the ambiguous description of the female body in 'Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement,' and other texts. Reconstruction occurs, and language is part of this return, but trauma remains, too, and becomes part of what is transmitted from one character to another. The metaphor of memory that I see establishing itself in this chapter is that of the palimpsest, a text that has been written and rewritten while retaining traces of its earlier form, creating a new text that refuses erasure of the past, historical and personal.

To explore the fictional writing of torture by Djébar, while keeping in mind its extra-textual relationship to historical events, one must also keep in mind testimonial texts, written by and about victims of torture. Texts that outline individual experiences of torture in Algeria for legal and political purposes, rather than literary or narratological reasons, are not the predecessors of Djébar's work, nor do they do the same work of bringing together private and

public narratives in the space of the body. Testimonial texts evidently give a very different position to the voice of the torture victim, one that is less fragmented, but still driven (or expected) to conceal or obscure certain aspects of torture. Several of Djébar's texts are interested in the intersection between testimony, historical fact and fictional narrative, notably *L'Amour, la fantasia*, which also reconstructs stories that, without fiction, might have been lost or erased. *La Femme sans sépulture*'s opening *Avertissement* "warns" of this kind of intergeneric influence in the novel, the confluence of historical fact and fiction. Djébar writes that she has "usé à volonté de [sa] liberté romanesque justement pour que la vérité de Zoulikha soit éclairée davantage" (FS 9). Djébar compares this overlapping of fiction and non-fiction, and the *éclairage* that it provides to the time-damaged mosaic of Césarée, one of the novel's central images. By placing Zoulikha at the center of a "large fresque féminine," one which has been worn away and degraded until its figures are barely recognizable, Djébar introduces from the outset of this text the concept of a reconstruction performed by fiction, by novelization that adds to what is already there.

## Chapter 3 – Testimonial texts: writing the obscene

“In order to construct self-narratives, we need not only the words with which to tell our stories but also as audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them.”

Susan Brison, ‘Outliving Ourselves: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity’

### INTRODUCTION

The period of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) was marked in metropolitan France by increasingly polemical and divisive political and moral debates over France’s presence in Algeria and, from 1957 onwards, over the issue of torture by the police and military. This chapter’s central focus is several post-1957 testimonial texts written during the war by victims of torture. These texts, Henri Alleg’s *La Question* and Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi’s *Djamila Boupacha*, are not the only testimonial texts published in the last years of the War. However, their connection to the Parisian intellectual community of the period, as well as the social and literary repercussions that they had, make them stand out as examples of writing about torture. Their focus on the physical (as well as juridical) results of torture and the tortured body connects *La Question* and *Djamila Boupacha* to later testimonial texts, such as Louisette Ighilahriz’s series of revelations about her torture. All three texts, with their various paratexts, conditions of publication, and afterlives, underscore the obscenity of torture and how that obscenity is restated and recreated in testimonial about torture. The texts exist in and describe a marginal space that disturbs and challenges notions of what can be seen and heard.

In the four years between the publication of Henri Alleg’s *La Question* (1958) and Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi’s collection of texts *Djamila Boupacha* (1962), Charles de Gaulle had returned to the presidency, been granted emergency powers and, at his insistence, the Fifth Republic had been voted and founded. In 1957, following numerous reports of torture in the press, President Guy Mollet had established the Commission de sauvegarde des droits et libertés individuels to investigate these accusations. Although the Commission punished some officers, and several hundred people were freed from internment camps, the Commission’s perceived bias and lack of power lead to further ridicule of Mollet’s treatment of the Algerian question, and was an important factor in de Gaulle’s return to power.<sup>78</sup> Following a cease-fire and the Evian Accords in March of 1962, a referendum in metropolitan France on Algeria’s self-determination was approved by over 90% of French voters.<sup>79</sup> French citizens living in the

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<sup>78</sup> For a complete discussion of Guy Mollet’s Algerian policies, including the Commission, and the period leading to de Gaulle’s return to the presidency, see Denis Lefebvre, *Guy Mollet: face à la torture en Algérie, 1956-1957*, Leprince, 2001 and Raphaëlle Branche, “La Commission de sauvegarde pendant la guerre d’Algérie: chronique d’un échec annoncé.” *Vingtième Siècle*, 1999.

<sup>79</sup> One year earlier, in January 1961, a referendum on Algeria’s independence was held in metropolitan France. 75% of voters from France, Algeria, and the DOM-TOM were in favor of Algerian independence at that point. These electoral figures show that the public view of Algeria’s relationship to and with France was changing; although this

Algerian departments, who would be arguably the most affected by the outcome of the referendum, were excluded from the vote. A referendum on the question of independence held in Algeria in July 1962 paralleled the vote held in France. Over 99% of Algerian voters were in favor of the terms of independence established by the Evian Accords.<sup>80</sup> Algerian independence was proclaimed on July 3, 1962.<sup>81</sup> Beauvoir and Halimi's book, a kind of collective petition for Djamila Boupacha, an Algerian woman who had been arrested and tortured and was now legally represented by Halimi, was released during the period between the signature of the Evian Accords and the proclamation of Algerian independence. *La Question* was published while Henri Alleg was still in prison in Algiers, after the violent urban warfare of the Battle of Algiers in 1957, and several months before de Gaulle returned to power.

The political events of this four-year period represent a major shift in Franco-Algerian relations and French domestic and foreign policy as the decolonization of France's last remaining African colony became inevitable, but criticism of French military and police actions in Algeria continued, as did reports of systematic torture in both Algeria and metropolitan France. While de Gaulle condemned and forbade torture, the practices described by soldiers and detainees in the early years of the war accelerated, by many accounts, when he returned to the presidency, merely becoming more covert as the war continued.<sup>82</sup> As the war progressed, and even after the 1962 cease-fire, the French government increasingly lost control of a military institution that was progressively more desperate to hold onto *l'Algérie française*. Raphaëlle Branche, in *La Torture et l'armée française*, describes de Gaulle's condemnation of torture, and the continuing practice of torture in the years following his return, in terms of both political pragmatism and cynicism:

La nouvelle énergie des hommes politiques à condamner ou sanctionner les auteurs des sévices n'est pas le fruit d'une prise de conscience subite du problème, ni d'un plus grand écho rencontré par les tenants de ces valeurs, mais la conséquence d'une modification des équilibres conditionnant l'exercice du pouvoir.

Le général de Gaulle souhaite un recentrage de la guerre sur une définition plus classique et plus normée du conflit. Au fil des obstacles importants rencontrés, c'est pourtant une pratique du pouvoir marquée par le réalisme qui se dégage, où l'on accepte que les illégalités continuent à faire partie des ingrédients utilisés pour gagner la guerre et où l'efficacité politique prime toujours. (Branche 345-6)

Branche emphasizes that de Gaulle's government's response to torture was not an ethical decision, but one that hoped to "recenter" the war around more regulated, political terms. This shift was calculated to move towards a negotiated, diplomatic end to the conflict: de Gaulle realized that an escalation of torture in Algeria and France was endangering any potential post-

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change was not necessarily reflected in military and police actions towards suspected FLN members in Algeria and France.

<sup>80</sup> A law on electoral lists issued earlier in 1962 allowed residents of Algeria, and those born in Algeria and living abroad, to vote in this referendum.

<sup>81</sup> A detailed timeline of these events can be found in Stora, *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History*. Stora's *Le Mystère de Gaulle: son choix pour l'Algérie* is a thorough historical and political examination of the events of the end of the war.

<sup>82</sup> For a complete discussion of what Raphaëlle Branche calls "La Grande impunité des militaires," see *La Torture et l'armée*, 225-335.

conflict relationship between the two countries and that winning the war by any means necessary was no longer a realistic approach. The “efficaciousness” of de Gaulle’s desired political approach, however, is cast into doubt by the increasing violence of the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète (OAS), a military faction determined to prevent Algerian independence at all costs, before and after the 1962 cease-fire. Additionally, as torture became a more underground, militant practice, it lost any claim it might have had on information gathering and “carrying out orders”; it became, in effect, a guerilla tactic designed to intimidate and eliminate members of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) as it became increasingly clear that they would soon be the leading party of an independent Algeria.

Coming out of this violent context, *La Question* and *Djamila Boupacha* are testimonial texts which, in the way that they are published, disseminated, and paratextually framed, throw light on several issues surrounding torture and its narration during the Algerian War: the question of testimonial texts’ veracity, censorship in France, and the need for these texts to be legitimized or spoken for if they are to enter into French national discourses about the war. Louisette Ighilahriz’s account of her torture in Florence Beaugé’s 2000 article, and her subsequent autobiography *Algérienne* (co-written by Anne Nivat, 2001) provide a counterpoint for Alleg and Boupacha’s testimonial texts, written during the Algerian War of Independence. Almost fifty years after Independence, and after Ighilahriz’s long career in the Algerian government, her testimony is not expected to have the same immediate effect on the public, nor to perform any legal function. Despite this lack of urgency, the idea that reparation or reconciliation is possible is present in Ighilahriz’s narrative, and it still has a performative function as she sets out to name and find the French military doctor who helped her. The gradual and diverse form that her account took, and the media and public’s reaction to her story, shows how the debate or controversy around torture during the Algerian War had changed in France almost half a century after Algeria’s independence and the end of the conflict. Ighilahriz’s testimonial begins as a quest for the identity of the doctor who rescued her from French military detention and ends with demands by a former member of the FLN that she reveal her scars to justify her public identity as a victim of torture. Her text is paratextually framed by French journalists and intellectuals, but, as this chapter will show, in a way that differs from the process of “legitimization” that is, I argue, afforded by the presence of Jean-Paul Sartre in Alleg’s case and Simone de Beauvoir in the case of Boupacha.

First-person accounts of torture undergone during the Algerian War of Independence insist on the movement between secrecy and public denunciation that all accounts of systematized violence occasion, as well as the personal and legal need to prove that torture has really taken place. That is, these testimonial texts focus on what happens in the perverted intimacy of the torture chamber, and on personal details like the kind of injuries received, or the victims thoughts during torture and then move outwards to interpellate other survivors and witnesses and bring descriptions of torture into a public and publicized discourse. By analyzing several accounts of torture – Henri Alleg’s first-person account of his detention, the dossier published by the Comité pour Djamila Boupacha that has at its center Boupacha’s report of her torture, as well as Louisette Ighilahriz’s revelations and account of her life as a survivor of torture many years after the fact – I examine what it means to bring the obscene act of torture into the public discourse and how what I define as obscene testimonial texts behave both as individual texts, and as part of a larger social landscape. The obscene, in the context of bearing

witness to traumatic events, is the offstage, liminal space to which narratives that society would rather not hear or know about are relegated. Testimonial texts are made to exist in this space and are therefore rendered obscene because of the way they are perceived and interpreted, and because of the unpleasant subject matter that they insist on narrativizing, putting into words and into a coherent narrative autobiographical events that could be perceived as outside or beyond the scope of linguistic and narrative expression.

In order for Alleg, Boupacha, and Ighilahriz's texts to be legitimized for the reader as testimony, that is to say, in order for them to be allowed to pass out of a marginalized space into public discourse, they all need to be provided with a context and justificatory support by French intellectuals. Contextualization was necessary to close the perceived gap between French readers of the testimonial texts and the texts' authors, to make them less of an enemy other. This legitimization makes the testimony public and allows it to coexist with a larger discourse about torture as a political act. Issues of torture's narrativization and its public reception also enter into relation with the fictional texts that rely on earlier testimonial narratives as a backdrop; such a relation allows fiction like that of Assia Djebar to ring true or believably allude to a post-torture context without claiming non-fiction status. I consider the reception of and response to these torture narratives, and examine how they reverberate in the "guerre des mémoires" of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century France.<sup>83</sup> Describing the debate and polemic that appeared in the media and in other public forums as a "war" of and on memory underscores not only the violent imagery and rhetoric still attached to the issue of torture in Algeria, but also the continuing existence of opposing camps and their supporters surprisingly similar to those at war with each other in the late 50s and early 60s.

#### **"UNE FIGURE FAMILIÈRE, UN SYMBOLE": DJAMILA BOUPACHA AND THE TESTIMONIAL GENRE**

As a genre, testimony is freighted with the expectations of legal and social recourse, and establishes the writer or teller as a victim or at least a witness to crimes both individual and collective. In the French tradition, survivors of the Shoah like Charlotte Delbo, Jean Améry, and Hannah Arendt have come to represent a kind of testimonial writing that bears witness to past crimes that seem too horrific to be addressed by any legal method.

In this chapter, I rely heavily on Ross Chambers' definitions of testimony and witnessing in *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial & the Rhetoric of Haunting*, imagining testimonial texts and performances as defined by the material they include, and by the role and reactions of the supposed audience. The event shared through testimonial may well be unsayable, but for Chambers its cultural inaudibility is just as important a feature of the genre. For Chambers, the liminal position of the writer, artist, or performer is also crucial: he or she is able to create a narrative only because of his or her survival. Additionally, often what is survived is an event that leaves the narrator as a ghost or revenant, because he or she is not supposed to have survived an event that so many have not. That is, these ghosts are stigmatized by the very

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<sup>83</sup> The term "guerre des mémoires" is taken from the title of Thierry Leclère's 2007 collection of interviews with Benjamin Stora, *La Guerre des mémoires: la France face à son passé colonial*.

experience that should give them special authority. Limit experiences of violence and trauma leave survivors changed in a way that gives them a different status than the unaffected, the living: they are not really ghosts, but they are easily treated as such as a way to ignore or marginalize their traumatic experience, the “death-at-your-doorstep” that threatens everyone else too (Chambers 30-31).

Chambers sees witnessing and the texts it creates as performative: a performance that takes place in spite of a cultural preference to not see or be made to see trauma that is happening in a given society. Witnessing, writes Chambers, is a parasitic genre, one that does not stand alone, but rather relies on other genres such as novels, biography, dance performance, and poetry in order to be brought into existence.<sup>84</sup> Host texts that include elements of testimonial carry along a “discourse of extremity,” made up of figural representations of extreme or “obscene” events, and deliver it to the public (25). Defining the testimonial as part of a text or performance, rather than a genre in and of itself, Chambers distances his terms from the idea of testimony as a legal category.

In *Women Witnessing Terror: Testimony and the Cultural Politics of Human Rights*, Anne Cubilié also focuses on the survivor’s (or witness’) position as potentially liminal and difficult to grasp. Both Chambers and Cubilié are writing in the tradition of Jacques Derrida’s engagement with the afterlife and haunting, and his idea of an “ethical responsibility to the specter.”<sup>85</sup> In the cases that Chambers and Cubilié discuss, the specters are alive enough to write and speak about what happened to them.<sup>86</sup> Chambers is more interested in the cultural and social spaces affected by testimonial, but Cubilié takes up the question of testimony’s legal role. She writes that “[t]o be one’s own witness is an important site of resistance and is fundamental in perceiving oneself as a subject within the judicial field” (78). Witnessing one’s own trauma is a way of positioning oneself inside a realm of discourse.

Cubilié’s recognition of the possible legal ramifications of testimony connects to the primary meaning of the word, which usually denotes a first person, sworn account of events given (orally or in writing) in a legal setting. Another dimension of the role of testimony, and one that is vital given the geo-historical context of the texts discussed here, is the importance that Islamic legal tradition places on testimony. As Stefania Pandolfo outlines in her article “Testimony in Counterpoint,” witnessing is an obligation in Qur’anic law:

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<sup>84</sup> Note the language of invasion and contamination that Chambers uses to think through the way that witnessing works with other genres: “Culturally speaking, witnessing is thus a genre of writing that is constitutively parasitic on other genres. It requires us, therefore, to consider briefly how and why the array of genres that constitutes a culture may be vulnerable to takeover, or at least open to infiltration, by a discourse of extremity such as witnessing writing, a figural “presentation” of the obscene that thereby itself becomes representative of the obscene within culture, intervening in the affairs of culture as the bearer of a reminder of what culture-as-civilization ignores” (Chambers 25). The figurative style of Chambers’ writing offers up a multitude of highly imaged ways of thinking trauma and witnessing. In this chapter, I focus on the trope of obscenity as it gives both a spatial and ethical framework in which to think about torture.

<sup>85</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*.

<sup>86</sup> Cubilié’s chapter on testimonial writing includes, for example, a reading of Charlotte Delbo’s *Qui rapportera ces paroles* (1974), a play in which the concentration camps and the survival of the camps is fictionalized and performed (90-111).

Testimony, the fact that others will attest for me, and that I exist as a proof in their witnessing, is a pivotal concept in Islamic Law. (Until the thirteenth century the rule of testimony was considered, within the frame of juridical debates, a supreme hermeneutical criterion for establishing proof.) ... in the rule of shuhud, I exist in the testimony of others. (96)<sup>87</sup>

Having someone who can bear witness for you is crucial, meaning that testimony is framed as a once-removed narrative: it is not the person who has survived the crime that testifies, but the person who witnesses the crime, the observer. As an extension of this tenet, Pandolfo writes that “[b]eing without any witnesses is abandonment beyond all relation, memory, beyond any connection to language” (97).

In Roqiya’s harrowing story, in “Testimony in Counterpoint” Pandolfo states that testimony is

the quasi-judicial establishment of a truth of the self through the intermediary of the modern state’s techniques of veridiction (official papers, certificates, identification cards, photos, evidentiary exhibits of a circumstantial justice), and by means of procuring recognition from the institutional others to whom she appeals—the public health physician, the judge, the psychiatrist, the anthropologist. But the truth sought after in this way is also that of speech—in the Lacanian sense of *parole*—which makes itself heard through the transference with both the psychiatrist and (in a nonclinical sense) with me; and through the performance of a symptom (what she calls her madness) that brings to a collective history her registering of its traumatic real. The criteria for truth are thus not simply circumstantial or epistemological, but ethical. ... It is the challenge of constituting herself as a witness to a social and existential condition, one of dispossession and banishment from the here and the now, and of recounting the advent of her madness as the theological sign of an injustice (*zulm*, a theologico-political concept), through a sort of reverse hagiography. She is *shahida* [legal term for a witness] in this sense by way of her exemplarity and bears witness to a collectivity (72)

Looking back to the character of Fatima in Leïla Marouane’s *Le Châtiment des hypocrites* (Chapter 1), we can see how the same kind of abandonment takes shape socially in her repudiation by her family: this repudiation and eventual exile can take place because there are no (reliable, present) witnesses to the horrors that Fatima experienced. Her displacement from the “here and now” and the recourse to madness are very much symptoms and results of an inability to have her trauma witnessed and transformed into *parole*. The loss of language, and the ensuing break with one’s community and surroundings, is one of the violences of the torture chamber in which theorists like Elaine Scarry and Kalí Tal are the most interested. Forcing the tortured subject to speak, and making that speech the goal of torture, destroys connections to the self and others.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Pandolfo discusses the case of Roqiya, a Moroccan woman who had suffered a breakdown after being repudiated by her husband on her wedding night.

<sup>88</sup> Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

However, the juridical role of testimony is only part of the Islamic view of the role of witnessing. The word for witness (*shahid*) is also the word for a martyr, and related to the word for martyrdom, the “ultimate testimony of faith in the sacrifice of self” (Pandolfo 72). Referring to those killed, tortured, or imprisoned by the French military during the war as “martyrs,” as the FLN did and still does, offers the linguistic possibility of seeing them also as witnesses to their own fate and the fates of others. It’s important to note that the term *shahid* can be used to refer to those who have died bearing witness to the Islamic faith, and has therefore been taken up by many political and armed groups in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. While I think that the connotations of martyrdom in the term, as explored by Pandolfo applies to the militants of the French-Algerian War, my interest is grounded in its relationship to testimony and the putting-into-narrative of traumatic events. *Shahid*, with its network of connotations, reveals the relationship between trauma and narration, the need to bear witness about that which is survived. Witnessing, therefore, has a strongly ethical dimension, writes Pandolfo, one that is connected to the witness’ own identity as a truthful subject. Her article takes into account the complicated legal, social and personal intersections of ideas about survival and testimony, as do Chambers and Cubilié.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, leading thinkers on the connections between trauma and writing, state that narration is a vital aspect of testimony: trauma must be reported or narrated to a third party in order for witnessing to take place. On the narrativization of trauma, Felman writes:

Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. The victim’s narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. (Felman and Laub 57)

The trauma of the event is not what makes it “come into existence” but instead becomes real through being told. In other words, one’s own experience, however divorced from language and narrative coherence, must be revisited in narrative terms in order for others to understand what has taken place. These definitions of trauma and testimony need to be considered when addressing not only how torture is narrated in fictional and nonfictional texts, but also the necessary distance between the event and its “registration” in narrative form.

In this chapter, then, testimony as a genre is set apart from the legal definition of the word, in which one person’s account of events is weighed against another’s. Even so, the traditional legal and social roles of testimony and those who testify find echoes in the words of Alleg, Boupacha, and Ighilahriz, all of who are positioned as survivors who need to and are ethically obliged to tell what has happened to them. As well as or instead of a purely legal role, the testimony of victims of political violence enacts a witnessing, a transmission, and a working through of traumatic events by circulating their stories of violence and loss.<sup>89</sup> Despite the evident

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<sup>89</sup> By the 1960s, *testimonio* was becoming an important genre in Latin and South America. One of the leading theorists of *testimonio*, John Beverley, defines it as

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the event

overlap between legal testimony and testimonial writing, the latter is set apart from a discourse that has a solely legal role. Testimonial writing often takes place in lieu of legal recourse, in situations where the idea of punitive or restitutive justice is impossible.<sup>90</sup> In March 1962, de Gaulle's government pronounced the first decree in a series of amnesty laws for crimes committed during the Franco-Algerian conflict.<sup>91</sup> This amnesty did not affect Boupacha and Alleg's texts, published before the decree, but the transmission of the accounts of torture after the war, and the possibility of public testimony was closely linked to the legal restrictions, (including censorship) that marginalized the voices of survivors.

Rather than retrospectively viewing an event or revisiting the initial site/cause of trauma, the testimonial texts created by and around Boupacha and Alleg emerge from a place of trauma. It is not that the testimonial genre excludes this kind of text, but more that it has come to be associated with past events that, for one reason or another, cannot be remedied or redressed within the available systems. These texts therefore stray from definitions of testimony in several significant ways. The *sur le vif* nature of Alleg and Beauvoir and Halimi's texts - Alleg and Boupacha were still imprisoned when they were published - means that the texts were aimed at a specific, immediate task: freeing the testifiers in question. Beyond that, they sought to draw public attention to a state of affairs that was happening as the testimonies were written, and as they were read. Instead of examining these texts in a post-traumatic, retroactive context, I read *La Question* and *Djamila Boupacha* as testimonial texts that create an immediate witnessing for the victims of torture, the readers, and for the intellectuals who framed and contextualized the first person accounts. They also provide direct narratives of the traumatic event of torture, describing its physical effects on the body in way that is both vivid and, because the narratives are also legal statements, clinical and evidentiary.

Djamila Boupacha was arrested at her home near Algiers in February of 1960, along with her father and brother-in-law, and taken to the El Biar detention center.<sup>92</sup> Boupacha's arrest

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he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or a significant life experience. Testimonio may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novela-testimonio*, nonfiction novel or "factographic" literature."... because testimonio is by nature a protean and demotic form not yet subject to legislation by a normative literary establishment, any attempt to specify a generic definition for it, as I do here, is at best provisional, and at worst repressive (Beverley 30-1).

Beverley reminds the reader that the Spanish word *testimonio* has both religious and legal connotations, so the notion of truth/lived experience is always present, even if Beverley argues that it shouldn't be the main concern with analysis and criticism of the genre. Beverley's explanation and analysis of the case of Rigoberta Menchú's 1983 *testimonio I, Rigoberta Menchú* outlines the problems of truth and representationality that can apply to testimony.

<sup>90</sup> In Argentina, for example, the amnesty laws that followed the Dirty War meant that many people were not brought to trial for the crimes committed by the military during this period. (Specifically, the *Ley de punto final* (1986) and the *Ley de obediencia debida* (1987). Both these laws were judged unconstitutional and repealed in 2005.) The proliferation of testimonial texts in the 1980s and 90s that address the Dirty War might be seen, at least in part, as a surrogate for public testimony and punishment, a way of putting into ambiguously fictional writing a story that could not enter into official public discourse. See for example the work of Ricardo Piglia and Rodolfo Walsh.

<sup>91</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>92</sup> See Branche, 121-139 on the notoriety of El Biar and the extent of torture carried out there.

followed the explosion of several bombs in popular public places in Algiers: she was suspected of being one of the *porteuses de feu* for the FLN.<sup>93</sup> Without any witnesses to testify against her, Boupacha's case required a confession to proceed, as was generally the case with suspected FLN members. At El Biar, Boupacha was beaten and then transferred to Hussein Dey, another infamous detention center, where she was raped and tortured. She was detained for a total of 33 days before appearing before a judge. In early June of 1960, *Le Monde* published an article by Simone de Beauvoir that outlined Boupacha's legal situation and deplored the general indifference to this sort of case in mainland France.<sup>94</sup> The article appeared as Gisèle Halimi, Boupacha's lawyer and a left-wing activist who had previously defended members of the FLN, was struggling to have the date of Boupacha's trial pushed back so that she would have more time to consult with her client and prepare her defense. The purpose of Beauvoir's article was to raise awareness of the injustice of the legal system operating in Algeria and to make public the physical abuse Boupacha had undergone, and the collection of testimonial texts *Djamila Boupacha* was conceived shortly after Beauvoir's article was published: as Halimi asserts, Djamila Boupacha had immediately become "une figure familière, un symbole" (Beauvoir & Halimi 63). Her familiarity was, in part at least, because stories of torture carried out in detention centers were not as rare as they had been even a few years previously.<sup>95</sup>

Boupacha's role as a symbol of torture during this period is more complex: her words and image are an important part of *Djamila Boupacha*, and she is allowed to speak for herself even as others speak for her. The images of Boupacha that appeared in the recueil show a beautiful young woman whose appearance likely did not align with most readers' ideas about FLN urban terrorists. She is dressed in European-style clothes, not the veil that many in metropolitan France associated with the *porteuses de bombes* of the FLN. In the first photo we see, one that takes up an entire page without a border or a caption, Boupacha's face is shown in close-up.

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<sup>93</sup> The bomb she was charged with having placed was found and disarmed before it exploded.

<sup>94</sup> "Pour Djamila Boupacha." *Le Monde* 3 June 1960.

<sup>95</sup> *Djamila Boupacha* has an obvious precedent in the 1957 text *Pour Djamila Bouhired*, in which French novelist Georges Arnaud introduces the speech for the defense by Bouhired's lawyer, Jacques Vergès. Arrested for possession of explosives and attempted murder in one of the infamous civilian bombings in Algiers, Djamila Bouhired was detained for 17 days without recourse to a lawyer. Vergès' efforts to free her, as well as to have her complaint about the torture she underwent brought to light resulted in her being pardoned in 1962.



**Figure 3 - Djamila Boupacha (uncredited photo)**

She is wearing make-up and a scoop-necked top and looks directly at the camera. The other photos of her in the *recueil*, taken after her arrest, show an understandably somber face, but in this first photo it looks as if she is suppressing laughter. While the text does not make mention of her attractiveness, it is clearly on display in the photograph, and is echoed in the sketch of Boupacha by Pablo Picasso that is reproduced on the inside cover of the book. In Picasso's sketch, Boupacha's large eyes and defined eyebrows are exaggerated, making her gaze toward the viewer seem even more open and direct than it does in the photo. She looks directly at the reader, and invites the reader to look at her, even before we read her account. The frank eye contact that has been established with the victim seems unflinching, even inappropriate, as we read Boupacha's testimony and comprehend the damage done to her body. The photo and the sketch both hold elements of the obscene: we are invited to look directly at Boupacha, an exchange that the reader would perhaps prefer to avoid, given Boupacha's status as a victim and survivor within the text. Through this visual depiction, Boupacha is made available as a symbol of innocence lost at the hands of the military, as well as one of a just cause that needed international support, a powerful position for a young woman who was at the time still in prison.

The collection of texts whose publication followed Beauvoir's article, *Djamila Boupacha*, published by Gallimard in 1962, was not censored, but Beauvoir's article in *Le*

*Monde* “was considered so anti-French and dangerous, the government ordered the seizure of all copies in Algiers, bringing even more international attention to Boupacha” (Murphy 272). The decision to work on a book-length publication in support of Boupacha’s case came soon after Beauvoir’s initial article. Beauvoir claimed that she agreed to appear as coauthor of *Djamila Boupacha* to “share the responsibility” of the outspoken text.<sup>96</sup> Both she and Halimi received death threats shortly after the book’s publication (Murphy 275).

*Djamila Boupacha* includes testimony in its most straightforward form and narrative, but is more like a *dossier* than a narrative *récit* in its approach to framing the victim’s story of torture. Boupacha’s account is given in its primary form, as a statement to her lawyer, rather than arranged into a narrative as it is Alleg’s memoir. Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi’s names appear on the cover of the book, but the text inside is divided into several sections: an introduction by Beauvoir, a long legal and biographical narrative by Halimi and a number of *témoignages* by engaged intellectuals of the period. Henri Alleg authors the first *témoignage*, Josette Audin, the wife of the disappeared Maurice Audin, (listed as “Madame Maurice Audin” to underscore her connection to the events in Algeria) the second, and subsequent testimonials are penned by novelists Jules Roy and Françoise Sagan, among others. The appearance of Alleg and Josette Audin as witnesses to Boupacha’s account immediately associates her ordeal with those of the two French male torture victims, further validating her right to speak up about her torture. The book also contains three illustrations created especially for the edition and a number of photographs of Boupacha and her family. At the center of the book, acting as a hinge between the historical and legal framing work done by Halimi, and the impassioned, critical voices which follow, are three “annexes”: Boupacha’s testimony, the article that Beauvoir wrote for *Le Monde* in 1960 that launched the ‘Pour Djamila Boupacha’ committee, and a letter from Abdelaziz Boupacha, Djamila’s father, relating the story of her arrest and detention. The centrality of these original documents, which underpin the necessity and rhetoric of everything that surrounds them, is clearly deliberate, but this placement also accentuates the brevity of these documents. The fact that they are referred to as annexes, usually an element of the text that comes after the most important part of the work, and which presents additional or supporting information that does not necessarily have a place within the body text, signifies several things: that the factual nature of the documents will underscore the rhetoric advanced elsewhere, that the contents of the text are somewhat marginal or marginalized, and that the direct relation of Boupacha’s torture needs to be quarantined from the rest of the text. Abdelaziz Boupacha’s letter is reproduced with its errors of grammar and spelling: “nous en avons respecté l’orthographe et la présentation” specifies the brief note that introduces the letter (224). Abdelaziz signs off his letter to Halimi, which describes the events leading up to Djamila’s arrest, as well as his own arrest and torture. “[E]scusé moi je ne sait pas bien écrire j’ai jamais été a l’école,” highlighting the distance between his letter and the deliberate prose used by the book’s editors and Boupacha’s supporters. In contrast, Djamila Boupacha’s statement is written in perfect, formal French, the result of her French education in Algeria. This contrast in register and formality goes further to polish

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<sup>96</sup> Beauvoir’s engagement with the Algerian question has been variously ignored and criticized. Franz Fanon is a notable critic of her involvement with the Algerian independence movement. For a discussion of the criticism of her work with Halimi and Boupacha see Murphy, and also Caputi in *Simone de Beauvoir’s Political Thinking*, Marso & Moynagh, eds.

Boupacha's image as a worthy *cause (tristement) célèbre* for the French middle class to care about.

The book itself, as well as the framing texts described briefly above, contains several iterations of Djamila Boupacha's statement. The statement, written in May 1960, is first cited in Beauvoir's June 3 article in *Le Monde*, where she outlines the case and cites Boupacha's statement in its most shocking detail:

On m'administra le supplice de la bouteille; c'est la plus atroce des souffrances; après m'avoir attaché dans une position spéciale, on m'enfonça dans le ventre le goulot d'une bouteille. Je hurlai et perdis connaissance pendant, je crois, deux jours (221).

Boupacha's text euphemizes the rape: the word "ventre" is used in place of "vagina". Beauvoir continues this euphemization or self-censorship in the article, when she paraphrases a military captain to avoid using terms "trop orduriers" for the newspaper. Boupacha is cited again, at length, in Beauvoir's introduction and then, on several occasions, in the long narrative by Gisèle Halimi. Halimi cites Boupacha's testimonial statement and other letters at length; she also reports conversations she had with Djamila. Her words are taken up, both directly and through paraphrase, in the *témoignages* that close the book. The citational practices of the many texts that surround Boupacha's own testimony have the effect of rendering it both familiar and, strangely, sterile. Boupacha's own terms are repeatedly cited by those trying to validate her account, but the repetition of the most shocking details of her experience have the effect of numbing their initial horror. The echoes of it that occur, deployed by others to argue her case, somehow lessen the shock of her account. In this case, Boupacha's own euphemistic reference to her rape, and the repetitive citation of her testimony mitigate her experience and make it audible. Just as the emphasis on her education and appearance made her a perfect representational victim of the gross injustices carried out in Algeria, repeating her own description of her torture and rape makes it somehow more suitable for a middle class French public. Her own words are, literally, surrounded and perhaps, figuratively, muffled by the textual framing collected by Halimi and Beauvoir. This contextualization, which makes up the majority of the book, is necessary, I argue, to bringing Boupacha's testimonial account into the public sphere.

When it comes, halfway through the book, Boupacha's testimony is horrifying in its matter-of-fact tone. Her statement (*plainte*) must, of course, conform to that juridical form, and deliver only the facts as they relate to the crimes against her. After the polemic of the rest of *Djamila Boupacha*, the naked details of Boupacha's case are chilling. She accuses the military officers who detained her, only one of whom is named in the statement, of "séquestration s'étant poursuivie pendant plus d'un mois et ayant été accompagnée de 'tortures corporelles'" (219). No mention is made in this official wording of her rape, although it is detailed in the statement as the final act in a list of tortures to which she was subjected. In the statement, the careful, formal wording of events carries out another hedging, contextualizing move, by putting the most atrocious details of torture in a parenthetical position:

J'appris alors ce que cela ["le second degré"] signifiait: tortures à l'électricité d'abord (les électrodes placés au bout des seins ne tenant pas, un de mes tortionnaires les colla sur ma peau avec du papier collant "scotch"), on me brûla de la même manière aux jambes, à l'aîne, au sexe, sur le visage. La torture électrique alternait avec les brûlures de cigarettes, les coups de poing et le

supplice de la baignoire : pendue sur un bâton au-dessus d'une baignoire, l'on me faisait boire jusqu'à étouffement (217-8).

The detail of a torturer using scotch tape to attach an electrode to her nipples is clearly in the realm of the obscene: the small, seemingly insignificant detail that is horrifying because it is too much to know, too intimate a contact between torturer and victim. Its obscenity lies in the superfluousness of this detail as it introduces a physical reality of the torture chamber that the reader – the non-torturable – is never supposed to “see” or read about. The contrast between this detail and the off-hand, elliptical “cela” that refers to penetrative rape also marks how and why the text is obscene. Rape is not supposed to be directly mentioned, and so is elided with “cela,” but the fact that scotch tape was used to tape electrodes to Boupacha’s nipples can be spelled out, as it is “only” a detail of torture, not rape. Boupacha also gives the now-familiar account of her rape – “Après quelques jours, on m’administra le *supplice de la bouteille*, c’est la plus atroce des souffrances” (218). Boupacha italicizes *supplice de la bouteille*, as if she herself is citing someone else’s term. This kind of “second-degree rape,” as it was legally referred to, or rape with a foreign object, was a common enough practice for Boupacha to have heard of it and for it to have a shorthand name.

#### REPRESENTING THE *HORS SCÈNE*: ROSS CHAMBERS AND THE OBSCENE

Ross Chambers writes that through witnessing “the culture is hijacked, its conventions appropriated for new purposes; audiences are turned from the circle of their everyday concerns toward what they may least want to hear about, the nightmare in their heads that they have not grasped” (21). The “nightmare in their heads that they have not grasped” corresponds to Felman and Laub’s “event that has not yet come into existence,” underscoring the fugitive nature of language and narrative that is at the heart of writing and telling about trauma. Testimonial texts invoke and often describe this missed or ignored event, hijacking the attention of those who would prefer to indefinitely defer the narration of trauma. The accounts in this chapter appropriate the genres of memoir, legal document, and newspaper article to speak in concrete terms about torture, and to insist upon its existence and its entry into the public domain. The textual movement towards the obscene – that is, what is considered off limits and against etiquette – provoked by testimonial texts always takes place along a continuum between what can and cannot be written about, what is remembered and what is forgotten.

Chambers’ *Untimely Interventions* is key to my discussion of how witnessing texts are contextualized and how this contextualization relates to both generic and cultural concerns. Chambers defines witnessing as “obscene,” considered off limits and against etiquette, and therefore as a form of text or performance that resists genre. He highlights the etymological definition of the word “obscene,” stressing that it encompasses that which is “offstage” or “backstage,” and therefore “delimits, and is simultaneously inseparable from, a scene of activity on which attention is focused. Chambers writes that “[t]he cultural obscene is “obscured” or “covered” with respect to a scene of culture, but without being discontinuous with it.” This obfuscation underlines the central idea of Chambers’ argument: that what is “culturally known” by a society may not be easily, readily, or comfortably discussed, or even explicitly exist in a

public forum (Chambers 23).<sup>97</sup> In terms of the texts discussed in this chapter, the obscene is a figure that defines what is inside or outside acceptable social and generic boundaries, a delimitation that allows for testimonial texts' contexts and paratexts to be part of the discussion of how torture was framed socially and politically in France. The same boundaries, reiterated by paratexts, help define and delimit our understanding of how torture can be described in a text, literary or otherwise. Paratextual elements of testimonial texts – prefaces, introductions, annexes, and responses – are all the more important in this kind of writing, because it deals with the very limits and boundaries that the paratextual seeks to define. In his 1987 book, *Seuils*, Gérard Genette defines paratexts as a threshold, a zone of contact between the text and the reader. He includes dedications, introductions, cover art, and back matter (appendices, indexes, etc.) as paratexts, and also distinguishes between peritexts (material inside the book) and epitexts (material around and outside the book, like advertising). In this chapter, I take the broadest definition of paratexts, to include artwork created for and about the text, responses, reviews, and legal decisions about the text. In *Seuils*, Genette mostly discusses works of fiction, although non-fiction works like testimonial texts often have interesting paratexts because these parts of the texts speak to the idea of what is true and validated about the text. Paratextual elements verify and support the first-hand experience that is at the core of the testimonial text.

The notion of the obscene, the way that Chambers figures testimonial writing as a form that exists between the public and the private sphere, is a crucial way of imagining the supposed “open secret” of torture and its recurring repression and return in literature and social discourse. Imagining reports of torture as outside the bounds of society and culture helps to interpret the way that testimonial texts are written, published, and read in a repressive climate.

For much of *Untimely Interventions* Chambers is referring to AIDS writing but there is in the Franco-Algerian conflict a similar feeling of something happening in the midst of society that most people in that society would prefer not to see that resonates with the idea of something happening offstage, out of the direct line of sight but still within earshot.<sup>98</sup> The tropes of

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<sup>97</sup> Chambers does not completely embrace the etymological gloss he introduces, but presents it nonetheless: I have in mind a sense of the word *obscene* that etymologically relates it to the word *obscure*: each of these two words (and a number of others) is conjectured to derive from an Indo-European radical \**sku*, denoting coverage or protection, whence Greek *skene* and ultimately English *scene*. The obscene, then, would be the “offstage” or “backstage” space that delimits, and is simultaneously inseparable from, a scene of activity on which attention is focused. The cultural obscene is “obscured” or “covered” with respect to a scene of culture, but without being discontinuous with it. And it is tinged with a sense of the sacred (Latin *obscenus* meant of ill augur), but also of stigma and abjection, both of which refer to the mixture of fascination and repulsion exerted by objects that are expelled from within the social or physical body (see Kristeva). Dubious as the etymology may be, it highlights the crucial idea that what is culturally known may not be readily acknowledged (Chambers 23).

<sup>98</sup> *Untimely Interventions* is Chambers' second book to address AIDS writing, following *Facing It: AIDS diaries and the death of an author* (1998). Note the language of attention, or noticing, and appropriateness (timeliness) that is used across the two books. The first title is about looking and position in space (facing “it,” not just looking towards something but turning one's whole attention towards it, physically and intellectually) and the second is about timing, both in a sense of etiquette, doing something at the right time, but also before and after time, what happens in the aftermath of the traumatic event. Of course, *Untimely Interventions* is also very interested in tropes of space, as shown by the idea of the obscene as something that happens in a liminal space between attention and disattention, allowed and disallowed.

contamination and containment of torture (torture as “la gangrène” that threatened to infect the whole infrastructure of the French military and colonial administration) are also similar to discourses around the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The texts Chambers discusses feature a split between agency and subjectivity, as the surviving witness speaks both from the position of victim (subject) and the position of survivor (agent). They can also, importantly, be written while the traumatic event is still happening. For example, a terminally ill, HIV-positive artist takes pictures of his lesion-covered body and exhibits them while he is still suffering from the lesions and from AIDS (Chambers 82-3).<sup>99</sup> Witnessing, then, as described by Chambers, can be done from a place of trauma, while the trauma is still happening, and not only after the fact, when it exists as a repetitive, “ghostlike” structure to which the writer must return (71). In the writing from the place of trauma that Chambers examines, the writer is already, and still, there, divided between agency and subjectivity, as he or she speaks both from the position of victim and the position of survivor who is able to narrate his or her trauma. This division is paralleled in texts that bear witness to torture, as the writer is writing as the subject of torture and as the survivor of torture who can look back on it as a past event. Witnessing allows for a broadening of the terms of discourse, one that acknowledges that any writing about trauma is necessarily “disruptive of the workings of genre,” which relies on linking events into a narrative that closes gaps and creates a whole (201).<sup>100</sup>

The terms “testimonial writing” and “witnessing” evoke “a way of rewriting insignificant residuality into hypersignificant liminality”. A way of writing about and therefore making visible what the “unaffected” would prefer to ignore is appropriate to outline the way that texts about torture in Algeria have been both present and invisible in France in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Chambers xxiv). The generic character of witnessing, or testimonial writing, “arises not from the supposed “unsayability” of the event but from the presupposed cultural “inaudibility,” in this sense, of the testimonial message. I argue that the paratextual legitimization that Alleg and Boupacha’s texts undergo places them in a position of hypersignificant liminality, which enables them to become audible or readable despite the strong preference to imagine torture survivors as already dead and therefore safely mute.

Hypersignificant liminality is also an apt way to think about how published accounts of torture were simultaneously banned and bestsellers, disavowed and widely-read. Many of the paratextual elements around these accounts – for example Jean-Paul Sartre’s postscript to *La Question* and the *témoignages* of left-wing intellectuals that close *Djamila Boupacha* – insist that the reality of torture be made known and ensure that it is not seen as merely a localized or

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<sup>99</sup> “Eric Michaels, Brisbane, June 26, 1988” from Eric Michaels, *Unbecoming*, viii. The title of Michaels’ photographs points towards both his body’s shift towards death – he is becoming nothing, as evidenced by the lesions eating away at his flesh – and the unseemliness of the vision of dying: it is unbecoming to take pictures of this process, and to look at those photos.

<sup>100</sup> “I will not be treating AIDS writing in this book as an illness narrative, nor will I take the audience’s sympathy as a given in the reception of witnessing narratives. Rather, my position is closer to Kalí Tal’s view that there is a social “battle over the meaning of . . . traumatic experience” and that testimonial is as “aggressive act” that social convention seeks to repress.” (Tal 7, Chambers 20)

marginalized practice. Of course, the hypersignificance of torture was not lost on those in power in France, many of whom publicly condemned torture while sanctioning it.<sup>101</sup>

Highlighting the hypersignificant liminality of torture gestures to the complicity that is an important part of the discussion about torture in Algeria: torture is ignored and denied at the same time that its existence is known. Jean-Paul Sartre's 1957 article "Vous êtes formidables" criticizes contemporary writing about torture as complicit with the act of torture, pointing to a lack of *engagement* and a fear of troubling the public. Sartre's criticism is mostly directed at the reading public who are described as passive consumers of reports on Algerian "events," and even of the published writing of returning soldiers, who were beginning to describe and denounce the violence of the French army in Algeria. For Sartre, a gap exists between the public's belief and its knowledge: "Le mensonge est là – et l'excuse du mensonge: oui, nous manquons de preuves, donc nous ne pouvons rien *croire*; mais nous ne les cherchons pas, ces preuves, parce que, *malgré nous, nous savons*" (62). The existence of torture is known but impossible to believe: its denial exists in a "cauchemar indistinct" from which the French population refuses to wake up. The idea of a feverish nightmare that the French (Sartre insists on the collective "nous," encompassing the whole population) "ne peut ni fuir, ni déchiffrer" mimics the language of torture victims who often describe their ordeals as taking place in a feverish state between sleep and waking (58).<sup>102</sup> Sartre uses this metaphor to illustrate the illness of those who he sees as "personnellement complices" in the State's lies and efforts not to disturb the general public: "Cacher, tromper, mentir: c'est un devoir pour les informateurs de la Métropole; le seul crime serait de nous *troubler*," evoking the verb's double meaning of disturbing and making less clear, muddying the water (59). By making an explicit comparison of France's refusal to believe testimonial accounts of torture and the German public's claim to not have known about the concentration camps, Sartre delivers a scathing, deliberately ironic commentary on the behavior of readers and writers alike: his "we" suggests that he is not exempting his cohort of engaged writers from collective blame.

At the heart of Sartre's denunciation is the role of the written and spoken word as proof of the existence of torture. "Oui, nous manquons de preuves," ironically ignores the accounts of conscripts and torture victims to underscore the extent to which the manipulation of language is operating in metropolitan France in 1957. In cases of torture, victims – and to some extent witnesses – also must contend with the new role that language must take up after torture has occurred. Language is no longer a way of conveying plot and feelings and opinion, it is now the "answer" to the question that torture poses. The difference between speaking and not speaking (using language or not) is the false logic that will put an end to torture: if the detained prisoner gives his or her torturer the desired information, he or she will be released. Accepting this logic – in which to speak is to "succeed" as a torture victim but "fail" as a member of a group, or as a "brave" individual – means that language's role within a genre as a way of telling a story or communicating information is forever changed, perverted even. Ironically, answering the

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<sup>101</sup> See Vidal-Naquet, *La Torture dans la République*, especially Chapters 4, 'Le temps du mensonge' and 9, 'Crise de la Nation?' See also the earlier mention in this chapter of Guy Mollet and Charles de Gaulle's reaction to military torture in Algeria.

<sup>102</sup> Sartre's use of metaphors of illness relates to the discourse around torture in France during the war: it is frequently referred to as a "gangrene" that threatens French society as a whole. Chambers uses similar language of physical invasion and threat ("parasitic," "infiltration") to talk about witnessing and obscenity.

question of torture means being denied language (Scarry 28-9). As Sartre states in his postscript to Henri Alleg's testimonial text *La Question* (1958), "[c]elui qui cède à la question, on n'a pas seulement voulu le contraindre à parler; on lui a pour toujours imposé un statut: celui de sous-homme." He thus demonstrates that the role of torture as a silencing tool extends beyond language to the victim's identity itself, making him not just less of a man but less *than* a man (Alleg 116).

In spite of the far-reaching influence of this silencing, testimony needs an audience, someone to hear the inaudible, in order to come into being. Describing the trauma of torture and the narratives that recount it as "obscene" makes torture an indescribable, always liminal event, and one that remains both known and unknown. These narratives take into account the way that language is perverted by the act of torture as forced speech, and evoke the problematic necessity of narrating trauma in order for it to be witnessed by others. Creating narratives that place the act of torture as the centerpiece and the *raison d'être* of the text displaces our attention towards the obscene, unsettling cultural ideas of what can and cannot be seen and written. Texts or *témoignages* of torture reconfigure cultural and literary spaces by shifting what has been "out of bounds," in Chambers' terms, to a more central role, forcing them to be acknowledged.

#### **TESTIMONIAL WRITING AND THE *ENGAGEMENT PARATEXTUEL* OF INTELLECTUAL PARIS**

In their implicit directive to "speak for" and represent a victimized group, Alleg and Boupacha's accounts of their experiences were expected to be true and verifiable. Given the illegality and relative clandestinity of the act of torture, providing "proof" other than a written and oral testimony was difficult, if not impossible. The texts answer the expectation of truth by giving material details that seek to corroborate their stories, and by including paratextual support from French writers that vouches for the testimonies' veracity and renders them more accessible for the metropolitan French public.

Both texts' reception and circulation are affected by censorship: books and articles thought to endanger the army or corrupt the morals of French youth were subject to seizure and their publishers subject to fines. The idea that the testimonial accounts of torture victims somehow threaten French national security and morale parallels the false justification of torture as a way of finding out information that will win the battle against terrorism in Algeria. By the same (false) logic, these texts are thought to disseminate information that might threaten France's role in Algeria, still considered one of pacification and repression of guerilla activity, rather than that of a military presence engaged in a war. This parallelism creates a context of competing narratives, one in which information must be forcefully attained, and another in which it must be legally repressed. While the information in question is not the same, the irony of torturing in order to make the victim speak and then censoring in order to silence his or her voice, is an essential aspect of the texts' production and reception. A similar forced voicing/forced silencing occurs in the torture/execution scenario: torture victims were often murdered either in the torture chamber or during the "corvée de bois" excursions, during which "escaping" prisoners were executed. In this scenario – one that is not directly addressed in the texts studied here, but certainly referenced by the authors, for example Alleg's naming of

murdered fellow FLN members like Maurice Audin – the prisoner is forced to “talk” and whether she or he says too much or too little (misinformation, nothing) is definitively silenced by his or her torturers.

Finally, and most crucially for these two texts, is the issue of legitimization. By this, I do not mean the truth or exemplarity or representativity of their narratives, but rather how the texts are legitimized as able to “speak for” torture victims, and as accounts that should be brought to hexagonal France’s attention. The intellectual “weight” of *écrivains engagés* Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, who act as patrons or conduits for the testimonial texts, is one way in which their texts are given license to speak publicly. Additionally, Beauvoir and Sartre write texts that become part of the testimonial, adding to the text while allowing it, to greater or lesser extent, to enter into a Parisian, left-wing discussion of *crimes de guerre*. Because of their controversial subject matter, *La Question* and *Djamila Boupacha* remained obscene, and therefore scarcely visible for the majority of the metropolitan French public. Nevertheless, the witnessing and framing that takes place around the testimonies allows for their greater legibility.

As Anne Simonin shows in her examination of the publishing houses Minuit and Seuil and their contrasting editorial policies during the war, very few anti-torture texts appeared at the beginning of the war. After the publication of Robert Bonnaud’s “La paix des Nementchas” in *Esprit* in April 1957, however, a number of intellectuals from across the political spectrum published articles and books denouncing torture and, more generally, what they perceived as the failure of the colonial system.<sup>103</sup>

As a text of witnessing, Henri Alleg’s first-hand account carried the weight of his prior experiences as a journalist and member of the Algerian Communist Party. *La Question*, published as a furious *sur le vif* diatribe against his treatment, was lent further gravitas by its relational and literary contexts. Prior to their arrests, Alleg was in hiding in Algiers with Maurice Audin, a fellow Party member who was arrested one day prior to Alleg’s arrest. Audin’s death during his detainment at El Biar was already suspect and was later widely considered to be a murder at the hands of the military.<sup>104</sup> *La Question* was published in February of 1958 (without Sartre’s “Une Victoire,” which was added in a later edition) and banned from sale in March, after selling 60,000 copies, because it “demoralized” and “hindered” the Army (Stora, *Gangrène* 21-31). “Officially,” writes James D. Le Sueur, “it was banned because the French government considered it anticolonial communist propaganda. Unofficially, it was banned by the doomed Fourth Republic ... precisely because it ended the state’s ability to deny that torture had become a preferred and practically universal method of interrogation in Algeria” (Alleg, trans. Calder xiv). For Simonin, the censorship of *La Question* forced the government to “reconnaître une dimension politique au problème moral posé par la torture” as the government intervened in the dissemination of information about what was happening in Algeria (Simonin 152). Alleg’s

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<sup>103</sup> See Etienne Fouilloux, “Intellectuels catholiques et guerre d’Algérie (1954-1962)” (in Rioux & Sirinelli). There is a lot of overlap between the criticism of the colonial system made by Catholic intellectuals and left-wing (principally, but not entirely Communist) intellectuals in the late 1950s and early 1960s, although the reasoning behind their protests were very different. The journals *Esprit* and *Les Temps Modernes* published denunciations of the violence in Algeria in 1954, by Bonnaud, Mattei, and Vidal-Nacquet.

<sup>104</sup> See Pierre Vidal-Nacquet, *L’Affaire Audin* (republishation 1989) and *La raison d’État* (2002). *L’Affaire Audin* was published 5 weeks after the initial publication of *La Question*.

memoir was banned in France but rapidly republished a few weeks later in Switzerland, traditionally a haven for publishing politically sensitive texts, and in later years in the Netherlands. Despite the ban, Benjamin Stora estimates that more than 150,000 copies of the text were in circulation by the end of that year (ibid.)

The narrative nature of Alleg's text is straightforward in that he describes, chronologically, the events that took place during his detention, but it is also a work of rhetoric that seeks to engage and convince the reader. As the author of the testimonial text, Alleg has evidently survived the torture that he describes in *La Question*, but suspense is nevertheless created within the narrative by referring to the death of other detainees (including Audin) and the threats by his torturers of violence against Alleg's wife and of his own death ("Tu es un mort en sursis!" 32).

*La Question* is legitimized as a testimonial text from the outset by the editors' preface, which introduces Henri Alleg as the editor of *Alger Républicain*, a newspaper banned in 1955 for its pro-independence stance. The preface goes on to give a brief timeline of his arrest and detention and to state that at the time of publication he is still imprisoned in Algiers:

Du camp, Alleg fait parvenir en France une copie de la plainte qu'il a déposée fin juillet entre les mains du procureur général d'Alger: il y dénonce les tortures dont il a été victime. Cette plainte connaît un grand retentissement dans la presse française et internationale.

A partir de ce moment, les bruits les plus inquiétants circulent tous les jours à Alger sur la "disparition," "l'enlèvement" et même le "décès" d'Alleg. Et c'est seulement à la suite d'une large campagne de presse que, le 17 août – c'est-à-dire deux mois après son arrestation –, Alleg est enfin présenté à un magistrat instructeur. Depuis lors, il est incarcéré à la prison civile d'Alger. Vers le mois de novembre, il a été, comme membre du parti communiste algérien, inculpé d'atteinte à la sûreté extérieure de l'État et de reconstitution de ligue dissoute. (Alleg 10)

The juxtaposition of the official document, the complaint filed by Alleg, and unofficial, unconfirmed "bruits" draws attention to the fact that Alleg's account will fill in the significant gap between these two forms of utterance. *La Question* is therefore established as a text capable of giving voice to the immense divide between official and unofficial accounts. Additionally, by mentioning the false rumors of his death and insisting on the difficulty of making Alleg "reappear" in a public, legal forum after his "disappearance," Alleg is introduced by the Éditions de minuit editors as someone who has narrowly escaped death, thereby identifying him as a survivor. In Chambers' terms, the survivor, Alleg, inhabits a marginal space and residual time which his testimonial writing transforms into a state of liminality; contact between the living and the dead represented in the figure of the survivor (Chambers xxvi). More concretely, reports from Algeria made it clear that Alleg could be killed at any time, and that the reader could be unwittingly reading a posthumous text. Through this process of becoming liminal, Alleg inspires in the reader a realization of a "not-dead-not-alive space" that makes the liminal event of torture suddenly and irrevocably hypersignificant (xxix).

One of the most striking elements of Alleg's texts is the constant framing and justification that takes place within the text. After the editors introduce Alleg as a bonafide

survivor of torture, a *revenant* who writes from the still-liminal space of a prison in a contested zone, Alleg takes up the introductory tone by prescribing a certain kind of reading for his text;

C'est aux "disparus" et à ceux qui, sûrs de leur cause, attendent sans frayeur la mort, à tous ceux qui ont connu les bourreaux et ne les ont pas craints, à tous ceux qui, face à la haine et la torture, répondent par la certitude de la paix prochaine et de l'amitié entre nos deux peuples qu'il faut que l'on pense en lisant mon récit, car il pourrait être celui de chacun d'eux. (Alleg 20)

This advice on how to read immediately precedes a flashback in which the narrative shifts from a here-and-now description of the prison from which Alleg writes to the recollection of his arrest in June. The first chapter of his statement, therefore, also works as a frame, describing the space of the prison, the people within it – divided into men and women, newcomers and the condemned – and the standard questions that determine a shared experience of torture (“Arrêté depuis longtemps? Torturé? Paras ou policiers?”).

The place of writing is also defined by scars caused by torture, although at this point in the narrative Alleg writes only about the damage done to others’ bodies, not his own. He mentions by name Mohamed Sefta, who can barely speak because of his “langue tailladée” and Boualem Bahmed with “de longues cicatrices qu’il avait aux mollets”. Others’ scars immediately draw focus to the body as the site of torture and are a reminder of the incommunicability of pain. The evocation of female prisoners – Alleg calls them “jeunes filles” - on the “autre côté du mur” who have been “déshabillées, frappées, insultées par des tortionnaires sadiques” is an acknowledgement of the kind of sexual violence that often went unspoken or euphemized in accounts of torture, which will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter (19-20). Alleg specifically mentions Annick Castel, who, pregnant after being raped by a paratrooper, committed suicide. Her “martyrdom” is shocking, and illustrates a very specific kind of violence against women, but is perhaps given by Alleg as a calculated example, as Castel was a “Français(e) d’Algérie” like him - a full citizen of France who agreed with the Algerian cause - and therefore more recognizable for the (mostly) French metropolitan readership. Alleg goes on later in *La Question* to give details of the torture inflicted on his body, but is careful in his introduction to describe himself as one of many and thereby remind the reader of the terrible ubiquity of torture, and to align himself with the other political prisoners in the detention center *and* with those who were killed before they could “escape” to the relative safety of prison where their presence and legal status had to be officially documented.

As well as establishing Alleg as one victim of torture among many and constructing a readership that understands his text as proof of an experience shared by many, the introduction to *La Question* also sets Alleg up as a reliable witness. He writes “Tout cela, je le sais, je l’ai vu, je l’ai entendu. Mais qui dira tout le reste?” (20). Alleg recognizes the divide between the acts that he experienced and was witness to and the “everything else” that testimonial texts imply but cannot describe. *La Question* operates a metonymy in which the author’s testimony stands in for many unwritten (and unwriteable) testimonies. The issue of the reliability of the author as a spokesperson takes shape in Alleg’s repeated concerns about his connection to “reality”. The biggest fear of his detention, as he tells it, is losing touch with reality and no longer being able to perceive what is happening to him. Blindfolded, Alleg writes that “[m]a myopie renforçait encore l’impression d’irréel, de cauchemar que je ressentais et contre laquelle je m’efforçais de lutter, dans la crainte de voir se briser ma volonté ” (33). Later, he digs his nails into his fist to

avoid moving his fingers, a sign to the torturers that he is ready to talk, inflicting a deliberate, willful pain alongside another to exercise his “volonté.” After nearly drowning, he writes “en ouvrant les yeux, je mis quelques secondes à reprendre contact avec la réalité” (37-8). The preoccupation with being “trainé hors de réalité” betrays a concern about the realism or veracity of his testimony. Alleg makes it a point of pride to be able to recall completely and thoroughly his ordeal, even as he admits momentary losses of consciousness, and therefore of the narrative thread that propels his testimony (55). Alleg’s psychological struggle centers not on withstanding physical pain, but with maintaining control and consciousness. His descriptions of his physical and mental reactions to torture often focus on the need to recall and narrativize what is happening to him, a need that keeps indicating the presence of the text as a post-torture narrative.

Similarly, in *La Gangrène* (1959), there is also an insistence on maintaining consciousness in order to stay connected to an increasingly unimaginable reality and on not “talking,” even to give false or innocuous information. *La Gangrène* is a collection of testimonials; seven suspected FLN members’ accounts of torture by the Direction de la surveillance du territoire (DST) in Paris. Almost as soon as it was published, the book was seized and prohibited from sale, viewed as a threat to national security. In both *La Question* and *La Gangrène*, the preoccupation with remaining conscious and connected to the real world of the torture chamber discloses a concern over identity as well as a concern with narration: losing consciousness means losing one’s self, either temporarily to pain, or permanently to death.<sup>105</sup>

Alleg’s concern with being able to narrate and therefore turn into testimony the events of the torture chamber is confused with the fear of loss of consciousness as death. This self-conscious conflation of survival with narration culminates in Alleg’s experience with pentothal, a so-called “truth-drug”. While the reader is never told what it is that Alleg does not wish to disclose during torture – in this way he refuses his torturers’ motivations and dismantles the logic of the torture chamber – his struggle to remain in control of his voice and body is once again expressed in terms of physical contact with reality. Pinching his leg, he thinks “tant que mes ongles pinceraient ma chair, je serais bien amarré à la réalité,” even though this anchoring is threatened by the fact that he can “hear himself” as he chattily answers his interrogator’s questions (68). Although this scene is not the most violent that Alleg describes, his anguish at a potential loss of control and separation from reality is more palpable here than elsewhere, as the drug is supposed to attack him mentally as well as physically, threatening his identity and integrity.

Another threat to Alleg’s physical integrity is the use of torture on the genitals, as well as penetrative torture. While accounts of “l’eau” (usually forced ingestion and dunking) and “l’électricité” (electrical current administered by more or less primitive “gégènes,” or dynamos) were almost universal in survivors’ accounts of torture, few victims were willing to talk or write about the sexual nature of torture.<sup>106</sup> Whereas Alleg only alludes to rape committed against female detainees in his introduction, the sexually degrading aspects of torture that he underwent himself are referred to openly and flatly: they are described without being analyzed or explained, unlike other episodes of torture he experienced.

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<sup>105</sup> For further discussion of *La Gangrène*, see Merom 144.

<sup>106</sup> On the “sexing” of torture, see Lazreg 122-135.

Very soon after the initial publication of *La Question*, *L'Express* published an article by Jean-Paul Sartre called "Une Victoire."<sup>107</sup> Sartre's association with Alleg was long-lasting: they were fellow members of the Communist Party, and Sartre, who had already strongly criticized the French political and military role in Algeria, became especially interested in Alleg's case. Sartre's article was published separately, and along with Alleg's *La Question*, in clandestine publications in France, and in translation in English the same month it appeared (Contat 345-346). Sartre's polemic directly addresses the public's illogical refusal to see the reality of torture in Algeria, as he had previously in "Vous êtes formidables," and went further by refusing the government's "ticking time bomb" justification of torture and alleging that torture was taking place in hexagonal France. He writes:

Vous savez ce qu'on dit parfois pour justifier les bourreaux : qu'il faut bien se résoudre à tourmenter un homme si ses aveux permettent d'épargner des centaines de vies. Belle tartufferie. Alleg pas plus qu'Audin n'était un terroriste ; la preuve, c'est qu'il est inculpé d'"atteinte à la sûreté de l'Etat et de reconstitution de ligue dissoute". Etait-ce pour sauver des vies qu'on lui brûlait les seins, le poil du sexe ? Non ... [L]a plupart des torturés ne disent rien parce qu'ils n'ont rien à dire. (Alleg 112-3)

By insisting on Alleg's French identity, repeatedly comparing the situation in Algeria to the Occupation, and using the first person pronoun "nous," as he did in "Vous êtes formidable," Sartre brings the existence of torture uncomfortably close for the "Français de France" who are his primary audience. As in the earlier piece, Sartre places himself on the side of the "bourreaux:" "Balayons notre porte et tâchons de comprendre ce qui nous est arrivé à nous, les Français" (112). Sartre briefly cites Alleg when he describes the kind of torture that he underwent, but uses most of the article to establish a series of oppositions between torturer and victim and between speaking and silence, that condemn the false, hackneyed logic of torture and repeatedly drive home the disturbing parallel between Nazi and collaborationist behavior during the Occupation and the French majority's refusal to act in opposition to torture.

This call to engagement is somewhat surprising given the number of newspaper and journals articles that had been published in France by March 1958, albeit mostly in left-wing publications. Sartre's "we" is therefore more slippery than it initially seems, addressing the *Français moyen* who supported de Gaulle's government and the army's pacification strategy in Algeria, and not those who, like him, were already cognizant of the horrors of torture.<sup>108</sup> The first-person plural also emphasizes the shared nationality and culture of Sartre, Alleg, and the supposed/imagined reader: all French, white, educated men who could, Sartre's text seems to threaten, end up in the torture chamber themselves, as either victim or torturer. In 1958 Paris, Sartre was in many ways the ultimate "legitimizer" of engaged texts. As the editor of *Les Temps modernes* his outraged, eloquent style was frequently employed to denounce injustice and take to task intellectuals who were not doing enough. By writing about the censored *Question*, Sartre ensures its notoriety, but "Une Victoire" is a postface to Alleg's testimony, rather than a

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<sup>107</sup> The edition of *L'Express* in question was censored, and Sartre's article subsequently appeared in several other newspapers and periodicals, in full or excerpted form, for example *The Observer*, *Le Canard enchaîné*, *Témoignages et Documents*, and *Les Temps modernes*. The page numbers given here are those from the 1966 reedition of *La Question, suivi d'Une Victoire*, published by Editions de Minuit in the Netherlands.

<sup>108</sup> See Simonin for a list of the texts published in France during this period.

prefatory text. In this position, it doesn't introduce Alleg's words but seconds them, echoing his tone and message. Compared to the case of Djamila Boupacha, as we will see shortly, Alleg had less need to be legitimized by a Parisian left-wing intellectual. Sartre's reiteration of his earlier condemnations of torture, and his specific engagement with Alleg's text, serve to bring the text completely into the Parisian, hexagonal context. Sartre emphasizes Alleg's French identity, stating that "nous sommes fiers qu'il soit Français," because of his endurance, even though the torture took place at the hands of representatives of the French Republic.

The need to repatriate Alleg and his testimony is a reflection on one of the major points of contention of the Franco-Algerian relationship. If Algeria was inherently French, as the majority of the French population believed at the beginning of the 1950s' "events," a part of France that it was unthinkable to imagine as a separate, independent entity, then why is it necessary for Alleg to be contextualized and legitimized by Sartre? Sartre vindicates, most likely accidentally, the idea that Algeria and those who lived there, by choice or by circumstance, were different and removed from the France that had lived through the Occupation and its own confrontation with torture and terror. The paradox of Algeria as a non-French part of France is underscored in "Une Victoire" when Sartre uses the now-familiar metaphor of torture as a contagious illness that threatens life in hexagonal France. He writes, "la gangrène s'étend, elle a traversé la mer : le bruit a même couru qu'on mettait à la question dans certaines prisons de la 'Métropole'" (111). Sartre ironizes "'Métropole'" with quotation marks, but it is also true that the physical and psychological barrier that separated Algeria and France was under attack by the testimonies carried back by returning soldiers and torture survivors.

Putting aside the left-wing credentials provided by Sartre's postface, Alleg's testimonial account required significantly less rhetorical couching than Djamila Boupacha's to reach a French readership. Henri Alleg was a writer and intellectual in his own right and his testimonial account was already widely read, even though it was officially banned from sale, so that Sartre's article served mostly to strengthen and legitimize his account, not to allow it to be published. In Djamila Boupacha's case, however, the intervention of legally, politically, and socially powerful figures would be necessary to make her testimonial text appear in the French public sphere. The amount of contextualization and paratextual justification that surrounds her testimony is, unquestionably, an attempt to bring attention to Boupacha's legal case and have the crimes against her recognized, but also an indication of the need to legitimize Boupacha's voice.

The obscenity of Boupacha's testimony, that is, the liminal, precarious position given to the violent acts it depicts, exists without the framing narrative of Beauvoir and Halimi's texts. These texts, however, lend legal, social, and intellectual gravitas to her case, and turn her account into a framed testimonial, rather than a bare testimony that only has meaning in a legal context. As previously mentioned, they have a paradoxical role of muffling the testimony's obscenity and at the same time bringing it to a greater public. Boupacha's testimony cannot circulate as a testimonial text in and of itself, it needs to be affirmed, cited, and revealed by French thinkers like Beauvoir. The paratextual framing, therefore, of Boupacha's "story" generically shapes the story itself, and draws the readers' attention to the obscenity of what she has to say. The irony here is that the obscene has been placed firmly at the center of attention: Boupacha's testimony is at the heart of the book and her words ripple outwards in the form of citation, explanation, and elaboration. Despite the many layers of rhetoric and explanation that surround her own words,

Boupacha's *plainte* has a repercussive, almost violent effect on the rest of the text. As this framework suggests, there was a need to make Boupacha emblematic of the kind of torture that was happening, the severity of the torture, and the legal, physical, and cultural aftermath of torture. The shock of Boupacha's witnessing does not lie in the nature of the torture being described, but in the personalization of it that occurs through the narrativization of Boupacha's *supplice* and the larger, frame narrative that makes Djamila Boupacha into a visible and audible survivor. Arguably, the genre of testimonial writing requires the graphic details that Boupacha provides, and which are taken up in the other texts that make up *Djamila Boupacha* as touchstones of her suffering.

A *plainte*, both a legal term for a complaint or grievance, and the term for the sound made by someone in pain, recalls the dual purpose of Boupacha's text: to appeal to the authorities on legal grounds and to the general public on an empathetic level. The difference between the reflexive form of the verb, *se plaindre* (to sympathize with, have pity for), and the transitive form *plaindre* (to complain) also reflects the complicated relationship between writer and reader: Boupacha's writing is a complaint and a sound that evokes sympathy. Legal officials, intellectuals, and all those who read her *plainte* are able to imagine her cries of pain as they read her *plainte*. The double meaning of *plainte* is echoed in the sketches by Lapoujade (Figures 5 & 6), which turn Djamila's body into an abstraction of lines, suggesting that her *plainte*, the legal appeal and the cry for help, have deconstructed or splintered her identity.

One of the ways in which Boupacha's body materializes for the reader who is being made a witness of her rape and torture is by the inclusion of photographs and illustrations in *Djamila Boupacha*. Three artists portray Boupacha, and the depictions of the woman become progressively less figurative. Featured on the inside of the cover, a sketch by Pablo Picasso [Figure 4] seems to be a mirror image of a photograph of Boupacha that is featured a few pages later. The image captures the same calm, seemingly happy gaze as the photo; the subject's eyes meet the viewer. While having Picasso illustrate *Djamila Boupacha* was certainly a coup in terms of publicity and influence, the two later images of Boupacha are more interesting in figuring her as a torture survivor and as a witness.

In Robert Lapoujade's sketches [Figures 5 & 6] – preparations for a later artwork that was apparently never created – a *Hommage* is imagined. Lapoujade fragments Boupacha's body, repeatedly sketching a disembodied hand, a stretched-out body without legs, and then a face in profile, the mouth open in a cry.<sup>109</sup> The profile of the face is repeated over and over again, as if trying to portray the repetitive nature of the act of torture, as well as the sheer number of cries and bodies represented by Boupacha's testimony. Lapoujade does not allow for a whole body to be viewed. Only the broken-up, divided body exists and is available as the subject of homage. Matta's painting, *Le supplice de Djamila*, is equally fragmentary [Figure 7]. A shape made up of curved body parts is at the center of the painting, crisscrossed by lines that resemble bars or weapons, and surrounded by dark, faceless shapes. The faint, radiating lines at the center of the painting suggest spread-eagled limbs and perhaps a head, but there is no face, as in Lapoujade's drawings. Instead, a number of harsh lines seem to attack the central figure, suggesting the

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<sup>109</sup> Robert Lapoujade was a French painter and filmmaker, and one of the signatories of the ant-Algerian War *Manifeste des 121*.

violence done to her body.<sup>110</sup> The representations of Boupacha become more abstract and also more disfiguring and violent as the figure depicted becomes a symbolic subject of torture rather than an individual who can meet the viewer's stare. This deterioration does, on one hand, remind the reader that torture is widespread and that Boupacha's experience is not uncommon, but it also removes the specificity of her case, turning abstract that which was once concrete: her name, her face, the details of the violence done to her. In this way, the violence and dehumanization of her words remain while she, the witness, disappears.



Figure 4 - Pablo Picasso, Djamila Boupacha, 1962

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<sup>110</sup> Roberto Matta was a Chilean surrealist painter and friend of Beauvoir and Sartre. In the late 1950s, his work was inspired by reading Alleg's *La Question*.

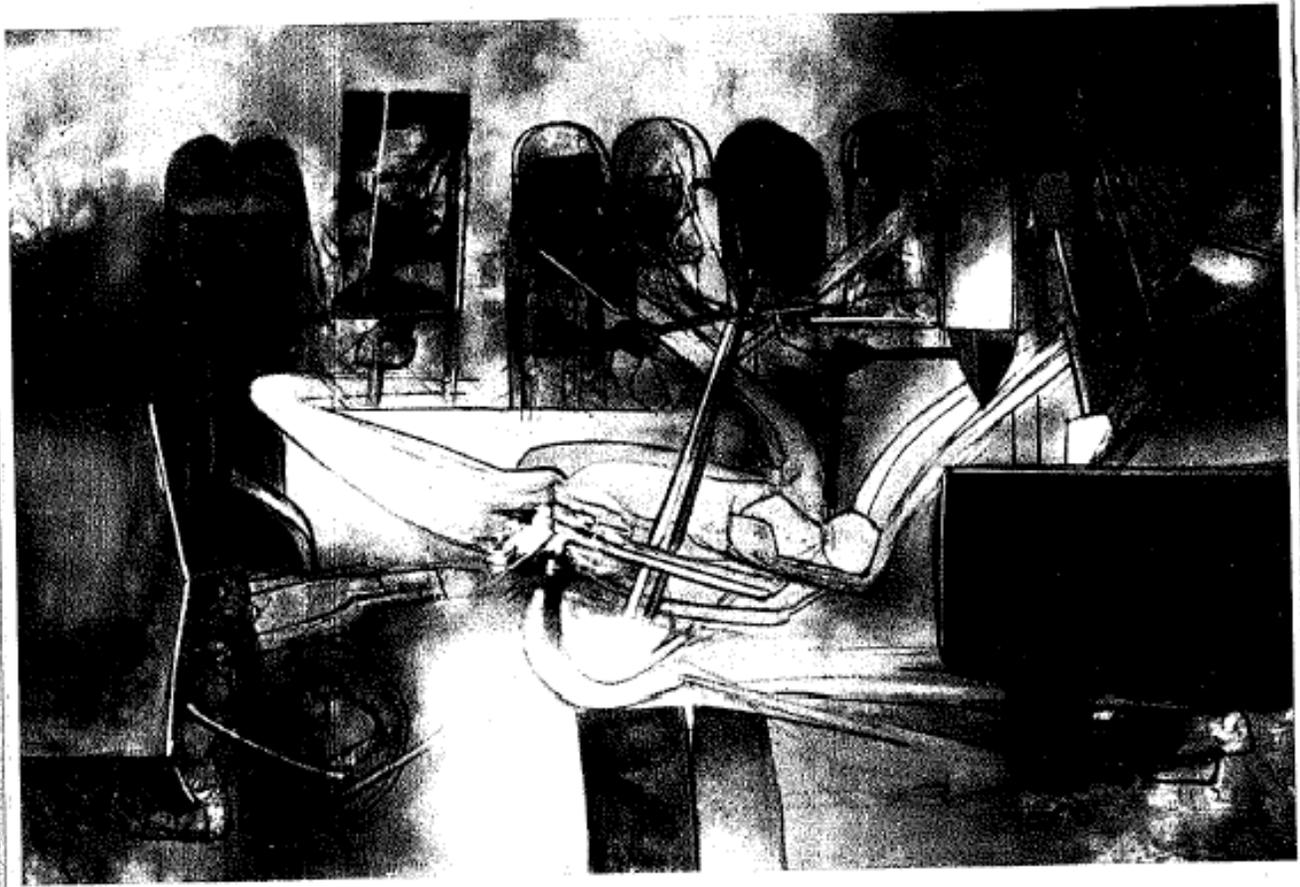


Figure 5 - Robert Lapoujade, Etudes pour un 'Hommage à Djamila Boupacha,' 1962 (1)



Page précédente : Djamila Boupacha (1961).  
Ci-dessus et ci-contre : Études pour un  
« Hommage à Djamila Boupacha », par  
Robert Lapoujade.

Figure 6 - Robert Lapoujade, Etudes pour un 'Hommage à Djamilia Boupacha,' 1962 (2)



*Le supplice de Djamilia* par Matta (peinture 4×3 m).

Figure 7 - Roberto Matta, *Le Supplice de Djamilia*, 1962

Making Boupacha visible through family photos is unsurprising, but the artists' interpretations of her body and her experience shift the expectations of the testimonial text. Whereas Halimi uses legal language and straightforward narrative, and Beauvoir uses polemic to insist on Boupacha's plight and the guilt of the French government, the illustrations denote a different possible reading of the text, one that allows for a more nuanced, abstract reading of Boupacha's text and the other voices that frame it. The illustrations are paratexts, along with Beauvoir and Halimi's textual interventions. They do not attempt to legitimize the text, but instead bring Boupacha's plight into the visual realm. The reproductions of paintings form a different kind of representation of violence, one that deconstructs the scene of torture and the tortured body alongside textual accounts that reconstruct and represent the survivor's body.

## NARRATING THE OBSCENITY OF SEXUAL TORTURE

As discussed above, Boupacha's euphemistic description of her rape is the most obscene part of her narrative. It draws full attention to that which is supposed to go unseen and unheard in reports of torture. In both Alleg and Boupacha's texts, sexual assault is mentioned not offhandedly, but certainly in a way that underscores the ubiquity of sexual humiliation, penetration, and genital torture in experiences of torture during the Algerian War.<sup>111</sup>

In thinking about the acts of sexual and genital violence reported by Boupacha, Alleg, and also Louisette Ighilahriz, the importance of the body as the site of torture is evident. While torture operates on both physical and psychological levels, and sexual torture certainly affects the victim on both these levels, the physicality of these acts is equated with truth-telling: in the case of Boupacha and Ighilahriz, physical evidence of rape is repeatedly insisted upon as a way of "proving" that torture did indeed take place. The tortured body is therefore sexualized once again as a site where torture leaves a trace that can be read judicially, politically, and personally. The body must be repeatedly uncovered to display the dishonoring event that was done to it. In Alleg's case, although he does not address the genital torture he suffered at length, it is clear that the nature of this specific kind of torture and rape is a display of power and not of sex. For Ighilahriz, the fact that she recounts the story of her torture, and eventually creates a testimonial text more than forty years after the events and in a radically changed social and political context, creates a different set of problems that relate to the role of testimonial writing and the audibility of delayed accounts. Ighilahriz's account of torture during her imprisonment, which initially came to light in an interview with Florence Beaugé in *Le Monde*, progresses from a denial of rape to the acceptance and transmission of its reality, a shifting narrative that fueled the "torture controversies" of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Branche, in her chapter "La Conquête au cœur: le viol des femmes," clearly outlines the differences between rape and other kinds of physical torture at the hands of the French police and military. In her study, a major difference lies in the fact that torture as a strategy of interrogation and control was officially sanctioned and documented, and continues to be defended by some of its practitioners (to varying degrees), whereas rape was not part of a "politique délibérée"; it was not sanctioned or planned in any way and, without exception, was denounced as an unnecessary and criminal violence by the former soldiers she interviewed (Branche 294-299). Because of its status as an act that accompanied the military presence in Algeria yet was not officially allowed, rape is absent from the military archives. This leaves victim and perpetrator testimonies of rape and sexual assault as the only source of information about the frequency and severity of these crimes, adding additional questions of subjectivity and reliability to any attempts at discussions of rape by the French military. Because of its absence from the archive, its taboo for both victims and perpetrators, and a number of other factors, including in Algeria what Branche describes as a policy of under-reporting sexual assault and rape during and immediately after the war in order to diminish the psychological influence it had on the Algerian population, rape becomes a "crime triplement tu, par les victims, par les soldats, et par les chefs [French and Algerian]" (92).

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<sup>111</sup> The Algerian War was obviously not the first or only time that sexual torture played a major role in warfare. For an overview of rape and genital torture in the modern world, see Rejali, *Torture and Democracy*. Lazreg develops the idea of rape and sexual torture as a strategy in *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*. See especially "Doing Torture" and "Women: Between Torture and Military Feminism."

In *La Torture et l'armée française*, Branche is primarily writing about rape that happened during pacification campaigns in rural areas, rather than rape that took place during interrogations.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps for this reason, she doesn't address the cases of sexual assault and rape of detained and imprisoned men, although she does make the distinction between genital rape (legally regarded as first-degree rape at the time) and rape with a foreign object (second-degree rape). In cases that took place in rural areas, rape was an act that took place inside women's homes and villages, often in front of other family members. It was therefore a violent act against women's bodies and their families that was also at times a spectacle, a show of power by an invading force: "Le viol est l'acte du conquérant, le signe du vainqueur et, pour le pays vaincu, une humiliation profonde" (Branche 298).

Branche also addresses the issue of babies born as a result of rape by members of the French military. Although it is impossible to establish statistics for these pregnancies and births, it appears that whether or not to keep these children, and whether or not to repudiate the women who had them, was a subject of debate for the Armée de libération nationale (Branche 299). As well as being a divisive and shameful social issue, these pregnancies created a physical and genealogical trace of the French presence in Algeria, one that "[maintient] la France en Algérie, dans le corps des femmes." Viewed as an issue of population control as well as psychological and physical abuse, rape that resulted in pregnancy is part of the "obsession, issue de l'imaginaire colonial ... d'une démographie algérienne galopante," a demography that is disrupted by fathering the next generation of Algerian children, diluting the dangerous nationalist current that the French government saw as the cause of events in Algeria.<sup>113</sup> Fear of pregnancy and the social and cultural issues surrounding it may explain why the distinction between first- and second-degree rape was so vivid for Boupacha and others: the latter cannot result in pregnancy and therefore could carry less of a stigma.

Fatima Mernissi insists on the importance in Islamic cultures of the boundaries established around male and female bodies in her book *Sexe idéologie islam*. A "sexualité territoriale" exists as a way of regulating family relationships, and ritualizing the social movements and public role of women (153-4). Mernissi writes that "[t]oute transgression de ces frontières est un danger social dans la mesure où elle constitue une attaque contre la répartition des pouvoirs exprimée par ces limites" (ibid.). Clearly, widespread rape, along with other elements that went along with torture (forced nudity, sexual insults) was a transgression of power dynamics that were already in upheaval during the war, one that was violently imposed on the already highly-regulated bodies of Algerian women.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> See the Introduction for a discussion of the kind of traces that cases of rape left in the archives, and Branche's analysis of this "proof."

<sup>113</sup> For an account of one pregnancy and child that resulted from rape by French soldiers, see Khanna, *Algeria Cuts* (1-31). Khanna analyzes the case of Mohamed Garne, the child of rape who sued the French government in order to receive his (unknown) father's military pension. He was awarded disability benefits and a partial pension in 2001, as the mediatized controversy over Ighilahriz's case was taking place. See also Mernissi 57-60, where she outlines the Quaranic scripture that is meant to ensure a child's paternity.

<sup>114</sup> The classical Islamic legal system of dealing with rape is outside the scope of this chapter but is interesting in light of work by Mireille Rosello and Joshua Cole who discuss the possibilities of and debates around the idea of reparation. They are often talking about memorial or ethical reparation, but Islamic culture also has a system of payment for crimes against persons. Asifa Quraishi writes, in an article about rape laws in Pakistan, that

One critical element of the obscenity of testimonial accounts of torture, and a problem often encountered when discussing cultural and social ideas of rape, is the recurrent conflation between physical acts of torture and sexual acts. Here, the obscenity is located in the confusion of public and private categories and the reversal of pleasurable and painful physical experiences: by imagining torture as always sexual, the nature of consensual sex is dislocated and the violence and power play of torture is translated into disturbingly gendered terms. In the Franco-Algerian context, this trope finds its uneasy footing early on after the outbreak of fighting in the late 1950s, as stories of rape (most often penetration with foreign objects) filter back to the mainland. It is possible, however, to perceive all acts of torture as sexed acts, as Marnia Lazreg describes in *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*. The sexualization of the torture chamber begins with the frequent request for prisoners to strip, and the focus on the genitals and erogenous zones during electrical and other kinds of torture (Lazreg 123).<sup>115</sup> The insistence on the victim's nudity, writes Lazreg, ensures that sex is always present in the torture chamber whether the victim is a man or a woman. The sexing of torture is deeply grounded in the recesses of the torturer's psyche. He either lets his fantasy loose by coercing his victim into sexual positions, and by touching him, or prefers to contain it, gazing, ogling, instead. The sexing of torture is also charged with the traditional conception of gender that inferiorizes women (Lazreg 123). This inferiorization is, of course, extended to men by placing them in a position of forced submission to those doing the torture. Reading torture in these terms is useful to ideas of how a colonial power imagined and treated those it saw as subjects, but there is also the danger of rape, committed against women and men, being perceived only as a strategy of torture rather than a crime in and of itself, one that exists outside of the world of military torture.

In Alleg's account, genital torture goes along with being cast in a submissive, traditionally feminized role, as well as with the humiliation of becoming a spectacle during torture. On the first day of his detention, Alleg is forced to strip naked and is then "straddled" by Lorca, a police officer, one of the torturers he recognizes and names in his account (26-7).<sup>116</sup> As well as the three torturers in the room, Alleg's ordeal draws other soldiers "désireux sans doute d'assister au spectacle" of him naked and pinned down (29). Alleg does not underscore the voyeurism of this scene, and yet the adjective "désireux" hints at the sexual and voyeuristic nature of the "spectacle" that he is forced to become. The scene of forced undressing and nudity is repeated a few days later:

Ils dégrafèrent mon pantalon, baissèrent mon slip et m'accrochèrent les électrodes de chaque côté de l'aîne. Ils se relayaient pour tourner la manivelle de la magnéto

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Islamic legal responses to rape are not limited to a criminal prosecution for *hiraba*. Islamic jurisprudence also creates an avenue for civil redress for a rape survivor in its law of *jirah* (wounds). Islamic law designates ownership rights to each part of one's body and a right to corresponding compensation for any harm done unlawfully to any of those parts. Islamic law calls this the law of *jirah* (wounds). Harm to a sexual organ, therefore, entitles the person harmed to appropriate financial compensation under classical Islamic *jirah* jurisprudence (al-Maqdisi 1994,36). Thus, each school of Islamic law has held that where a woman is harmed through sexual intercourse (some include marital intercourse), she is entitled to financial compensation for the harm. Further, when this intercourse was *without the consent* of the woman, the perpetrator must pay the woman both the basic compensation for the harm and an additional amount based on the *diyya* (financial compensation for murder, akin to wrongful death payment). (131-2)

<sup>115</sup> See Alleg 44, and also *La Gangrène*, in which the torture victims are made to strip and remain naked for the duration of their detention.

<sup>116</sup> On Lorca, a police officer in Algeria, see Branche 130-1.

– une grosse “gégène”. Je ne criais qu’au début de la secousse et à chaque “reprise” du courant, et mes mouvements étaient beaucoup moins violents que lors des premières séances. (Alleg 44)

Alleg elaborates that music was played loudly nearby. This detail at first seems like a macabre parody of a seduction scene, but the music is played, of course, to drown out the victims’ screams. In yet another session with the *gégène*, an electrode is inserted into the end of his penis (31). In *La Question*, Alleg never says that the genital torture and humiliation affected him more than any other kind of torture, nor does he indicate that describing this kind of emasculating experience is especially painful, but the inexpressive report of these violations is colored by the closing phrases of the text. Alleg writes, “J’ai terminé mon récit. Jamais je n’ai écrit aussi péniblement” (94). The adverb applies to the difficulty of the writing process in prison and to the physical pain of his wounds (his fingers and hands were badly injured), but “péniblement” could also refer to the difficulty of the subject matter. His experience of being stripped and straddled is not described in terms of sexual assault; however, the language that Alleg uses highlights the submissive position that he is forced into, as well as the seemingly sexualized physical and spectacular contact that he has with the officers present.

For Boupacha, her experience of rape becomes the focus of her testimony, as described above, through the repetition in *Djamila Boupacha* of her account of the “*supplice de la bouteille*.” In the introduction to the collection, Beauvoir tells of the judge who is relieved when he discovers that Boupacha was raped vaginally and not anally with the bottle, the latter being a practice that often leads to the victim’s death through internal bleeding. This anecdote underscores once again the different hierarchies that are at work in testimonies of sexual violence: Boupacha’s concern is with her social and familial status, while the judge is asking about degrees of physical violence. The central concern of Boupacha’s narrative, however, is one that relates to her status as a victim of rape, as well as the physical trace of that rape. A medical examination proves that Boupacha is no longer a virgin, but this “proof” is insufficient, as there is no corresponding physical evidence that she was a virgin before her arrest (Beauvoir & Halimi 140-142). Aside from physical proof, however, is Boupacha’s preoccupation with the question of her virginity. In Halimi’s account of an early interview with her client, Boupacha phrases the question about her rape as an elliptical statement: “Je ne sais plus si je suis *jeune fille* ... Tu comprends? Je m’étais évanouie, et j’ai eu du sang, quand ils m’ont redescendue dans la cellule ...” Halimi adds, “Cette question, elle se la reposait sans doute pour la centième fois” (24). Boupacha’s phrasing of the question indicates the change in status that goes along with being raped. Her identity as a virgin would be destroyed through rape, and her question is not whether she was raped, but whether the second-degree rape “counts” the same way that intercourse would. Boupacha’s question about her status as a “jeune fille” could also be explained by an epistemological confusion: was rape with a foreign object considered in the same way as genital rape? Did the fact that she was not raped with a man’s penis mean that she could still be a virgin? In the context, Boupacha’s question seems to be a social or ethical question rather than a juridical one.

Boupacha’s preoccupation with the blood that she discovers after regaining consciousness in her cell indicates her concern over her hymen, the only physical proof available of a woman’s virginity. The material importance of a woman’s virginity is linked to her future husband’s

masculinity, because of anxieties around procreation and the need for a man to “assumer une sexualité organique centrée sur la reproduction” once he is married (Chebel 59).<sup>117</sup> Although she points out that the pre-Independence situation in Algeria varied between urban and rural areas, and between social milieux, Monique Gadant also stresses the importance of a woman’s virginity, and the social stigma associated to a pre-marital loss of virginity (249-252). She emphasizes that after many, if not most, Algerian weddings, a bloody sheet is displayed to the groom’s inner circle to prove that the bride had been a virgin, and that she has been successfully deflowered.<sup>118</sup> The possibility of repudiation, exclusion, or even legal consequences if an unmarried woman is not a virgin adds to the overvaluation of the hymen and the heightened fear of its loss. While many historians affirm that the role and expectations of women changed in Algeria during the war, it is unclear from Chebel and Gadant’s discussions whether this anxiety over female virginity continued during the War of Independence, it is evident from Boupacha’s words that she fears her lack of virginity (“Je ne sais plus si je suis *jeune fille*”) more than her other injuries.<sup>119</sup>

While it is difficult to generalize about Algerian customs at the time of the war, or the knowledge of these customs by the French, the police and military were certainly aware of the increased importance of female virginity in Islamic cultures, and the shame and potential dishonor that came with rape. Because a woman could be excluded by her family, and become “unmarriageable,” raping a virgin as part of their detention amounted to destroying her identity as a young woman and, possibly, as a member of a family or community. The physical violation of sexual assault and rape is therefore accompanied by a psychological attack on identity and belonging that relates to Branche’s comments on the far-reaching impact of sexual violence on Algerian women.

Similar questions of degree and the social and personal meaning of rape resonate in Louisette Ighilahriz’s memoir *Algérienne* (2001). Ighilahriz was arrested in September 1957 and detained for three months. She spent several months in prison in France and then returned to Algeria, where she was a teacher and member of parliament, as well as being recognized and celebrated as a FLN *moudjahida*. In her initial testimonial texts, Ighilahriz addresses the issue of first- vs. second-degree rape and states that she was not raped, although Graziani, one of the officers who tortured her during her detention, “enfonceait toutes sortes d’accessoires dans le vagin” (Ighilahriz 113). When she joins her mother in prison, Ighilahriz replies to her mother’s anguished question “Ma fille, ils t’ont violée! Les salauds, ils t’ont violée?!” in the negative,

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<sup>117</sup> In *Le Corps dans la tradition au Maghreb*, Malek Chebel explains the significance of female virginity, and its importance to the family unit, stating that the hymen has both a material and subjective, or symbolic aspect in the Maghreb:

Une fille dont l’état de l’hymen est matériellement intact est dite *s’hiha* (non détruite). Une déchirure de l’hymen vaut à la fille le nom de *m’fasda* (litt. “dé-faite”). ... La virginité, concrétisée par la présence de l’hymen, est figuré dans le discours idéologique par les notions de “fermeture” du corps, du corps limité, hermétique, fermé, muré (59).

<sup>118</sup> Gadant echoes Chebel’s analysis, writing that the hymen of an unmarried woman holds “une valeur symbolique” as well as “une valeur économique qui se concrétise dans la dot offerte par le fiancé” (252).

<sup>119</sup> For a more detailed, varied analysis of exactly how women’s social status changed during the war see for example Neil Macmaster, *Burning the Veil*; Djamilia Amrane, *Des femmes dans la guerre d’Algérie*; Baya Jurquet-Bouhoun, *Femmes algériennes: de la Kahina au Code de la famille*; Raphaëlle Branche, “Des Algériennes en guerre” in *La Torture et l’armée française*.

although she admits that her mother “a néanmoins compris le genre de sévices auxquels j’avais eu droit” (129). As Chebel illustrates, the presence or absence of the hymen “détermine un rapport particulier de la mère (préservatrice morale de sa virginité) à sa fille (préservatrice réelle),” so this avoidance of the truth could well stem from Ighilahriz’s desire to protect her family and its various female relationships from the complete story of what had happened to her (60). Ighilahriz wants to protect her mother from a full account of the torture she has suffered, but also believes that what was done to her, because it was “second-degree” rape, was not to be called rape nor considered as serious. This account of her torture will change in the telling, as examined later in this chapter.

Louissette Ighilahriz’s testimony was initially brought to light in an article by Florence Beaugé in *Le Monde* that was framed as a search, by Ighilahriz, for the man who had rescued her from her torturers.<sup>120</sup> The article begins with the words “J’étais allongée nue, toujours nue,” yet avoids mentioning sexual assault or rape, instead focusing on other forms of physical violence and neglect. Ighilahriz, with the help of Anne Nivat, writes a memoir the next year, *Algérienne*, which tells the story of her childhood, her time in the *maquis*, her arrest and imprisonment, and her life in Algeria after the war. In her initial testimonial texts – the article and the memoir – Ighilahriz minimizes the kind of sexual assault that happened to her. In *Algérienne*, she says that she was “trop dégueulasse” to be raped, and repeatedly emphasizes her physical state: in a cast for her broken leg, she is covered in her own urine, feces, and menstrual blood (113). In her article “Revisiting Ghosts: Louissette Ighilahriz and the Remembering of Torture,” which carefully maps the evolution of Ighilahriz’s testimonies, Sylvie Durmelat points out that it is only after her mother’s death in 2003 that Ighilahriz can admit that Graziani did rape her with his penis. For Durmelat, the gradual revelations about the nature of the sexual torture she underwent give a conflicting and conflicted depiction of her painful experience, while making visible for us how such a trauma is locked and unlocked, repressed and expressed, and how it can only come out as fragments and only later reassembled as a cogent, presentable whole. Ighilahriz’s reluctance to fully acknowledge her rape reflects her resistance and emotional turmoil faced with the perverse yet pervasive eroticization of torture performed by her torturers. Her gradual recognition of Graziani’s actions as rape is a way of “refusing the intimacy” of rape, as well as a way of protecting her family from the full truth of her ordeal (Durmelat 154).

In the cases of Ighilahriz and Boupacha, the rape that took place in the torture chamber is described as part of the torture, not as something that is startling or necessarily remarkable. In Simone de Beauvoir’s letter to *Le Monde* that drew attention to Boupacha’s arrest, the fact that Boupacha was raped is clearly meant to be the shocking part of the account. However, in both Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi’s later writing about Boupacha, as well as Alleg’s mention of women “déshabillées, frappées, insultées par des tortionnaires sadiques,” rape is described as an essential part of torture, not as a shocking, outlying event. Alleg even writes that “chacun ici connaît le martyr d’Annick Castel, violée par un parachutiste”: her story is known by *everyone*, so that the “ici” of this paragraph can refer both to the “here” of El Biar prison and of his readership, in mainland France (Alleg 19-20).

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<sup>120</sup> Florence Beaugé. “Torturée par l’armée française en Algérie, “Lila” recherche l’homme qui l’a sauvée.” *Le Monde*. 19 June 2000.

As previously stated, rape and sexual assault are therefore seen as an inherent, yet underinvestigated and underreported, component of physical and psychological torture carried out during the Algerian War. Writing about Louissette Ighilahriz's rape and Marcel Bigeard's subsequent denial of it, Joshua Cole writes that conflating rape and torture in Algeria

concentrated all of the anxieties that the French felt in listening over the years to stories of torture ... Torture and rape were about establishing a particular relationship between French soldiers and Algerian Muslims, one in which the most essential parts of the victim's personality – the integrity of their bodies, their relations with their families, their connection to a religion, a cause – were annihilated.

The French military ... was determined to use the trauma of torture and rape as a kind of primal scene that would forever define the relationship between the state and its colonial subjects, between the torture-ers and the torture-able (Cole 132).

Dividing individuals into "torturer" and "torture-able" – and, within this logic, rapist and rape-able – opens up a terrifying binary that is constantly present in the three testimonial texts discussed in this chapter. Boupacha, Ighilahriz, and Alleg also enter into a paradox in which the victim (torture-able/rape-able) individual speaks and has his/her words legitimized by members of the French public – Beauvoir, Halimi, Sartre, and Beaugé in these cases – so that these intellectuals can escape the binary relationship and **not** be the torturers and rapists that Cole's schema identifies with the hexagonal French. This move, carried out in the paratexts that I analyze here, does not dismantle the binary of colonizer and colonized, but it does draw attention to the problematic relationship that existed between France and its colonial populations. Looking at the way that torture, and testimonial texts about torture, once again became the focus of attention in turn-of-the-century France, we see the ways in which assumptions about Franco-Algerian relationships are still freighted with pre-Independence ideas of dominance and submission, as well as ideas about who has the right to speak about atrocities that are supposed to be amnestied.

#### **LOUISETTE IGHILAHORIZ AND THE "TORTURE CONTROVERSY"**

The immediacy of the testimonial texts of Henri Alleg and Djamila Boupacha define the way in which the texts were received and represented and also what those texts were meant to achieve on a personal and political level. Forty years later, Louissette Ighilahriz's bearing witness, a process that took place over gradually a period of ten years, is difficult to address through issues of contextualization and legitimization, although her witnessing is framed by writing by intellectuals. More than a generation after the end of the war, Ighilahriz's testimonial texts work to destabilize and repolemicize competing national myths of the Algerian War.

In June 2000, Florence Beaugé's article "Torturée par l'armée française, "Lila" cherche l'homme qui l'a sauvée" appeared on the front page of *Le Monde*. The debate that followed, which led to the trial of Paul Aussaresses for justifying war crimes and to emphatic public denials of torture from within France and Algeria, marked a new chapter in the two countries' responses to torture during the war, but also rekindles many of the images and arguments that were deployed during the war itself. Ighilahriz's testimonial is fascinating because of the intense

media scrutiny that accompanied it, and the dramatic series of accusations and denials that followed the publication of Beaugé's article. It is also of interest because of the evolution of Ighilahriz's account, and the various readings of the perceived subjectivity of her story. Accounts of torture were not new; many had been published during and after the Algerian War, and revelations of torture continued to surface throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, although with less fanfare and polemic. While Djamila Boupacha's words were cordoned off to some degree by the words of Beauvoir, Halimi, and other *intellectuels engagés*, Ighilahriz's words are amplified by the media and by her opponents, revealing the potential afterlives of testimonial texts and the way in which they are able to be performative, to return to Ross Chambers' terms, in spite of a social and cultural preference to ignore the ubiquity of torture.

As previously mentioned, Beaugé's article begins with a quote from Ighilahriz: "J'étais allongée nue, toujours nue. Ils pouvaient venir une, deux ou trois fois par jour." Neither sexual abuse nor rape is explicitly mentioned in the article, but strongly hinted at. Beaugé later said that neither she nor Ighilahriz knew how to approach the subject of her rape.<sup>121</sup> Ighilahriz's account mentioned Generals Massu and Bigeard and Captain Graziani by name, but the alleged goal of the piece was to find Commandant Richaud, the doctor who took Ighilahriz from the detention center where she was being held and made sure that she received medical care.<sup>122</sup> Soon after the article appeared, Generals Paul Aussaresses and Massu both admitted that the kind of torture that "Lila" (Ighilahriz's *nom de guerre*, used in Beaugé's article) described did happen in Algeria. However, while Massu expressed his regret for the torture he took part in, Aussaresses dismissed Ighilahriz's testimonial as "un tissu d'affabulations," while maintaining that torture had been a valid, acceptable, and necessary part of the Algerian campaign.<sup>123</sup> Both Aussaresses and Ighilahriz released memoirs in 2001, and criticism were leveled at both for trying to profit from their wartime experiences.<sup>124</sup> These accusations were also leveled at Ighilahriz in Algeria. In her article Sylvie Durmelat points out that both books are "commercial as well as memorial commodities" and "caught up in the testimonial inflation of the memory business," meaning that the publicity that flared up around these publications was helpful for the sale of their respective books, as well as a way of reapproaching questions of torture (143).<sup>125</sup> Durmelat highlights the pragmatic, financial element to the Ighilahriz case and the "torture controversy" around it, while

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<sup>121</sup> "Il lui fallait beaucoup d'effort pour sortir les mots de sa souffrance. Surtout, elle n'avait pas encore la force de parler du viol dont elle a été victime et moi-même je ne savais pas comment l'écrire." Cécile Plet and Pierre Yves Schneider, "La Torture à la Une: Quand *Le Monde* va tout va," *Tocsin: le journal en ligne des media*, 7 December 2000, 14 Sept. 2002. Cited by Sylvie Durmelat 143-4.

<sup>122</sup> Ighilahriz's memoir, *Algérienne*, begins with her and her sister's visit to Richaud's grave: she wasn't able to find him before his death. In this way, Ighilahriz's story is presented as one that has failed by Nivat, her cowriter, and by Ighilahriz herself. The opening pages of *Algérienne* focus on the age and frailty of Ighilahriz and her sister, as if the visit to the grave is a kind of final pilgrimage for both of them. Published in 2001, the memoir was in fact followed by responses by military figures in both Algeria and France, and these responses also focus on Ighilahriz's body and physical presence.

<sup>123</sup> Laurent Mouloud, "Torture – Schmitt après Aussaresses," *L'Humanité*, 25 June 2003. Cited by Durmelat, 144.

<sup>124</sup> See Joshua Cole and Sylvie Durmelat, *op. cit.*

<sup>125</sup> Durmelat illustrates the occasionally problematic relationship between the legal process and the publishing world: "The testimonies of Louise Ighilahriz and Aussaresses have also been deeply enmeshed with judicial processes. For historians such as Henry Rousso, this interface is potentially dangerous because the legal norms that preside over the judicial arena impose constraints upon the witnesses that do not necessarily foster free speech." (Durmelat 143)

also constructing a nuanced analysis of Ighilahriz's ability to bear witness to her torture and rape gradually, over a number of years.<sup>126</sup>

The question of whether Ighilahriz would have been taken so seriously if she had not, in Beaugé's article, centered her narrative on a positive story, is one that resonates in the gradual emergence of her story and its reception. By framing her testimony with a quest to find the innocent Frenchman who delivered her from the torture chamber, the article turns the military torturers into a corrupt minority whose actions can be somewhat mitigated by the fact that Ighilahriz was saved by another member of the military. Additionally, the fact that this quest is presented by Beaugé as the wish of a frail old woman certainly performs a double act of validating her words, and vilifying the officers who tortured Ighilahriz. By virtue of appearing in *Le Monde*, the article is given credibility and is exposed to a broad readership, some of who may well not have been aware of the extent and the nature of torture during the Algerian War.

In *Worlds of Hurt*, Kalì Tal identifies mythologization as one strategy of coping with the aftermath of trauma. Through repetition and recasting, narratives of trauma become codified and controllable as they are made to confirm to a predictable story line (Tal 6).<sup>127</sup> By the 1990s, the Algerian War, while still an underexamined and rarely discussed chapter of French history, had produced several recognizable mythologies, such as the figure of the damaged returning soldier, or the coincidental encounter with a victim of torture.<sup>128</sup> In fact, the narrative of torture during and after the war as an open secret or *secret de polichinelle* that the French public was unaware of, can be counted as one of those mythologies, one that allowed the reality of torture to remain liminal, offstage for those who preferred not to integrate it into their narrative of the Algerian conflict. As Tal writes, mythologies of trauma are linked to opposing groups in power.

Survivors bear witness in a social, cultural, political, and historical context. Their location within the complex network of communal relations determines the reception of their testimony and the interpretative and revisionary pressures that will be brought to bear on their traumatic experience. Members of opposing interest groups will attempt to appropriate traumatic experiences while survivors will struggle to retain their control. The winner of this battle over meaning will determine the manner in which the experience is to be codified. Representation of traumatic experience is ultimately a tool in the hands of those who shape public perceptions and national myth. (Tal 18)

The question of who benefits from the collective narratives of traumatic experiences is also one raised by Durmelat. She conceives of the debate on torture in France as "a non-consensual site of

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<sup>126</sup> On the relationship between testimony, publication, and power, Cubilié writes: "Testimony can never be an unproblematic political act of resistance, as the structure of language itself is a structure of power that is often utilized to enhance the domination of those in power over the less enfranchised. Published testimonial accounts of atrocity enter into the commodified field of discourse much more directly and widely than oral testimonial accounts, many of which might stay within a family, therapeutic, or community setting" (79).

<sup>127</sup> In *Worlds of Hurt*, Tal examines the narratives of the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and childhood sexual abuse in 20<sup>th</sup>-century USA.

<sup>128</sup> For a reading of one instance of this kind of meeting, see Mireille Rosello, "Repentance and Detective Fiction: Legal Powerlessness and the Power of Narratives," in *The Reparative in Narratives: Works of Mourning in Progress*.

memory” where memories of the war intersect and conflict (142).<sup>129</sup> The fictionality and non-consentuality that occur when individual and collective memories come into conflict, as was the case in the 1990s and early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in France, and is epitomized in the Ighilahriz case.

In an article that examines the controversy around Ighilahriz’s testimonies and Aussaresses’ trial, Neil MacMaster identifies a shift in French national discourse “from an obsessive concern with the ‘Vichy syndrome’ to what might be termed an ‘Algerian syndrome,’ a watershed that was marked by the Papon trial of 1997–1998” (MacMaster 450). As discussed in the Introduction, the very public spectacle of Papon’s trial presented a cultural hinge between two historical events, the connections between which had been explored in literature and in debates over blame and responsibility since the war ended.<sup>130</sup> This “watershed” was not restricted to hexagonal France as the debate over who benefits from the memorialization of traumatic historical events continued for over a decade, with regard to Ighilahriz. In the most recent chapter of her witnessing of torture, in 2011, the veracity of her account was called into question by Yacef Saadi, an Algerian senator and military leader during the Algerian War of Independence. Saadi claimed to have never met Ighilahriz during the conflict, and suggested that she should publicly display the bullet wounds on her body to prove that she was a “real” *moudjahida*, and not simply seeking to profit from the post-war status conferred on *moujahidate*.<sup>131</sup> Saadi’s request once again places the physical reality of Ighilahriz’s tortured body at the center of the debate. When she announced, in September 2001, during a conference, that she had, in fact, been raped, Ighilahriz performed the same kind of obscene act, by presenting her tortured, raped body to an audience and describing it as such. In this case, her revelation can be read as obscene because of the spectacle and voyeurism that become possible with her words. Ighilahriz deliberately brings onto center stage the bare facts of her rape, asking that the public’s gaze focus on the crimes committed against her. With this announcement, she rejects the various forms of etiquette (or timeliness) that have prevented her from speaking earlier about her rape. By making this announcement directly, in a speech, rather than through a journalist or a biographer, Ighilahriz drew attention to her own body and the acts committed against it. Saadi’s criticism tries to limit Ighilahriz’s role to merely an embodiment of proof of her ordeal, a body that is marked as a victim of torture in a way that can be read and understood by those who see it. In this way, her role as a *militante* is marginalized and even occluded, and her written testimony is invalidated. In the same way that Djamilia Boupacha’s non-virginity was a legible sign of her ordeal, Saadi asks, fifty years after the fact, for Ighilahriz to prove herself as a victim and, therefore, as a legitimate hero of the FLN. The fact that a legible body is demanded so long after the event is jarring in terms of timeliness because it suggests, in a concrete way, that the past has not passed: demands are being made on Ighilahriz’s body as they were when she was a victim of torture.

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<sup>129</sup> See my discussion of Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de mémoire* in Chapter 2. Both Durmelat and Tal are more interested in the individual, or psychological connection to the past through memory.

<sup>130</sup> See the Introduction for a discussion of the role that the Papon trial plays in “officializing” connections between deportation/the occupation and the Algerian War.

<sup>131</sup> Merouane Mokdad, “Louissette Ighilahriz: “Yacef! Ne te cache pas, sors et viens en face de moi” *Tout sur l’Algérie*, 4 May 2011.

Ighilahriz refuses Saadi's accusations by redirecting towards him the same gendered and belittling language that he used to talk about her. Just as he insists on her femininity and nudity as visual proof of her identity, she attacks his masculinity to defend herself. She demands that Saadi resign, and orders him to "Soi[t] un homme!" saying, "Ne te cache pas, sors et viens en face de moi" (Mokdad). By asking the senator to "act like a man," Ighilahriz suggests that he has not been acting in an appropriately masculine way by questioning her heroism, and that he, too, needs to reveal himself, to present himself in front of the public to regain his identity as a man. Further, she challenges the mythology of (male) FLN members as rightful heirs to power in Algeria, by identifying her role as a threat ("un empiètement") "sur son monopole sur la narration historique autour de la guerre de libération nationale" (ibid.).

Ighilahriz's response to Saadi does not, I think, constitute any kind of victory for victims of torture or for the circulation of testimonial texts that bear witness to torture during the Algerian War. It shows instead a strong understanding, by Ighilahriz, Saadi, and the journalists who reported on the case, of the potential for the manipulation of historical narratives. Whether or not the public, and we, as readers, are cynical about Ighilahriz's motives as a witness to her own torture, it should be clear that the ability of her testimony to be heard, and to be taken up by others, is vastly different from the accounts by Alleg and Boupacha that were published during the war. In early 21<sup>st</sup>-century France and Algeria, the discourses surrounding the Algerian War and its survivors were still shifting and maneuverable, as were the identities of those connected to these narratives of trauma. These qualities are connected to Benjamin Stora's perception of the acceleration of public forms of memory relating to the war from the 1990s onward in hexagonal France, and to the increasing recognition of, and dispute over, the extent of torture during the Algerian War. The exchange between Ighilahriz and Saadi took place a few months after the state of emergency in Algeria that had been in place since 1992 was lifted, a shift that symbolized an end to the period of civil war, and possibly gave space for thinking about the narratives and memories of the earlier War of Independence. The fact that many of leaders of the FLN, like Saadi, have been members of the ruling party in Algeria since the 1960s reveals a desire to stabilize national narratives of heroism and to reject alternatives that "empiète" on this ideal collective memory of the war.

The "guerre des mémoires" that the overlapping, and at times competing narratives of Ighilahriz, Beaugé, Nivat, Massu, and Saadi (and others) represented what Vidal-Naquet refers to as a "gigantesque envie de vérité" about the Franco-Algerian War, but also (and sometimes conflatedly) about France's role in other historic events (Macmaster 452). In October 2000, *L'Humanité* published the "Appel des Douze," an appeal for a "travail de mémoire" that would end the government's silence on the subject of torture and begin to move towards reconciliation.<sup>132</sup> Henri Alleg, Josette Audin, Gisèle Halimi, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Germaine Tillion, and others, signed the appeal, demanding a "une démarche de vérité qui ne laisse rien dans l'ombre," acting as "grands témoins" and anti-torture activists. They write of a "devoir de mémoire," stressing the ethical component of the work to come, rather than the legal and political ramifications of the government's potential admission of torture. The return of testimonial voices from the past direct the attention of the public in two directions at once: towards events that took place fifty years earlier, like Alleg's detention and torture, or Halimi's

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<sup>132</sup> Cited from the Ligue des droits de l'homme (Toulon section) website.

defense of Boupacha, and towards a future that potentially dealt with the trauma of torture. The public's proclivity to ignore the liminal space of torture was, as it had been during the war, challenged and reconfigured. The way that Saadi's accusations bring the debate over the veracity of Ighilahriz's testimony back to her body, and its ability to represent or prove an objective "truth," illustrates that moving the discussion over "la Question" from a psychological, individual sphere to a collective, historical one, is not yet possible.

The way that Ighilahriz's wounded body returns as the central focus of the debate can be read in several ways. It suggests that the physical realities of torture – rape, long-term nerve and limb damage, brain damage, death – are only recognized by those who want to talk about torture. For those who would rather that torture remained unseen and unspoken of, the injured body must necessarily remain hidden, abstracted. In this light, the exchange over Ighilahriz's scarred body, and whether or not she would reveal it to "prove" herself, seems like a shift in ideas about how the body remembers and represents torture, and who has the right to bear witness to the narrative of surviving torture.

Reading testimonial texts about torture as obscene establishes an important connection between the genre they inhabit and their cultural and political presence. The narratives by Boupacha, Alleg, and Ighilahriz, along with the paratextual writing that contextualizes them, become rhetorical narratives that have both pedagogical and cautionary functions. Rather than simply putting into narrative both individual and collective realities of torture, they are performative in that they are asking not only for attention, but for some kind of action by the text's readers. Additionally, the legal and political context into which these testimonial texts were published is extremely important to their social function, and, through *engagement*, legal response in the form of censorship, and the repeated reframing of the survivor's narrative, creates a complicated network of potential interactions and afterlives beyond the paratextual frames that introduce the accounts to the French public.

Fifty years after the Evian Accords, many historians, sociologists, politicians and novelists have confronted the reality of torture as an endemic, state-sponsored practice during the Algerian War of Independence. It can still be said, however, as Chambers puts it, that these journalistic and literary confrontations take place "in the context of a strong proclivity, on the part of those who understand themselves as unaffected or uninvolved, to ignore, not only suffering itself ... but even the stories of suffering, as if such suffering was not also happening (in a certain sense) to them" (4). This proliferation of accounts – in fiction and non-fiction – that confront the secrecy and conspiratorial aspects of torture can only exist in the context of this proclivity to ignore stories of suffering: many texts rely on this paradox as a narrative motivator and plot point. During the years of the Franco-Algerian conflict, this state of denial, the "strong proclivity" towards disattention, was the context in which first person accounts of torture circulated. If torture and its narratives remain *obscene*, hovering in the margins of what society lets itself see and hear, then they can continue to be controlled and the ghosts they contain can be laid to rest definitively. In literary texts, however, the narrativization of torture moves into a more central role, and the ghosts that symbolize the memory and transmission of these stories haunt characters and readers in ways that refuse marginalization.

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## Abbreviations used for the works of Assia Djebar

<i>L'Amour, la fantasia</i>	AF
<i>La Disparition de la langue française</i>	DLF
<i>Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement</i>	FA
'La Femme en morceaux' (in <i>Oran, langue morte</i> )	FM
<i>La Femme sans sépulture</i>	FS

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