Cross-Cultural Poetics in Kateb, Salih, Djebar and Dib

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (D.Phil.), MML
Trinity Term 2013

Short abstract

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The present study elaborates a poetics of cross-cultural writing. Its primary theoretical reference is the 'cross-cultural poetics' (*poétique de la relation*) of Edouard Glissant: a set of poetic tropes and narrative structural strategies that he identifies in the mixed cultural setting of the Caribbean, in *Le Discours antillais*.

My thesis argues that if these poetic strategies are indeed a response to specific social, cultural and political situations, then if *analogous* situations were considered elsewhere, we might expect an analogous poetics to arise. Taking North Africa as an example context, and specifically the novels of the Algerians Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar, Mohammed Dib, and the Sudanese Tayeb Salih, I argue that these writers' complex poetic strategies engage with – indeed, help to articulate – analogous socio-political concerns arising in their homelands.

The formal poetical analysis of these authors is based on several key thematic tropes and structural strategies that Glissant advocates in his cross-cultural poetics. My five chapters consider roots and origins, living landscapes, silence and screams, literary opacity, and structural polyphony. They also develop a new critical vocabulary to describe how Glissant's poetical strategies might take form at a close textual level; my analysis reveals a complex, and reciprocal, relationship between poetic expression and socio-political context.

Glissant's work is therefore shown to be more broadly relevant, but the founding tenets of his theory are also interrogated and questioned; the comparison with a North African setting entails a (re)assessment of the underlying conceptions of Glissant's poetics – of the implicit logic by which he connects poetic form to social, cultural and political factors. These factors, for Glissant, also display a clear overlap with the (post)colonial; in studying cross-culturality, the postcolonial, and the poetics engendered by their overlapping, my thesis presents a specific critical focus for the postcolonial literary field.

Long abstract

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The present study elaborates a poetics of cross-cultural writing. Its primary theoretical reference is the 'cross-cultural poetics' (*poétique de la relation*) of Edouard Glissant: a set of poetic tropes and narrative structural strategies that he identifies in the mixed cultural setting of the Caribbean, in *Le Discours antillais*.

My thesis argues that if these poetic strategies are indeed a response to specific social, cultural and political situations, then if *analogous* situations were considered elsewhere, we might expect an analogous poetics to arise. Taking North Africa as an example context, and specifically the novels of the Algerians Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar, Mohammed Dib, and the Sudanese Tayeb Salih, I argue that these writers' complex poetic strategies engage with – indeed, help to articulate – analogous socio-political concerns arising in their homelands.

The formal poetical analysis of these authors is based on several key thematic tropes and structural strategies that Glissant advocates in his cross-cultural poetics; it is the first work to attempt this (at length) in an entirely separate cultural context to Glissant's own. My five chapters consider roots and origins, living landscapes, silence and screams, literary opacity, and structural polyphony.

In 'Roots, Origins, and the Possibility of Return', I observe that Glissant's starting point on origins is the brutal uprooting, and 'entanglement' of various peoples in the Caribbean; from this ensue his reflections on belonging and his interrogation of national and cultural 'roots' – his conclusion is that *antillanité* does not ultimately require individuals to select or privilege one of the many *composantes* that contribute to their cultural identity. Such 'composantes,' however, are certainly negotiated in a culture such as Algeria's or that of the Sudan. My contention in this chapter is that, despite Glissant's belief that Algeria can rely on a pre-existing cultural 'hinterland,' the interrogation of roots and origins that we find in Djebar or Kateb belies such a possibility, or posits it as illusory, while Salih's work points to cultural hybridity, and a rejection of binaristic conceptions of tradition 'versus' modernity. The poetical focus in this chapter is on how these novels *figure* this negotiation through a comparable set of poetical tropes; whether we can reconcile the notions of 'cross-cultural' and a poetics of roots and origins; and what frameworks for national identity they propose.

For Glissant, a cross-cultural poetics is tied not only to its people, but closely to the land they inhabit. Accordingly, he gestures to a poetics that strongly evokes both, through a dynamic employment of the pathetic fallacy. Furthermore, the socio-political

issues that underlie Glissant's living landscapes are predicated on the idea of a contested community (one menaced, for example, by a colonial presence, or by a questioning of how its cross-culturality translates into a valid or recognisable community). These concerns resonate strongly with (post)colonial Algeria and Sudan, where such contestatory forces are evident, and are, in turn, figured as just such a living landscape (or cityscape). This chapter examines the poetical forms that this may take: firstly, I consider the 'marriage,' destruction, and restoration of the land. From landscape, I turn to cityscape, and examine living cities, focussing particularly on how the community's suffering is mapped onto the city itself. I then turn to landscape-as-memory: here, culture, history and politics are physically engraved in the landscape, at times forming an 'archaeology' of colonial history. Finally, I consider the role of physical itineraries in these works; mapping these out, we see that the protagonists' own itineraries evoke key thematic and psychological concerns in each novel.

The trope of the scream is used in Glissant's work to allude both to the outburst following the release from slavery, and to the suffering endured by the nation as a whole; Glissant understands the scream as the expression of hidden, or repressed, *meaning*. In the patriarchal, traditional Islamic context of North Africa, we find analogous pressures: their literary articulation, through either screams or indeed silence, is my focus. For example, Glissant's *univers muet du servage* may not just be encountered under colonialism; rather, his topoi of silence and screams are predicated on an injunction not to communicate – to offer no outlet to such pressures – and this may be encountered in various societal contexts: in the social dictum that Algerian women should internalise their domestic issues, for example ('la seule réellement coupable [. . .] était "la femme qui crie'"),[1] in the whispers of cloistered women (in Djebar), or in those (in Dib) of a terrorised city populace afraid to speak. In Kateb, Djebar, Salih, and Dib, a poetics of silence is employed to represent subjects, indirectly, with reserve; these silences make it possible to negotiate narration. The scream's mutability also helps to register the complex character of trauma, though it also erects certain barriers to interpretation. Finally, turning to the question of the *unsaid*, I draw on Genette's concept of *paralipse*,[2] which allows me to describe *structural* silences. A great variety of poetical forms are derived from the very pressure *not* to communicate, or indeed, the author-narrators' own reticence about speaking of a subject – at least directly.

Glissantian opacity is a fluid concept, taking various forms. Essentially, it focuses on three main areas: 'opaque' narrative presentation (avoiding a purely objective, realist narrative style), an anti-reductionist (and anti-universalist) ideological stance, and the 'opacity' of one language with respect to another. In my chapter on Opacity, I consider 'resistant' writing, in both senses (interpretative and political) – indeed, I argue that resistance to interpretation, in literature, is one way of communicating a political message. Opacity is founded on registering complexity, and the main thrust of this chapter is an investigation into how this translates, practically, into a poetics: one that registers – indeed insists on – the irreducible or complex character of a protagonist or situation. I consider opacity firstly as a theme, then its employment in narrative structure. This

[1] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 228.
[2] Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 212.

chapter demonstrates how Glissant's theory bridges cross-cultural and (post)colonial concerns: in its emphasis on registering and respecting difference, opacity provides a model for cross-culturality that respects particularity and avoids the risk of 'universalism,' while its indirect artistic approach to the structures, and experience, of trauma and oppression is clearly (if not exclusively) based on the experience, and memory, of colonialism.

In my final chapter, 'The Mechanics of Polyphony,' I turn entirely to structure, with the aim of describing the poetical structuring of the kind of 'exploded' narrative forms (*un discours éclaté*) that Glissant describes. Glissant's *polyphony* is founded on a strategic refusal of 'clarity' – in this case, structural. A traumatic or confusing past experience – what Glissant terms 'la hantise du passé'[3] – such as the trauma of the slave trade or life under colonialism, is not adequately conveyed by the 'clarity' of a linear narrative. Although Glissant's justification for a fragmented narrative structure is indeed reflected in the narrative logic of my chosen writers, this should only be the starting point for a new form of structural analysis. Glissant himself speaks of a 'polyphony' of dramatic shocks; even in an exploded narrative structure, there may still be a correspondence and interplay of parts, or voices. Drawing on music theory (on polyphony and sonata form), I first examine principles of non-linear connection. I then elaborate other, occasionally violent, forms of connection (*irruption*, *proleptic markers*, and *interference*). I also offer a theoretical countercurrent, in a section called *sequence*: drawing on Propp, I take *L'Amour, la fantasia*'s most 'fragmented' Part, and demonstrate not only a counterpoint between distant chapters, but how psychological and semantic associations maintain sequential connections from one (ostensibly unconnected) chapter to the next. What such analysis reveals is that the associative logic of structure is part of the message being conveyed: for example, mirrored scenes compare changing cross-cultural relations, while narrative sequence allows incendiary political points to be approached through structure alone.

The cross-cultural poetics I elaborate ties these authors together, on the basis of their poetic responses to cross-culturality; indeed, it works across borders and periods. Glissant's work is therefore shown to be more broadly relevant, but the founding tenets of his theory are also questioned; the comparison with a North African setting entails a (re)assessment of the underlying conceptions of Glissant's poetics – of the implicit logic by which he connects poetic form to social, cultural and political factors. These factors, for Glissant, also display a clear overlap with the (post)colonial; in studying cross-culturality, the postcolonial, and the poetics engendered by their overlapping, my thesis presents a specific critical focus for the postcolonial literary field. My work represents a turn towards poetics, but my thesis is that this is *not* a turn away from the social, political or psychological concerns of the text. Rather, a deeper reading of structure and poetic effect is necessary if we are to understand why, and *how*, these writers engage with such issues. In short, if we want to engage with the issues and politics of these texts, we must engage equally with poetics, or risk losing the message itself.

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[3] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 254.

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Short forms and abbreviations

Mohammed Dib

QSM	*Qui se souvient de la mer*

Assia Djebar

L'Amour	*L'Amour, la fantasia*
Blanc	*Le Blanc de l'Algérie*
Vaste	*Vaste est la prison*

Tayeb Salih

Season	*Season of Migration to the North*

À partir des traces d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, mêlées

(*Le Discours antillais*)[1]

A postcolonial poetics is a controversial, though emerging, topic. The problem with such a term is that it refers to a very broad range of literatures; it does not specify a particular nation, a single period, or indeed an artistic movement. In short, it is too broad a category for many critics – even postcolonial ones. The link between literary form (a postcolonial poetics) and its 'stimulus' (postcoloniality) is problematic, because the latter term encompasses such a wide range of experiences, periods and individuals (though one could argue similarly against other broad categorisations such as Postmodernism, or even the New Novel). That said, literature is an art form, and on the level of form, any works can be compared. The true test of a poetics is not in assuming that all works will cohere owing to a prior categorisation (a Postmodernist work; an Algerian work; a Postcolonial work), but in impartially considering their poetics from the ground up.

Given this problem, the first step of my approach will be to delimit the field somewhat, by selecting one of the myriad aspects of the experience of postcoloniality, and then focus on its poetical treatment. I have chosen cross-culturality – firstly, because it is an inherent aspect of postcoloniality, especially for the postcolonial elite (i.e. those who write novels). The moment of colonisation brings about a particularly stark and violent form of cross-cultural contact; its legacy may also be oppressive, but in time there will likely be a more nuanced relationship between the cultures involved. In focussing on cross-culturality, I am purposefully avoiding a poetics that is predicated on one country,

[1] Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 18.

or even period: it is an approach, in principle, that we could apply wherever cross-culturality – which is to say, a social configuration – arises. This is not exactly 'comparative literature' in its conventional sense (that is, reading and comparing literature from two different countries), as my approach is not based on, or categorised by, nation(ality) to begin with: quite the opposite. Indeed, to demonstrate that the cross-cultural paradigm is relevant to more than one country, it makes sense to consider writing from more than one. The postcolonial frame provides some degree of delimitation;[2] for reasons of scope in the present study, I shall provide another two, by limiting my study to North African, twentieth century writers. These writers are the Algerians Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar, and Mohammed Dib, and the Sudanese, Tayeb Salih.

My thesis is that, in selecting certain cross-cultural writers, their experiences will be shared, though differing – their individual views on nationality or origins may vary, for example – but their poetical *treatment* of these topoi may offer parallels. The metaphorical topos of roots, for example, is used to approach questions of origins in each work I study, but this does not mean that each writer comes to the same conclusions. In other words, my contention is that certain aspects of the experience of cross-culturality are well-suited to expression by particular poetical means – and in considering these analogous poetical features, we can identify an interrelated poetics of cross-cultural writing. One might query which experiences or concerns will commonly be treated by cross-cultural writers: which should we select before analysing their poetical treatment?

[2] I.e. I am considering cross-culturality *within* the postcolonial; focussing on their overlap provides some delimitation.

A theoretical framework of some kind is necessary here, and I draw mine from Edouard Glissant.

Glissant persistently engaged with cross-culturality, and he was also drawn to the question of poetics – his cross-cultural poetics, elaborated in *Le Discours antillais*, drew its examples from the cultural diversity of the Caribbean. In broad terms, his poetics responds to the experience of living in a 'hybrid' community, the question of rupture from a (putative) origin, and to life under (and after) colonialism; while Glissant's cross-cultural poetics is, then, related to colonialism, that remains one aspect of the larger picture. His work, though based in the French Antilles, identifies a set of concerns that he himself extends to the Americas, and would expand further in his later work. It is, however, the particularly strong connection with the local geography that attracted me to *Le Discours antillais*. As Peter Hallward notes, Glissant's later work tends towards Deleuzian deterritorialisation, and loses the geographical specificity of the *Discours antillais*[3] – and it is a similarly grounded geo-cultural context that we will see expressed in the poetics of the North African writers that I study. In '*poétique de la relation*,' the section of the *Discours antillais* that delineates a cross-cultural poetics, Glissant identifies a variety of poetical tropes and structural techniques that he believes Caribbean writers employ, strategically, to respond to realities of life in the Caribbean. His cross-cultural poetics is, then, grounded in the Caribbean and the social conditions particular to it. But what if the concerns that he traces had analogous counterparts outside the Caribbean? Would we expect a comparable poetics to arise if analogous conditions were experienced

[3] Peter Hallward, 'Edouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific', *The Yale Journal of Criticism,* 11.2 (1998), 441-464 (p. 454).

elsewhere? I contend that we would, that it can be demonstrated, and that the interrelated poetics that ensues offers a useful, and – in considering the *overlap* of the postcolonial and cross-cultural – more *focussed* paradigm within postcolonial studies.

Though conceived with Caribbean writing in mind, Glissant's tropes illuminate compelling parallels with the works of Djebar, Salih, Kateb, and Dib. Of particular interest among these are topoi such as narrative 'opacity' (or intractability), 'forced poetics' (writing which registers a tension with its own linguistic medium), a privileging of 'orality,' narrative 'polyphony' (the use of asynchronous, dovetailed, or cyclical narratives, and palimpsests), motifs of 'rooting,' 'silence' and 'screams' (the suppression and subsequent explosion of a collective unconscious), and a particular interest in the function of landscape. These tropes and techniques, though diverse, all derive from Glissant's interrogation of cross-culturality, and I shall use them as a thematic and stylistic framework with which to consider cross-cultural literature from North African writers. The present study is the first to attempt this (at length) in an entirely separate cultural context, but there are previous examples of 'Glissantian' criticism: Suk's[4] and Anderson's[5] both apply Glissant's poetics (his questioning the possibility of Return,[6] for example), but generally remain focussed on Caribbean writers; Chevrier's *Poétiques d'Edouard Glissant*[7] and Hassab-Charfi and Zlitni-Fitouri's, *Autour d'Édouard Glissant*[8]

[4] Jeannie C. Y. Suk, *Postcolonial paradoxes in French Caribbean writing: Césaire, Glissant, Condé* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001).
[5] Debra L. Anderson, *Decolonizing the text: Glissantian Readings in Caribbean and African-American Literatures* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).
[6] Suk, pp. 61-62; see also her chapter on 'Archetypal Returns,' which applies this issue in relation to Maryse Condé.
[7] Jacques Chevrier, ed., *Poétiques d'Edouard Glissant* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999).

(both *actes de colloque*) testify to the variety of interpretations offered by Glissantian criticism – and indeed, some, on occasion, look beyond the Caribbean;[9] these two collections generally centre on the later Glissant (the *chaos-monde* and rhizomatic identity for example) and his turn towards Deleuze.[10] Beyond these, the use of the term 'cross-cultural poetics' in criticism is relatively rare, though Ram Harsha used it to describe the 'transposition of discursive formations' at the Georgian, Russian and Soviet 'contact zone',[11] and in a North African context, Danielle Marx-Scouras wrote of Driss Chraïbi's oeuvre as 'cross-cultural'.[12] Lee-Perriard's thesis *Border Subjects* also touches on similar territory in its consideration of Djebar and Cixous' 'narrative and writing position'[13] as one divided between countries – but not with the aim of delineating a poetics; Dominique Combe's *Poétiques francophones* focuses on the manifold politics, and poetics, of language, to the exclusion of poetics not concerned with language

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[8] Samia Hassab-Charfi, and Sonia Zlitni-Fitouri, eds, *Autour d'Édouard Glissant: Lectures, épreuves, extensions d'une poétique de la Relation* (Pessac: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2008).

[9] In Sonia Zlitni-Fitouri's essay, 'De l'île au désert de Boudjedra : intention et désir poétiques', Zlitni-Fitouri considers Boudjedra's *Cinq fragments du désert*, primarily in the light of Glissant's later work, *Poétique de la Relation*. Hassab-Charfi and Zlitni-Fitouri, eds, pp. 191-201.

[10] Though this does not mean that certain tropes cannot be related back to *Le Discours antillais*; Geneviève Bélugue's essay 'Du lieu incontournable à la relation' shifts between Glissantian periods while considering his treatment of landscape and the rhizome – ultimately using both as a frame to analyse Glissant's novels. Chevrier, ed., pp. 43-54.

[11] Ram Harsha, 'Towards a Cross-cultural Poetics of the Contact Zone: Romantic, Modernist, and Soviet Intertextualities in Boris Pasternak's Translations of T'itsian T'abidze', *Comparative Literature* 59.1 (2007), 63-89.

[12] Danielle Marx-Scouras, 'A Literature of Departure: The Cross-Cultural Writing of Driss Chraïbi', *Research in African Literatures* 23.2 (1992), 131-144. Marx-Scouras terms Chraïbi a 'cross-cultural writer deeply concerned with all peoples who have had to relinquish their land, their history, their voice, and their identity' (p.141). Chraïbi himself identified with the notion of cross-culturality: 'J'ai la fierté de réussir, de vouloir réussir là où les politiques se sont cassés les dents, c'est-à-dire établir un pont entre deux cultures. Pour moi, il y a eu au départ, et il y a toujours le fleuve culturel de mon pays, mais il y a eu des affluents et parmi ces affluents, la culture française' (Driss Chraibi, 'Interview de Driss Chraïbi' [Interview by Lionel Dubois], *CELFAN Review* 5.2 (1986), 20-26. p. 21).

[13] Lee-Perriard notes that the 'the roots of [the term 'border subjects'] stem from the authors' biographies'. Marta Lee-Perriard, *Border subjects: a textual dialogue between Assia Djebar and Hélène Cixous* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 2003).

choice.[14] If we consider the term 'postcolonial poetics,' we have to look more recently: Hesse's *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms*[15] uses the term to describe theoretical writing by South African, Black British, and other writers[16]; and Crowley and Hiddleston's *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form*[17] offers an extensive consideration of poetics in postcolonial literature, from a variety of critical perspectives. In terms of *poetics*, Kateb in particular has elicited a great deal of structuralist and aesthetic criticism: among others, Aresu's *Counterhegemonic Discourse from the Maghreb: The Poetics of Kateb's Fiction*,[18] Gontard's *Nedjma de Kateb Yacine: essai sur la structure formelle du roman*,[19] Salhi's *The politics and aesthetics of Kateb Yacine*,[20] and numerous works by Charles Bonn[21] all testify to the fact that Kateb's complex poetics benefits from close analysis *qua* poetics.

Before introducing my thesis in more detail, I ought to define its basic terms: what do I mean by 'poetics' and 'cross-cultural'? Let us consider poetics first.

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[14] Dominique Combe, *Poétiques francophones* (Paris: Hachette, 1995): 'Le texte francophone ne se distingue pas tant par la nature intrinsèque de ces procédés (sauf exception), mais par leur emploi' (p. 8)
[15] Barnor Hesse, ed., *Un/settled multiculturalisms: diasporas, entanglements, 'transruptions'* (London; New York: Zed Books / St Martin's Press, 2000).
[16] Hesse's chapter 'Diasporicity: Black-Britain's Post-Colonial Formations' (pp. 96-120) considers the 'cross-cultural formation of Black Britishness' (p. 116) and identifies 'post-colonial poetics' in the theories of J. Jorge Klor De Alva, Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha (p. 108ff.); Zimitri Erasmus' chapter, 'Some Kind of White, Some Kind of Black: Living the Moments of Entanglement in South Africa and its Academy' (pp. 185-208) considers cross-culturality in a South African context.
[17] Patrick Crowley and Jane Hiddleston, eds, *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).
[18] Bernard Aresu, *Counterhegemonic Discourse from the Maghreb: The Poetics of Kateb's Fiction* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993).
[19] Marc Gontard, *Nedjma de Kateb Yacine: Essai sur la structure formelle du roman* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985).
[20] Kamal Salhi, *The politics and aesthetics of Kateb Yacine: from Francophone literature to popular theatre in Algeria and outside* (Lampeter: E. Mellen Press, 1999).
[21] See for example Charles Bonn, *Kateb Yacine: Nedjma* [1990] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).

Poetics

Glissant assays a cross-cultural poetics in his *Discours antillais*, but the term *poetics* itself has a long (and cross-cultural) history. Fundamentally, 'poetics' refers to the formal features of linguistic art forms: rhetoric, metaphor, structural composition, and so forth – in short, the *craft* of the work. Whether we consider the Greek language of Aristotle's *Poetics* (where a poet, or *poietes*, is literally a 'maker'), or the term used for the poets of the Scottish Renaissance, the *makars* ('makers'), both poetics and poetry centre on the formal process of artistic creation. Since its origin, however, there has also been an argument for a link between form and content: for Aristotle, what makes a *poietes* a poet is not writing in metre, but the very act of representation or imitation[22] (*mimesis*); so although his focus is 'primarily on its formal aspects', as Murray notes,[23] Aristotle's decision to define poetry by its mimetic role means that his poetics is predicated on the link between form, and the world it represents.

The most basic aspects of a poetics respond to certain natural aspects of human perception. Theorists such as Roman Jakobson famously pointed to aphasics' inability to master either contiguity or similarity in language (which he associates with metonymy and metaphor respectively);[24] the implication that our neurophysiology naturally carries an understanding of form (in the recognition, for example, of parallelism, or of contrast)

[22] As Murray notes, scholars are unsure whether to translate Aristotle's *mimesis* as 'imitation' or as 'representation': 'Aristotle's usage includes both of these meanings'. *Classical Literary Criticism*. ed. by Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch [Introduction and notes by Murray, 2000, 2004] (London: Penguin, 2004), p. xxxi.
[23] Ibid., p. xxx.
[24] Roman Jakobson, 'The metaphoric and metonymic poles', in David Lodge and Nigel Wood, eds, *Modern Criticism and Theory: a Reader*. 3rd edn (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2008), pp. 165-168 (p. 165)

lends credibility to the notion of an aesthetic 'faculty' in the sense of *aesthetics* offered by Kant, or by its etymological root, *αἰσθητά*.[25] This faculty would be contrasted, properly speaking, with *poetics* – the latter incorporating formal aspects, the former their 'sensory' perception, as Marc Redfield argues: 'Aesthetics, therefore, unlike poetics or classical rhetoric, has relatively little to do with, for instance, technical aspects of literary composition'.[26] Aesthetics refers, then, to our faculty of (artistic) perception, and poetics are the various formal techniques that derive from and appeal to it.

By one school of thinking,[27] a poetics is precisely the opposite of the truly individual component of a text: many techniques of composition have become inherited and standard tools equally at anyone's disposal (no one culture or individual 'owns' metaphor or personification, for example, or could identify their origin).[28] This would mean that one's specificity is revealed through meaning, content, and the particular *implementation* of these techniques, with poetics serving as a kind of communal toolbox. And to an extent this position is true: every literary device employed in a work is individually selected by the writer. This does not conflict with the roles of tradition and genre;[29] nor does it prevent the possibility that certain tropes or narrative structures could,

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[25] αἰσθητά [Gk.: 'of things pertaining to, or perceptible by the senses'] is the basis of the word 'aesthetics' – for Kant, aesthetics is the ability to detect signs through the senses: 'the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception' (OED, s.v. aesthetics).

[26] Marc Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 12.

[27] See for example Combe, *op cit*. Combe looks at poetics form the point of view of language interplay, but does not focus on specific poetic techniques.

[28] Certain techniques or forms can of course be linked to their inventors: Petrarch's sonnet form, for example; in the Modern era, Flaubert's *style indirect libre*, Schoenberg's serialism, or the cubism(s) of Picasso and Braque.

[29] Though their views differ somewhat, critics such as Bloom, Eliot and Bakhtin all attest to a dialogue between tradition and individual literary creation (see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and Individual Talent' [1919] in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), pp.47-59, and Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981)).

nevertheless, be well suited to representing particular experiences, themes, and so on – in sum, the selection of certain tropes by, for example, cross-cultural authors does not deny the writer's artistic individuality or free agency. In my study of cross-cultural poetics, I am going to connect experience and literary expression, but this expression must be understood as a series of elected poetic *strategies*. From this point of view, Glissant's poetics provides a particularly useful model, as it is conceived in the same spirit. Glissant's poetics is not a kind of 'reflex' to the cultural and socio-political conditions that he considers; though expressing aspects of his community, Glissant sees the writer as strategically selecting, and justifying, his own poetics:

> La production littéraire qui participe d'une telle conscience collective en quête d'elle-même n'est pas seulement exaltation de la communauté mais aussi réflexion (et souci de) son expression spécifique. Le discours ne se contente pas de dire mais exprime en même temps *pourquoi il dit de cette manière plutôt que d'une autre*.[30]

Glissantian and Genettian poetics

The poetics Glissant focuses on can be broadly divided into poetics of theme (roots, silence, screams, landscape), and poetics of structure and technical effect (opacity, polyphony). His poetics describes the general form or approach of such thematic tropes and structural strategies (for polyphony, for example, he alludes to discontinuous narrative structures marked by breaks or 'shocks,' and a disordered chronology); as I

[30] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p .198 (my emphasis).

have said, I believe that such tropes and strategies are evident in other works of cross-cultural literature, and I shall soon demonstrate this in detail. What Glissant does not provide, however, is a programmatic, or exhaustive, description of their *application*: he does not usually provide concrete examples for analysis, nor does he offer a specific technical vocabulary to describe their articulation. To help provide such a vocabulary in chapters that are focussed on structure, I will also draw on Gérard Genette's narratological terminology. For example, to help describe the structure of non-chronological narratives, I must first employ his distinction between *récit* and *histoire*; and then to describe the particular *mechanism* of intratextual references (and occlusions), I draw on his structuro-temporal terminology of *analepse*, *prolepse*, *paralipse*, and *amorce*. For 'point of view,' his theories on focalisation and the extra/intradiegetic prove useful. In my chapter on *Polyphony*, I also modify and extend Glissant's terms, offering a more flexible model of *portée* (for Genette, the chronological 'range' of a reference) that better suits discontinuous narratives. I also develop new terms and models based on Genettian concepts: *portée* forms a basis to my theory of literary recapitulation, while Genette's *polymodalité* shapes my development of a technique that I shall, after Glissant, term *irruption*. Since Genette's terms are relational (e.g. analepse or prolepse), simply linking discrete points in a narrative, his structural vocabulary is equally suited to describing ordered or disordered chronologies: it does not presume a set literary form.

My chapters, then, will provide a more explicit and extensive development – at points, logical extensions – of how Glissant's poetic strategies can work in practice. It is not usually necessary, or possible, to identify at each stage whether we have, for example,

'Glissantian' opacity, 'Glissantian' polyphony, beyond the examples and general definition that Glissant himself provides: in each chapter, I shall first analyse Glissant's thoughts on the particular topos, and then investigate comparable approaches elsewhere. And as with any poetics, it identifies features that in reality operate simultaneously, and impact on each other; separation of these elements is, however, unavoidable for analysis (literally, 'splitting') of a text – as Genette notes with respect to his structuralist study of *Combray*, we should not infer from such analysis a 'hypostatisation' of these elements: 'On se gardera toutefois d'hypostasier ces termes, et de convertir en substance ce qui n'est à chaque fois qu'un ordre de relations.'[31] The reader will, I hope, find a productive interplay (or *relation*) between the poetics of each chapter.

Cross-cultural

My usage of the term 'cross-cultural' simply means a pronounced influence of various cultures – usually when experienced within (or in connection with) one's own culture or country. As I noted above, it is a common element of postcolonial cultures, beginning from a stark, and often violent, throwing-together of cultures that may not otherwise have met, akin to the abrupt mixing of peoples that Glissant identifies in the slave trade and the ensuing cultural makeup of the Caribbean. Cross-culturality, then, is not *restricted* to, but is often a feature of, postcolonial nations; other circumstances may also lead to it. (Indeed, as Patrick Crowley notes, terms common in postcolonial literary criticism, such

[31] Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris, Seuil, 1972), p. 76.

as 'hybridity,' can certainly apply to some works of 'Western' literature.)[32] On the one hand, we might argue that any modern author is in a sense cross-cultural, given an increasingly global culture and developments in communications technology. I would argue, however, that it is a question of degree: postcolonial cultures present an intensified combination, interrelation or negotiation of cultures with a notable presence in their *own* country; there is frequently the question of bilingualism; and, importantly, as it does not result from personal choice (as it does when T.S. Eliot researches Chinese ideograms, for example), it is also more problematic – it must, as Glissant argues, be negotiated. Glissant's later works, such as his *Poétique de la Relation*,[33] espouse the notion of a *totalité-monde*: national specificity gives way (almost) entirely to the ideal of a boundless confluence of nations and identities. In *Le Discours antillais*, however, Glissant argues that the Caribbeans need neither reject nor uniquely affirm their African heritage;[34] their self-conception as a matrix of their African, Caribbean, or indeed European elements is not construed as a conflict, but as a 'reconquête culturelle' (18) – importantly, one still grounded in the Antilles:

> Aujourd'hui l'Antillais ne renie plus la part africaine de son être ; il n'a plus, par réaction, à la prôner comme exclusive. Il faut qu'il la *reconnaisse*. [. . .] Il n'est plus contraint de rejeter par tactique les composantes occidentales, aujourd'hui encore aliénantes, dont il sait qu'il peut choisir entre elles. Il voit que l'aliénation

[32] Patrick Crowley, 'Algerian Letters: Mixtures, Genres, Literature Itself', in Crowley and Hiddleston, eds, *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp.129-146 (p. 131).
[33] Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).
[34] Although the great majority of Martinicans are of African descent, there are also those of Amerindian, Eastern Indian (Tamil), French, Lebanese and Chinese origin, among others.

> réside d'abord dans l'impossibilité du choix, dans l'imposition arbitraire des valeurs, et peut-être dans la notion de Valeur. [. . .] Il est *devenu* antillais.[35]

Glissant's vision of *antillanité*, then, is a local identity defined not despite, but rather *by* its (particular, local) combination of cultural elements, and his cross-cultural poetics is grounded in this context.

What, then, would cross-culturality mean with the authors that I am considering? On a practical level, the native (post)colonial elite are more likely to attend the colonial school, and have more chances of travelling widely than their compatriots. These factors clearly apply in the case of Djebar, Kateb, Salih and Dib: each attended colonial secondary school,[36] and subsequently spent years writing abroad. Djebar currently lectures at NYU and holds a place in the *Académie française* (her writing is also, avowedly, semi-autobiographical); Kateb composed much of *Nedjma* in Paris, and has been characterised by Charles Bonn as a 'wandering writer';[37] Salih, as with his fictional protagonists,

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[35] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 18.

[36] After attending the primary school where her father taught French, and then the colonial secondary school, Djebar attended the Lycée Fénelon (and later ENS) in Paris. (Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), pp. 12-13.) She later won the Neustadt Prize for Contributions to World Literature for 'perceptively crossing borders of culture, language, and history in her fiction and poetry' ('About the Author and Translator', Assia Djebar, *So Vast the Prison: A Novel*, trans. by Betsy Wing (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), p. 365).
Kateb attended the French school in Lafayette (Bougaa), and then, following his father's wishes, the colonial *collège* in Sétif, where he was a boarder: 'This tradition of literacy was of course in Arabic, but his father, the mediator of tradition and of the law associated with language, deliberately threw his son into the "gueule du loup" [jaws of the wolf] of the French school, as depicted at the end of *Le Polygone étoilé* (180), thereby precipitating a break with the past while at the same time maintaining continuity with it' (Charles Bonn, 'Kateb Yacine', *Research in African Literatures* 23.2 (1992), 61-70 (p. 62)).
Mohammed Dib's 'father, a proponent of Kemal Ataturk's secular policies, chose to send young Mohammed to the French school, reflecting a linguistic and cultural option that permanently influenced the future writer, who also studied English when he reached the lycée' (François Desplanques, 'The Long, Luminous Wake of Mohammed Dib', *Research in African Literatures*, 23.2 (1992), 71-78, p. 71)

[37] Charles Bonn, 'Kateb Yacine', *Research in African Literatures* 23.2 (1992), 61-70, p. 69.

belonged to the 'first generation of Sudanese educated in Britain in preparation for independence'[38] (he studied at the University of London; he then spent most of his life abroad,[39] and worked for the BBC Arabic service), was lauded in obituaries as a bridge across the Mediterranean by Sudan's Foreign Minister,[40] and deemed a 'cross-cultural author'[41] by the New York Times; Dib lived in Europe for decades, and his latter books form a 'Nordic' Quartet. In their work, they each engage at points with the question of colonialism. And each, besides Salih, writes in the language of the coloniser. This last point means that my reading of *Season of Migration to the North* is, as with almost all literary criticism of Salih, a reading of the (critically acclaimed) English translation of the Arabic. This requires some explanation on a linguistic level (I have already noted that my study is not of any one national literature, and that my critical paradigm in fact only holds *if* it works in different cross-cultural contexts).

When considering a novel in translation, we should be cautious when relying on the exact semantics of one word, in isolation; we should also note that certain cultural concepts or idioms may need to be modified in translation (for example, the Quranic formulas exchanged at gatherings by the village elders in *Season*). We can expect that

[38] Jamal Mahjoub, 'Obituary: Tayeb Salih', *The Guardian*, 20 February 2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/feb/20/obituary-tayeb-salih> [accessed 1 June 2013].
[39] Ibid.
[40] The Sudanese Embassy maintains a tribute to Salih on their website, entitled 'جسر صـالح الطيـب والغـرب الشـرق بيـن' ('Tayeb Salih: a bridge between East and West') <www.sudan-embassy.de/tayeb-salih-gallary.html> [accessed 1 June 2013].
[41] 'Tayeb Salih, 80, Cross-Cultural Arabic Novelist, Dies', *The New York Times*, 23 February 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/23/books/23salih.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&_r=0> [accessed 1 June 2013]. (Print version: 'Tayeb Salih, 80, Cross-Cultural Arabic Novelist', *New York Times*, 23 February 2009, p. A25 (New York edition)).

subtleties of vocabulary may vary (I draw on Waïl Hassan's study[42] of *Season* for connections to Arabic cultural and literary traditions, such as the *Nahda*, and once for a translation), but when details are compounded, we can assume there is progressively less chance of it being the hazard of translation (for example, a potential metaphor can be confirmed by its repeated use;[43] *Season* is marked by an obsessive return to particular metaphorical tropes). On a larger scale, the problems diminish: for events, character actions, descriptions of settings, meta-themes, or novelistic structure, we can expect a very large degree of parity. The majority of my points on Salih, however, do not rest on the nuance of one word; but ultimately, and as a last defence, I am studying the English version of *Season* as a piece of cross-cultural literature in its own right, rather than Salih's original.

Chapter outline

Each chapter will begin with a consideration of a key aspect of Glissant's cross cultural poetics; each is taken from the section dealing with cross-cultural poetics (*poétique de la relation*) in his *Discours antillais*. As I shall discuss later, many of the tropes identified here are quite fluid; in a sense they form an interrelated poetics, and so certain concerns, and techniques, are signalled in one chapter, then developed fully later. I have chosen to consider the broadly thematic tropes first, and then those that tend more towards structure. I begin with origins and roots.

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[42] Waïl S. Hassan, *Tayeb Salih: Ideology and the Craft of Fiction* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), p. 85.

[43] Reading Combray in translation, we might gloss over (or indeed, notice) a potential archery metaphor in the 'nock' that appears in Legrandin's iris; but after the page of extended metaphor that ensues, the French or English reader will be equally aware of the ironic analogy with an arrow-pierced Saint Sebastian.

Glissant's starting point on origins is with a brutal uprooting, and 'entanglement' (*point d'intrication*) of various peoples in the Caribbean; from this ensue his reflections on belonging and his interrogation of national and cultural 'roots' – his conclusion is that *antillanité* does not ultimately require individuals to select or privilege one of the many *composantes* that contribute to their cultural identity. Such 'composantes,' however, are certainly negotiated in a culture such as Algeria's or that of the Sudan, either with respect to national ethnic diversity, or to individual cultural reintegration after travel. My contention in this chapter is that, despite Glissant's belief that Algeria can rely on a pre-existing cultural 'hinterland,' the interrogation of roots and origins that we find in Djebar or Kateb belies such a possibility, or posits it as illusory – while there may be no equivalent *arrachement* to that experienced by Caribbeans, Djebar reflects at length on separation: from the life, culture and even language of her female peers, from her ancestors and forgotten female genealogies, and from her vanishing (and largely undocumented) Berber heritage; Kateb's *Nedjma* shows us a dislocated new generation, adrift from a tribal heritage that was decimated by the French takeover, while in *Season*, the principal drama for both protagonists is the possibility of cultural reintegration after a long separation from their people (indeed, *Season*'s opening words are 'It was, gentlemen, after a long absence [. . .] that I returned to my people').[44] I further argue that, in *Season*, various characters presume a Manichean contrast, and separation, between cultures, but that the narrative exposes this as an illusion; ultimately, the narrative points to cultural hybridity, and a rejection of binaristic conceptions of tradition 'versus' modernity, as the potential way forward. The poetical focus in this chapter is on how these novels figure

[44] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1969), p. 1.

this negotiation through a comparable set of poetical tropes; whether we can reconcile the notions of 'cross-cultural' and a poetics of roots and origins; and what frameworks for national identity they propose.

Nation forms the link to my next chapter. For Glissant, a cross-cultural poetics is tied not only to its people, but closely to the land they inhabit. Accordingly, he gestures to a poetics that strongly evokes both, through a dynamic employment of the pathetic fallacy. Furthermore, the socio-political issues that underlie Glissant's living landscapes are predicated on the idea of a contested community (one menaced, for example, by a colonial presence, or by a questioning of how its cross-culturality translates into a valid or recognisable community: for Glissant, the response to these forges a 'national' literature). These concerns resonate strongly with (post)colonial Algeria and Sudan, where such contestatory forces are evident, and are, in turn, figured as just such a living landscape (or cityscape). This chapter examines the poetical forms that this may take. I have divided this analysis into a series of interrelated tropes: the pathetic fallacy is studied in the form of the marriage, destruction, and restoration of the land. I then turn from landscape to cityscape, and examine the depiction of living cities, focussing particularly on how the community is figured as responding to the trauma of colonialism: their suffering is mapped onto the city itself. I then turn to a related trope of landscape-as-memory: here, culture, history and politics are physically engraved in the landscape, at times forming an 'archaeology' of colonial history. Finally, in a nod to Franco Moretti's mapping of personal itineraries in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*,[45] I consider the role of physical

[45] Franco Moretti, *Graphs, maps, trees: abstract models for a literary history* (London: Verso, 2005).

itineraries in these works; mapping these out, we shall see that the protagonists' own itineraries evoke key thematic and psychological concerns in each novel.

If, as Glissant argues, landscape functions as one poetic manifestation of the 'cry' of the nation, it is worth considering the nature of this cry, and of the submerged or 'non-evident' histories alluded to in my chapter on *Landscape*. The trope of the scream is used in Glissant's work to allude both to the outburst following the release from slavery, and to the suffering endured by the nation as a whole; it is not simply an inarticulate expression of pain, however – Glissant understands the scream as the expression of hidden, or repressed, meaning. Along with landscape, it is a central tenet of 'le discours antillais': 'Le discours antillais s'articule tout autant sur l'éclat du cri originel que par la patience du paysage reconnu'.[46] This chapter argues that, in the patriarchal, traditional Islamic context of North Africa, we shall find analogous pressures: their literary articulation, through either screams or indeed silence, is my focus. For example, Glissant's *univers muet du servage* may not just be encountered under colonialism (in the Caribbean or elsewhere); rather, his topoi of silence and screams are predicated on an injunction not to communicate – to offer no outlet to such pressures – and this may be encountered in various societal contexts: in the social dictum that Algerian women should internalise their domestic issues, for example ('la seule réellement coupable [. . .] était "la femme qui crie'"),[47] or indeed in the parallel between the Martinican slaves' 'précaution, réticence, chuchotement, trames brin à brin dans la nuit nouées'[48] and the whispers of cloistered women. To help provide a vocabulary of silence, I draw on (and expand) the

[46] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p.201.
[47] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 228.
[48] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 238.

theoretical framework posited in Alexander Hecker's study of silence in Shakespeare,[49] in the form of literal, or thematic, silences (or a combination), and also the question of the *unsaid*. On this last point – the contradictory question of whether (and how) to express the 'inexpressible' – I turn to Wittgenstein and certain critical writings on trauma, while Genette's concept of *paralipse* allows me to describe structural silences. We shall see that a great variety of poetical forms are derived from the very pressure not to communicate, or indeed, the author-narrators' own reticence about speaking of a subject – at least directly. This reticence, and the attempt to at times *conceal* the referent, lead us into the next chapter.

Glissantian opacity is a fluid concept, taking various forms. Essentially, it focuses on three main areas: 'opaque' narrative presentation (avoiding a purely objective, realist narrative style), an anti-reductionist (and anti-universalist) ideological stance, and the 'opacity' of one language with respect to another – as Celia Britton notes, 'Respect for the Other includes respect for the "opacity" of the Other's difference'.[50] It is, then, founded on registering complexity, and the main thrust of this chapter is an investigation into how this translates, practically, into a poetics: one that registers – indeed insists on – the irreducible or complex character of a protagonist or situation. Opacity is key to Glissant's notion of cross-culturality, because an attempt to distil the *composantes* of one's identity, or the need to 'choose' one or the other, would undermine the very concept. In this chapter, we see a similar resistance, both ideological and poetical; as

[49] Pierre Alexandre Hecker, *Silence in Shakespeare* (unpublished M.Phil dissertation, University of Oxford, 1994).
[50] Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1999), p. 18.

with *Silence/Screams*, I divide this chapter into thematic and structural sections – the former investigates opacity as a theme, the latter its employment in narrative structure. This chapter also questions whether 'opaque' or difficult writing may carry a political force not *despite*, but through this very approach, combating the dangers of what Glissant terms 'transparency.' Through an opaque poetics, the authors of my corpus approach sensitive political issues such as state-sanctioned executions in the Algerian War, the ethno-politics of Algerian nationality, and, in Dib's *Un Eté africain*,[51] the cultural pressure on Algerian women not to speak of their oppositions to arranged marriage. The final part of this chapter turns to the linguistic sense of Glissantian opacity, and in particular to the form he terms a 'poétique forcée'; this is an area that connects strongly with my writers' mixed linguistic heritage, and with their respective experiences of the colonial school system. Though this chapter establishes clear connections with Glissantian opacity and his opposition to realist style, I also argue for the continuing validity of realism, and its interplay with opacity.

Glissant opens his chapter on transparency and opacity, in *Poétique de la Relation* (a later work), by describing an opaque mirror: 'La transparence n'apparaît plus comme le fond du miroir où l'humanité occidentale reflétait le monde à son image ; au fond du miroir il y a maintenant de l'opacité, tout un limon [*silt*] déposé par des peuples'.[52] Until now, structural effects have occupied a frequent, but often secondary place, in my analysis; but in my final chapter I turn entirely to structure, with the aim of describing the poetical structuring of the kind of 'exploded' narrative forms (*un discours éclaté*) that

[51] Mohammed Dib, *Un Eté africain* (Paris: Seuil, 1959).
[52] Glissant, *Poétique de la relation*, p. 125 (translation added).

Glissant describes in his *Discours antillais*, and which we readily find in Djebar, Kateb and Salih's work. In common with his theories on opacity, Glissant's concept of *polyphony* is founded on a strategic refusal of 'clarity' – in this case, structural. A traumatic or confusing past experience – what Glissant terms 'la hantise du passé'[53] – one such as (though not, as he notes, restricted to)[54] the trauma of the slave trade or life under colonialism, is not adequately conveyed by the 'clarity' of a linear narrative. Effectively, Glissant describes narratives that 'roughen' structure, much as, for Shklovsky, poetry 'roughened' language.[55] This chapter is not (or not exactly) 'structural opacity,' however: Glissant himself speaks of a 'polyphony' of dramatic shocks; in other words, even in an exploded narrative structure, there may still be a correspondence and interplay of parts, or voices. Since these are not linear narratives, my approach is to find alternative linking principles – so, in this chapter, I examine principles of non-linear connection: I employ music theory (on polyphonic composition), and also draw on the physical metaphor of the mirror – a mirror being an elementary, non-linear connector between points A and B, it allows us to glimpse a reflection of an earlier point (even if as through a glass, darkly). Then, following Glissant's notes on disordered chronology, I elaborate other, occasionally violent, forms of connection; these are grouped under the headings *irruption*, *proleptic markers*, and *interference*. I also offer a theoretical countercurrent, in a section called *sequence*: here, I take what is typically considered *L'Amour, la fantasia*'s most fragmented Part, and assert that we can find, in addition to

[53] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 254.
[54] 'Ce qui "se passe" en fait, c'est qu'il semble qu'il s'agisse de débrouiller une chronologie qui s'est embuée, quand elle n'a pas été oblitérée pour toutes sortes de raisons, en particulier coloniales.' ibid., pp. 254-5.
[55] Shklovsky contended that 'the language of poetry is, then, a difficult, roughened, impeded language.' Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as technique' in Lemon, Lee T., and Marion J. Reis, eds, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, pp. 3-24 (p.22).

the expected cross-chapter counterpoint, a *linear* connection from one (ostensibly unconnected) chapter to the next – provided that we dispense with traditional interpretations of linearity (i.e. chronological or consequential sequence) and replace them with an alternative, associative logic. In this and the previous strategies, this chapter is intended to draw out, and engage with, the cross-cultural and postcolonial factors that underlie Kateb, Salih, and Djebar's narrative fragmentation.

A 'cross-cultural' poetics presents an alternative, and (in combining them) more specific, category of analysis than the postcolonial; I am not rejecting the latter, but offering a productive, focussed critical lens. By employing Glissant's cross-cultural poetics as a model, I draw together different, but related, tropes that provide a multi-point schema for analysis; and as Glissant's tropes are poetic strategies elected in response to very real socio-political factors, my study, though 'formalist,' connects form to such concerns. In taking Glissant beyond his usual remit (the Caribbean, and very rarely the Americas), my analysis highlights Glissant's ongoing relevance to other contexts; by the same token, it also shows that poetics can *migrate* – we can analyse certain poetic strategies according to socio-cultural criteria rather than those of nation, period, or genre. This in turn means that we could consider works across nations, periods, and genres – which opens the way to a broader comparative-literary trend than is customary in postcolonial studies (though, as I have noted, I take issue with the initial cohesion implied by 'comparative': I am proposing a different way, or framework, to connect works). My study considers cross-culturality as an aspect of postcoloniality; there is a productive interplay between the two: indeed, even when I consider postcolonial concerns, these are

often tied to the crossing or interplay of cultures. I am aware that 'cross-cultural' may sound less 'political' or contestatory than 'postcolonial', but in *Nedjma*, for example, it is the relationship between two cultures (which is *not* always oppositional) that ties together events from the colonial period; indeed, this also influences novelistic structure, whether in Kateb, Djebar or Salih. This shift in focus does not deny the overarching postcolonial literary frame, but works within it (while, ultimately, offering a bridge to other literatures). By shifting the focus from colonialism to the relationship between cultures that accompanies or follows it, and to concomitant questions of cross-cultural identity, my work is a move away from what can be the implicitly oppositional tone (temporal or national) of the post(-)colonial. This is not to deny the historical and political import of colonialism; but even within the postcolonial context, a study of the complicated relationship between cultures can be more realistic, and revealing (we should not feel we have to ignore cultural syncretisms that can and do arise in such situations) – though as Glissant notes, a (post)colonial context can provide an amplified and at times particularly violent form of this.

In terms of poetics, my study also introduces a new typology of literary techniques, using Glissant and Genette as a base. As it is a cross-cultural poetics, it identifies certain thematic tropes that are not often considered in the postcolonial field – opacity, for example, establishes a productive dialogue between Modernism, cross-culturality and the postcolonial. It is a 'return' to structuralist analysis, but one that emphasises the connection *between* poetic form and content (Eagleton, for example, criticises formalists

for neglecting the link between the two).[56] My typological, and at points structuralist, method is not intended as a comforting return to formal clarity in the face of the destabilising effects of opacity and narrative fragmentation; rather, it identifies, in a heuristic manner, thematic and structural techniques within such narratives, and so allows us to articulate and compare the mechanics of what could otherwise seem isolated experiments in form. Techniques such as Proppian analysis add to this: the whole structure of a work can be represented and compared with others, allowing us to clearly describe, and differentiate, even the most fragmented of structures. My additional analysis here, extending Propp, shows that connections in fact exist even in the appearance of fragmentation, or explosion; indeed, these subtle connections can communicate part of the works' message. In comparing tropes and structural effects across texts, we shall discover certain propensities of style and form. Identifying such similarities, or indeed differences, at the poetic level also gives us another method by which to compare and contrast these – and other – writers' responses to the cross-cultural, and indeed oppressive, elements which run through the postcolonial literary field.

[56] Eagleton notes, for example, that 'the Formalists passed over analysis of literary "content" [. . .] for the study of literary form. [. . .] [A]nd though they did not deny that art had a relation to social reality [. . .] they provocatively claimed that this relation was not the critic's business.' Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 3.

***A l'ombre des pères*: roots, origins, and the possibility of return**

Alger, de nouveau port d'attache (*Vaste est la prison*)[1]

Car l'histoire de notre tribu n'est écrite nulle part, mais aucun fil n'est jamais rompu pour qui recherche ses origines (*Nedjma*)[2]

if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making (*Season of Migration to the North*)[3]

To begin with the beginning: opening a tale with its origins has been a favoured approach since the inception of the novel, and before. *Season* opens with a return: 'It was, gentlemen, after a long absence [. . .] that I returned to my people';[4] as well as commencing *Season* with the kernel of its intrigue, its narrator also begins by proclaiming a return to *his* own origins. But in the context of the postcolonial elite writer (or perhaps any writer in the modern world system) what are we to make of such a 'return,' and its literary figuration; and in what terms – national, communitarian, or indeed familial – should it be conceptualised? If exile has, as Salman Rushdie suggests, 'been transformed [. . .] into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture,' and we have 'become accustomed to thinking of the modern period itself as [. . .] an age of

[1] Assia Djebar, *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p.309. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text, as *Vaste*.
[2] Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Seuil, 1956; repr. 1996), p.137.
[3] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1969), p.50. Henceforth referred to as *Season*.
[4] Salih, p. 1. Subsequent references to *Season* will be made parenthetically in the text.

anxiety and estrangement',[5] then the condition of modernity may *ipso facto* problematise the post-exilic return to origins and national solidarity. Furthermore, any attempt by such writers to negotiate or 'reconnect' with their roots may risk being perceived as ahistorical or politically conservative. James Clifford, for example, cautions that '[l]ines too simply drawn between "original" inhabitants (who often themselves replaced prior populations) and subsequent immigrants risk ahistoricism'.[6] Deleuze and Guattari also argue strongly against the assertion of a single autochthonous *root* or origin, whether in nature or language – a notion whose 'genealogical' suggestions they construe as implicitly authoritarian (even multiplicities are criticised if stemming from an 'arborescent' origin).[7] They advocate instead the ideal of the rhizome (a biological form, such as a moss or fungus, characterised by the plurality of its roots and its indistinct point of origin):

> C'est très différent de l'arbre ou de la racine qui fixent un point, un ordre. [. . .] Il y a toujours quelque chose de généalogique dans l'arbre [. . .]. Il n'y a pas de points ou de positions dans un rhizome, comme on en trouve dans une structure, un arbre, une racine.[8]

Indeed, in the realm of world politics, any appeal to *national* origins – an appeal common to nationalist movements – is likely to elicit certain reservations now often held about

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[5] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), p. 173.
[6] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 252-3.
[7] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie, II* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. 14.
[8] Ibid., pp. 13, 14, 15.

nationalism itself. Following the disappointments of many third-world nationalisms in the 1970s, as Partha Chatterjee notes, for some, the very idea of nationalism appeared to have fallen from grace:

> nationalism was already being relegated to the domain of the particular histories of this or that colonial empire. [. . .] By the 1970s, nationalism had become a matter of ethnic politics, the reason why people in the Third World killed each other.[9]

And yet, despite these pitfalls, writers such as Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar and Tayeb Salih all repeatedly figure the questions of origins, roots, exile and return in their works: which is to say, novels written both *during* (Kateb) and considerably *after* (Djebar, Salih) their countries' national independence struggles. In order to assess how these topoi function, why they should indeed be present, and what models of 'rootedness' they present, it will be useful to first elaborate, and question, the relation between 'roots' and national identity itself.

The roots of the term 'nation' are so mixed that even glossing its meaning is rendered problematic. If we trace its etymological root, *nasci* ('to be born'), we can infer something of its early usage: for many centuries it could refer to either a 'group of peoples' or to 'a political state,' although the genealogical sense predominated: '[i]n early

[9] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 3.

examples notions of race and common descent predominate'.[10] The term 'nation-state' is sometimes opposed to the term 'state' on the basis of the presence or lack of a 'common national identity ([historical, cultural or ethnic])',[11] such as when a state is composed of significantly distinct groups – such as tribal communities, races or linguistic groups – as, for example, in the case of the largely arbitrary national boundaries first created through colonial administration in Africa and then retained following independence. The differentiating factor here, then, irrespective of political borders, is whether these communities 'imagine'[12] themselves as interconnected despite their heterogeneity. (Indeed, even nations that possess a long-attested and 'naturalised' mythology of nationhood were nevertheless composed of various 'peoples': even Stalin's foundational treatise, 'The Nation,' observes for example that 'the French nation was formed from Gauls, Romans, Britons, Teutons, and so on. The same must be said of the British, the Germans and others'.)[13] In contemporary historico-sociological discourse, it is generally agreed that there are three main positions on the origins of the nation-state: the 'primordialist,' the 'modernist' and the 'ethno-symbolist' positions. The primordialist position suggests that nations, despite changes in political administration, represent 'a "primordial" and natural unit of human association outside time';[14] the modernist position, espoused by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Tom Nairn, and many others, views the nation-state and nationalism as 'irreducibly *modern* phenomena',[15] an

[10] *OED*, s.v. nation.
[11] Ibid.
[12] See Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
[13] John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 18.
[14] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 3.
[15] Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 69.

administrative and cultural polity that was fashioned and unified (or homogenised) in response to the demands of industrial society (Gellner, for instance, asserts that pre-industrial society emphasises 'horizontal differentiation within societies, whereas industrial society strengthens the boundaries between nations rather than classes').[16] Andrew Smith's nationalist-symbolist approach suggests a middle way: while he concurs on nationalism's origins in the 18th and 19th centuries, his conception insists on the importance of '*ethnie*,' and on the historical continuity this provides. By 'ethnie,' Smith implies 'ethnic' communities, not conceived in terms of race, but in the sense of those sharing a common *mythology* of community: for example, shared sacred centres, languages, customs, common myths of descent, associations with a specific territory (even if not actually possessed), as well as hostile surroundings and other factors[17] – in short, an 'imagined' community that, though its mythology is conceived differently to Anderson's (whose mythology rests on the imagined communities created through 'print capitalism,' pilgrimage, and a new conception of time as 'homogeneous' and 'empty'),[18] is not at odds with Anderson's conception that a nation must 'think' itself whole in order to enter the nationalistic phase. Indeed, Gellner sees the 'essence' of nationalism being 'a fusion of culture and polity',[19] with the former's antiquity mythologised to reinforce the latter, such as in the nineteenth-century neo-classicist revivals. Crucially, all contemporary conceptions of nationalism appear to trace a fundamental shift in social organisation – and social mythology – from the level of *Gemeinschaft* (a community;

[16] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd edn, ed. by John Breuilly (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006), p. 12.
[17] Smith, *Ethnic Origins*, pp. 22-31.
[18] Anderson, p. 24.
[19] Though Gellner insists that this is not the case because culture and polity happen to coincide prior to nation-formation, but that nationalism enforces a cultural homogeneity that comes to be *seen* to be natural *after the fact* (54).

face-to-face contact) to that of *Gesellschaft* (civil society; the social relationship of individuals irrespective of communitarian or familial loyalties). Thus, although an appeal to 'origins' may look to either *Gemeinschaft* or to *Gesellschaft*, in the nationalist context it makes sense to invoke a mythology that asserts supra-Gemeinschaft ties (though this very mythology is likely to be framed as 'one' national community). As Gellner notes, in an industrial society (itself a prerequisite in his conception of nationalism), this 'exo-socialization' is the defining feature of nationalism:

> [e]xo socialization, the production and reproduction of men outside the local intimate unit, is now the norm, and must be so. The imperative of exo-socialization is the main clue to why state and culture *must* now be linked. [. . .] [I]t is unavoidable. That is what nationalism is about.[20]

Since nationalism charts the transition from kinship structures to social 'gelding'[21] and the fragmentation or surpassing of local allegiances, as well as the formation of a national 'community' that fashions a self-legitimating mythology of origins, this raises questions for those writing from a position 'divided' between cultures (or nations). As Fanon notes,[22] the nationalism of the oppressed, such as that of anticolonial nationalism, is often predicated on an implacable opposition and resistance to the occupying power (the alternative being the call for home rule but not sovereignty), but in the period following

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[20] Gellner, p. 37.

[21] A term Gellner uses to mean 'break[ing] the kin link by depriving the budding warrior/bureaucrat/cleric either of ancestry, or of posterity, or of both'; some examples he cites are celibacy (in the priesthood), and elsewhere the 'use of [. . .] foreigners, whose kin links could be assumed to be safely distant; or of members of otherwise disenfranchised or excluded groups'. Gellner, p. 15.

[22] See Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: La Découverte / Poche, 2002).

independence the postcolonial elite in particular often continue a connection with the coloniser's country (and culture) through education, temporary migration or indeed exile. Kateb, Djebar and Salih, for example, each experienced a 'colonial' education; Djebar and Salih continued on to prestigious higher education institutions in Paris and London respectively; Kateb largely wrote *Nedjma* in Paris. If national belonging is to be understood on an (inter)national level – one nation defining itself in contradistinction to other nations – then need such writers address the question of origins in terms of one nation, and in what forms? On one level, there is the question of national roots conceived through a collective mythology of origins, as I have discussed; on a further level, we could question the *individual* experience of nationalism for these writers: to what extent does their 'cross-cultural' experience inflect their personal relationship to the nation (or community)? And does this experience inflect the representations of roots or origins in their works? In short, and though it may sound paradoxical, can we properly speak of a 'cross-cultural' poetics of origins and roots?

To begin to answer this question, we may investigate a potentially analogous theory in Glissant's *Le Discours antillais*. The question of origins is key to Glissant, who has attempted to delineate a poetics that registers the complex social, cultural and linguistic matrix of the Caribbean – a *poétique de la relation* formed through the very entanglement ('[le] point d'intrication')[23] of peoples. His intellectual trajectory has been seen by some (such as Hallward) as moving from the analysis of a geographically situated locus (in *Le Discours antillais*), to a Deuleuzian poetics of deterritorialisation and the rhizomatic

[23] Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 36.

global totality of the *tout-monde* in his *Poétique de la relation*: '*Relation* finally swaps a territorial for a planetary coherence'.[24] However, although Hallward is correct to assert this shift in Glissant, it is important to note that Glissant's initial stance, though concerned with *antillanité*, is not rigidly circumscribed to the Caribbean (indeed, Glissant extends his own framework to 'Le Roman des Amériques'): this poetics is described as emerging from the *specific*, but not necessarily *exclusive*, social, political and historical situation of the Caribbean. A *poétique de la relation* is, then, a poetics inextricably tied up with the politics of community and cross-culturality. For Glissant, a 'national' literature is one indeed predicated on the need for national self-assertion precisely in a particularist, oppositional sense:

> J'appelle littérature nationale cette urgence pour chacun à se nommer au monde, c'est-à-dire cette nécessité de ne pas disparaître de la scène du monde et de courir au contraire à son élargissement.[25]

Such a national literature is, for Glissant, an assertion of cultural specificity in the face of assimilation or destruction – though the assertion of such a national particularity may risk implying (or, as Gellner argues,[26] necessitates) a cultural homogeneity. Glissant argues that Caribbean identity's very specificity, however, draws on its self-conception as a

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[24] Peter Hallward, 'Edouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific', *The Yale Journal of Criticism,* 11.2 (1998), 441-464 (p. 454).

[25] Glissant, p. 192.

[26] Gellner, pp. 36-38, 44.

matrix of African, Caribbean and indeed European elements; this matrix is not viewed as a conflict of (originary) elements but rather as a 'reconquête culturelle':[27]

> Aujourd'hui l'Antillais ne renie plus la part africaine de son être ; il n'a plus, par réaction, à la prôner comme exclusive. Il faut qu'il la *reconnaisse*. [. . .] Il n'est plus contraint de rejeter par tactique les composantes occidentales, aujourd'hui encore aliénantes, dont il sait qu'il peut choisir entre elles. Il voit que l'aliénation réside d'abord dans l'impossibilité du choix, dans l'imposition arbitraire des valeurs, et peut-être dans la notion de Valeur. [. . .] Il est *devenu* antillais.[28]

The process of *antillanité* is predicated on the citizen's acceptance of multiple – but not limitless – roots; he or she must renounce perceiving France as a 'terre rêvée' or the dislocation from Africa as a '*coupure* béante'.[29] Glissant contests the notion, promulgated in the teaching of francophone literatures, that '*L'homme (de nos pays) est douloureusement écartelé entre deux civilisations*':

> Nous récusons cette douleur-là. Elle ne frappe parmi nous que ceux qui, parce qu'ils sont maintenus dans la tutelle, sont incapables de concevoir la Relation nouvelle et en tout cas empêchés d'y entrer vraiment.[30]

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[27] Glissant, p. 18.

[28] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[29] Ibid., p. 18.

[30] Ibid., p. 327.

This conception of Relation is paramount to Glissant, because he considers the Antilles to lack the presence of a cultural 'hinterland' (an 'arrière-pays culturel ancestral'),[31] however mythical, that is conventionally drawn on in nation-formation and 'sedimented' over time):[32] he contends that the abrupt severance of people from disparate countries and their regrafting in the Caribbean setting entails an *antillanité* that *originates* through the very process of entanglement. I believe this entanglement resonates strongly with Kateb, Djebar and Salih. They did not have the same experience of uprooting as that of the Caribbean slave trade (though colonialism indeed caused a sudden and violent entanglement in Algeria); but their writing, nevertheless, persistently engages with, and poetically figures, pressing questions of cultural belonging and separation (or exile), the cross-cultural, and an acute interrogation of lineage (and its future). At this point I intend to investigate whether, for these writers, what I venture to term their 'cross-culturality' is experienced in celebratory, post-identitarian terms, or as a loss or severance (or in other terms). In what forms do the tropes of origins, roots and exile enter their poetics, and what solution or framework for national identity, if any, are we offered?

Nedjma

'L'absence d'itinéraire abolit la notion du temps':[33] written during the years of the Algerian war of independence, *Nedjma* cannot adequately be comprehended without

[31] Ibid., p. 131.

[32] Ibid., p. 132.

[33] Kateb, p. 29. Subsequent references to *Nedjma* are given parenthetically in the text.

noting its deliberate obfuscation of narrative clarity, chronology and itinerary. Composed in fragments whose seemingly haphazard arrangement (settled on after various attempts at recombination) deliberately opposes a linear narrative progression, *Nedjma* offers no clear sense of purpose: its characters attempt grandiose pilgrimages, which fail to reach completion; or they end up in prison, or drug-addled in a *fondouk*. The narrative's fragmentary arrangement itself evokes a finally circular form that is more suggestive of an aimless cyclicality than any final epiphany or resolution – though Bernard Aresu suggests that such continued (re)commencements of the narrative may suggest attempts to successfully ignite the spark of national rebirth – a narrative structure 'conjuring up the cyclical vision of the birth, destruction and rebirth of national entity'.[34] If *Nedjma* begins and ends with three young Algerians setting off in separate directions, none, however, appears to represent a clear path to national renewal. Indeed, throughout *Nedjma*, we find a matrix of images whose principal connections are those of sterility, dust, shadows, and doomed searches for origins: we witness a state, or people – 'pas [encore] une nation' in Si Mokhtar's estimation (121) – languishing in 'l'ombre des pères' (91). These matrices of images, however, gravitate around certain characters; we cannot understand them unless these are contextualised as such. As *Nedjma* is a work intimately concerned with the question of national birth and a troubled sense of genealogy and ancestry, I shall attempt a 'genealogical' structure in my own study, examining in turn the role of ancestors, fathers, mothers, and sons.

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[34] Bernard Aresu, *Counterhegemonic Discourse from the Maghreb: The Poetics of Kateb's Fiction* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1993), xii.

ancestors

Appropriately, the etymological root of *Keblout* – the principal ancestral line referred to in *Nedjma* (in it lies the ancestry of Si Mokhtar, Rachid, and Nedjma herself) – is reputed to be 'broken rope': 'Quelqu'un m'a expliqué que c'était sans doute un nom turc: "corde cassée," Keblout' (116). This genealogy is passed on from Si Mokhtar to Rachid in the manner of a 'fatherly' transmission, though Si Mokhtar's credentials as a father and indeed as a genealogist are dubious: his account is both unverifiable (Rachid himself refers to Si Mokhtar as a 'mythomane' (92)) and incomplete – Rachid notes that 'il finit par tout dire, ou presque tout…' (116). In a sense, this transmission, subsequently carried on from Rachid to Mourad, indeed suggests the continuation of this oral genealogy. However, and crucially, what is communicated is not a comforting sense of ancestral plenitude, but a *ruined* and confused lineage: confused (as I shall discuss later) by Si Mokhtar's polygamy, and eventually ruined under the auspices of French colonial rule. The Keblouti were first decimated, following the murder of a colonial in the Keblout mosque:

> les décades passaient sans que les Français aient pu étendre leur influence. C'est alors que la tribu fut décimée. [. . .] Tout se passa en quelque jours [. . .]. Le Nadhor fut mis à feu et à sang, [. . .] ; peu après, les six principaux mâles de la tribu eurent la tête tranchée, le même jour, l'un après l'autre (118)

Subsequently, the administrative apparatus of the colonial state served to largely disband and disperse the tribe, breaking it into four branches: 'l'autorité nouvelle achevait son œuvre de destruction en distinguant les fils de Keblout en quatre branches, "pour les commodités de l'administration"' (120). This very dismantling means that Si Mokhtar, although acting as the last repository of ancestral genealogy, in fact represents one of the three branches ('la branche des déserteurs' (137)) that abandoned the tribal patrimony and consanguinity of descent. Both he and Rachid are received with enmity upon meeting 'la quatrième branche, [qui] gardaient la mosquée détruite, le mausolée, le peu de terre, l'étendard de l'ancêtre' (120). Indeed, following Si Mokhtar's murder by a member of this branch, his burial in the patrimony is only permitted in exchange for the handover of Nedjma (139); Si Mokhtar's murderer insists that 'Keblout a dit de ne protéger que ses filles. Quant aux mâles vagabonds, dit l'ancêtre Keblout, qu'ils vivent en sauvages [. . .], eux qui n'ont pas défendu leur terre…' (142). Si Mokhtar's abortive pilgrimage to Mecca – a 'pseudo-pèlerinage' (170) as Rachid terms it – and subsequent attempt to return to the tribal heartland, should also be considered in view of Si Mokhtar's age: as with *Season*, the principal exponents of tradition and genealogy are those nearing (or indeed at) the end of life; the question then would be who (if anyone) will wish to carry it on.

How, then, to position this return to ancestral origins? Does Si Mokhtar's (and subsequently Rachid's) concern for tribal origins imply an ethnocentric conservatism, fixated on the past? On the one hand, at least in the *literal* sense of these terms, this is

unavoidably the case: Rachid himself speaks of tracing the 'fil [. . .] jamais rompu' (137) to his origins, and of the fantasy of breathing life into ancestral ashes:

> Des hommes dont le sang déborde et menace de nous emporter dans leur existence révolue [. . .] : ce sont des âmes d'ancêtres qui nous occupent, substituant leur drame éternisé à notre juvénile attente, à notre patience d'orphelins ligotés à leur ombre de plus en plus pâle, cette ombre impossible à boire ou à déraciner, – l'ombre des pères, des juges, des guides que nous suivons à la trace, en dépit de notre chemin, sans jamais savoir où ils sont, et s'ils ne vont pas [. . .] ressusciter rien qu'en soufflant sur les cendres chaudes. [. . .] … Ce sont nos pères, certes (90-91)

However, another answer to this is provided by Si Mokhtar himself, who contends that Algeria, rather than having achieved nationhood, is, rather, a nation in gestation that must not disavow tribal lineages, but register this plurality of tribal histories as jointly contributing (in *relation*, as it were) to a specifically *national* unity:

> Tu dois songer à la destinée de ce pays d'où nous venons, qui n'est pas une province française, et qui n'a ni bey ni sultan ; tu penses peut-être à l'Algérie toujours envahie, à son inextricable passé, car nous ne sommes pas une nation, pas encore, sache-le : nous ne sommes que des tribus décimées. Ce n'est pas revenir en arrière que d'honorer notre tribu, le seul lien qui nous reste pour nous réunir et nous retrouver, même si nous espérons mieux que cela… (121)

Si Mokhtar's call for tribal recognition is concomitant with his aspiration for a unified nation – though, as we shall see, Si Mokhtar's own position hardly constitutes an argument for an ensuing tribal 'purity.' Given that *Nedjma* was written during the War of Independence, we should also note the revolutionary appeal of this speech, which identifies Algeria's in-between state – no longer under the dynastic rule of a bey, nor fully under French control – and appeals to origins for *political* ends; there is an implicitly nationalist hope or expectation in 'pas *encore*'. Rachid and Si Mokhtar both argue that the past is inextricably tied to us: it is an 'ombre impossible à boire ou à déraciner' (90-91); Algeria is a land in the shadow of its fathers (familial and historical) – among whom, to Rachid, the longest shadow is cast by Abd-el-Kader: 'seule ombre qui pût couvrir pareille étendue, [. . .] seul chef capable d'unifier les tribus pour s'élever au stade de la nation' (96). Their definition of the nation does not rest on ancestors or lineage alone – but it cannot function without them.

We should, however, consider the enunciative context of these speeches. This discourse on origins is also repeatedly framed as a reverie (Rachid) or an apparent passion (Si Mokhtar) (116) – Rachid's remarks are made during a feverous 'crise de paludisme' (97) (Mourad, his listener and narrator, reflects that '[Rachid] semblait lui-même considérer tout ce qu'il m'avait dit comme un délire' (97), and Rachid himself queries whether it is the fever that is making him talk (94)). In fact, Mourad confesses that none of Rachid's stories are unambiguous, but are deliberately fragmented, incomplete, and perhaps not entirely sincere: 'j'avais à peu près reconstitué le récit que

Rachid ne me fit jamais jusqu'au bout ; [. . .] comme s'il voulait à la fois se confier et s'assurer que je ne prenais pas à cœur ses épanchements' (89). Finally, Si Mokhtar's dreams of restoring himself, Rachid and Nedjma to the ancestral homeland of the Nadhor not only ultimately *fail* (Si Mokhtar dies; Rachid is forced to leave; Nedjma is effectively abducted by the tribe), but are framed, *a priori*, in terms laden with doom, and implicit sterility:

> Nous irons vivre au Nadhor [. . .] … Et le sang de Keblout retrouvera sa chaude, son intime épaisseur. Et toutes nos défaites, dans le secret tribal – comme dans une serre – porteront leurs fruits hors de saison. [. . .] S'il faut s'éteindre malgré tout, au moins serons-nous barricadés pour la nuit, au fond des ruines reconquises… (121-22)

Although it is indeed longed-for, Si Mokhtar's utopian dream of ancestral plenitude suggests little real hope of successful rebirth.

fathers

One of the principal reasons for Si Mokhtar's journey to his ancestral homeland is also a quest for rebirth not only of the tribe as a whole, but a response to a kind of crisis of sterility: he is unable to produce a secure lineage of his own. For example, the narrator wonders if Si Mokhtar decides on his final 'pilgrimage' to Mecca, 'redoutant de mourir vaincu, abandonné, stérile' (116); the narrator is quite aware that Si Mokhtar (probably)

has various offspring, but *stérile* implies here the lack of an identifiable lineage . Si Mokhtar is, nonetheless, the only significant father figure in *Nedjma* – a status due to the general absence of fathers in the text; as Aresu notes, '[w]ith the exception of Mustapha's, all fathers are absent in *Nedjma*'.[35] As the 'faux-père' of Rachid (91) (an ironic status, given that he all but certainly murdered Rachid's own), the presumed father of Kamel, and suspected father of Nedjma (94), he is in fact only assured of being polygamous, rather than a confirmed father – indeed, even where his polygamy is concerned, it is his female partners who are taking charge: he is 'ni polygame ni Don Juan, mais au contraire victime de polyandries sans nombre' (92). Unable to identify his own (potential) offspring, he is repeatedly figured as an 'arbre sec' or 'arbre traqué' engendering an almost 'rhizomatic' proliferation of unidentifiable moss (*mousse*, and by extension, 'velours'):

> tel un arbre traqué, trop haut pour attirer la mousse [. . .] : il était tard pour reconnaître ses enfants, pour voir grimper vers lui le velours d'une enfance qui fût vraiment sienne [. . .] (92)

Much as a tree may fail to successfully self-propagate and yet foster other forms of life, such as moss (an archetypically rhizomatic life form – a complex web of roots, spreading like a mass rather than as a shoot, and lacking an obvious point of origin – and one not genealogically connected with the tree), Si Mokhtar's offspring cannot be securely verified as his own lineage. Having only ever been 'le second époux juste le temps de

[35] Aresu, p. 146

bouleverser la chronologie du sang' (92), Si Mokhtar's polygamy eliminates the possibility of a simple line of descent (indeed, as I shall shortly discuss, there is, throughout the generations in *Nedjma*, an unfailing pattern of abductions, adulteries and exchange of both husbands and wives). In fact, his pattern of adulteries and likely fatherings is figured as the opposite of a rooted nature: having rejected the '[lignée] de la tradition, de l'honneur, de la certitude,' he opts for 'l'autre, lignée d'arbre sec jamais sûr de se propager, mais partout vivace en dépit de son obscure origine' (92). It is precisely the desire for a confirmed line of descent, however, that drives his final uprooting and quest for ancestors in the Nadhor (and, ultimately, his oral testimony to Rachid):

> et c'était lui qui s'inclinait en définitive, courbant le tronc, déterrant ses mortes racines, en quête d'un lichen jusque-là étranger… Il était au bord de la tombe, [. . .] et rapprochait seulement l'heure banale de la chute ; il cherchait en vain des témoins dans le prétoire des pères et des fils trompés ou méconnus [. . .]. Pas même un passant pour proclamer à l'heure de la déchéance : 'Je suis l'enfant de ce cadavre, je suis un bourgeon de cette branche pourrie' (92)

Why, then, does this abundance of imagery evoking the convolution of descent, and the unsettling of the natural order (uprootings, *bouleversements*), centre on Si Mokhtar? One answer is that, coming from one branch associated with those who entered the colonial social order, abandoning a kinship-based social organisation, Si Mokhtar in a sense embodies the transition, or perhaps the tipping point, between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The tribe criticises Si Mokhtar and Rachid not only for leaving the Nadhor,

but also for not bringing anything back to the community: 'Où est votre puissance? Est-ce le luth et le tam-tam [. . .]? Décidément, les Français ne vous ont rien appris…' (138-9). His personal crisis of genealogical transmission indeed echoes a broader question raised by this social reorganisation: if rank and position in Algeria are no longer maintained through direct genealogical transmission (such as was the case with the decapitated Keblouti, whose sons 'n'avaient pas quitté le berceau quand ils furent nommés caïds et cadis d'office, recevant [. . .] un nom patronymique correspondant à leurs futures professions' (119)), who inherits the 'natural' role of leader? This is a question whose answer (if there is one) falls to the 'sons' of Algeria.

mothers

In concentrating on the 'sons' and 'fathers' of Algeria, I have highlighted the twin tropes of confused or intractable genealogy and a pervasive sense of sterility. The 'natural' answer to the question of national rebirth is the figure of the mother: whether on a national level (as the femme-patrie), or as a fought-over love interest, the figure of the woman (and mother) in *Nedjma* provides, however, no sense of ontological or genealogical certainty. Indeed, if Nedjma acts as the eponymous centre of Kateb's work, she is perhaps more remarkable for her absence – fleeing or abducted from suitors, largely silent, presented only in glimpses, and characterised as 'distante, mais sans disparaître, à la façon d'un astre impossible à piller dans sa fulgurante lumière' (130). As a love object, both Nedjma and her mother are continually fought over, but in each case the agency is largely not that of their suitors. Algeria itself is pictured as a potentially

fertile land accepting various graftings (each conquest being a 'greffe douloureuse' (96)), yet refusing the mastery of any; each invader in fact becomes *hostage* of its object, and competes for its affections: 'comme les Turcs, les Romains et les Arabes, les Français ne pouvaient que s'enraciner, otages de la patrie en gestation dont ils se disputaient les faveurs' (96). Similarly, Nedjma's mother, 'confond[ant] ses amants' (170) divides her four suitors to the point of murder (as well as '[faisant] exploser la tribu'), and her daughter, 'qu'aucun époux ne pouvait apprivoiser' (169), serves to continue this combat in the following generation:

> l'adversité faite femme – Nedjma l'Andalouse –, la fille de la Française qui avait opposé entre eux quatre soupirants, dont trois de la même tribu, les trois descendants de Keblout, car c'était la mère de Nedjma, la Française, c'était elle qui avait fait exploser la tribu, en séduisant les trois mâles dont aucun n'était digne de survivre à la ruine du Nadhor… (168)

In fact, there is no young female figure who does not serve as a locus of conflict – the violence surrounding M. Ernest's daughter Susie microcosmically prefigures the motif of a fratricidal competition for primacy. The older generation of mothers is also figured as incapable of further reproduction (Lella N'fissa dies; Lella Fatma, Nedjma's stepmother, loses four male children (71)). Nedjma, who is variously depicted as having obscure origins ('l'ogresse au sang obscur' (169)), and as both ultimately unattainable and uncertainly rooted ('fleur irrespirable, menacée jusqu'à la profondeur et à la fragilité de ses racines' (169)), can be seen as the embodiment of Algeria's uncertain future rebirth,

as well as posing the ultimately unanswered question of which invader counts as Algeria's 'father.' This 'parental' loss is figured on three levels in Si Mokhtar's lament that 'Ils perdaient un empire. Nous ne perdons qu'une tribu. Et je vais te dire, j'avais une fille [. . .]' (121). Childless, increasingly absent, and refusing any final suitor, she represents a potential, fantasised, but as-yet unrealised, mother figure; the implicit and metonymic promise of national renewal is always-already deferred.

sons

'[E]t qui d'entre nous n'a vu se brouiller son origine comme un cours d'eau ensablé, n'a fermé l'oreille au galop souterrain des ancêtres, n'a couru et folâtré sur le tombeau de son père…' (91). If Si Mokhtar can be seen as bridging the generational shift from a kinship-structured to a colonial social organisation (though his personal lineage is as unclear as an *eau ensablé*), and the principal daughter (and hence future mother) figure is incessantly fleeting, the youngest generation of sons is manifestly adrift: fatherless, often motherless, jobless and ostracised by village communities for troublemaking, they pursue 'des années de perpétuel exil, de séparation, de dur labeur, ou d'inaction et de débauche' (127). They are offered a crisis of allegiances: the memory of a now-defunct kinship system, or the continuation of a colonial administration that offers financial reward in exchange for obedience:

> Les chefs de l'Algérie tribale, ceux qui avaient la jouissance des trésors, la garde des traditions, furent pour la plupart tués ou dépossédés au cours de ces seize

> années de sanglants combats, mais leurs fils se trouvaient devant un désastre inespéré : ruinés par la défaite, expropriés et humiliés, mais gardant leurs chances, ménagés par les nouveaux maîtres, [. . .] ; ils se croyaient devenus plus riches qu'ils n'eussent jamais pu s'y attendre si tout était resté dans l'ordre ancien. (95-96)

If their fathers can been seen as having served these new masters and were 'riches d'argent et de bijoux, mais frustrés' (96), what perhaps marks out Lakhdar, Rachid, Mourad and the others is that they are not benefitting from such rewards, nor the inheritance squandered by their fathers. Rather, they find themselves imprisoned for anticolonial protest (Lakhdar and Mustapha are both present at Sétif) and, together, forced to flee the authorities having answered colonists' violence with their own. Thus, despite the motifs of cyclicality, and the risk of history repeating itself, the novel both begins and (nearly) ends with an escape: 'Lakhdar s'est échappé de sa cellule' (9, 244). Rachid's journey to restore Nedjma to 'la dernière chaumière' (127) – a journey into the past – is conceived, however, as an historical turning point:

> Et puis nous voulions, *avant d'envisager l'avenir*, connaître toutes les survivances de la tribu, vérifier nos origines pour dresser un bilan de faillite, ou tenter une réconciliation (138; my emphasis)

But if registering one's past is necessary to forging ahead with the future – and keeping faith with the dead is surely one of Rachid's motivations (the massacre of his ancestors is

one which he considers 'qu'il faudra prendre à notre compte' (91)) – it remains that what is implicitly needed is a politico-historical *rupture*. *Nedjma*'s poetics of shadows, ruin, and the impossibility of return emphatically rules out a return *ad originem*; but neither does it clearly indicate which path to follow. *Nedjma* does not quite end with Lakhdar's escape, but with Mustapha's uncertain path: 'Et toi, Mustapha? – Je prends un autre chemin' (245). We find then in *Nedjma* a (qualified) vindication of rootedness: given the impossibility of continuing a *single* tribe or history, there can be no 'monolithic' root; they can no longer exist in isolation. Rather, the future nation is seen as ideally springing from, and accommodating, *all* tribal histories; *Nedjma*'s poetics therefore depicts multiple roots, but this does not imply a *rhizome* (the continued references to origin, even if hard to trace, cannot correspond with what Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor implies). Crucially, these roots do not dictate the nation's future direction – but registering them is one of the conditions for its growth.

Season of Migration to the North

Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim al-hijrah ilá al-shamaī* (*Season of Migration to the North*) is, similarly, a work positioned at a crossroads – and one that questions the nature, possibility, and legitimacy, of roots and the return. Its narrative tracks the growing dissolution of the narrator's established notions of belonging, and, as Patricia Geesey observes, demonstrates the dangers of 'a negative pattern of cultural mythologizing'.[36]

[36] Patricia Geesey, 'Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim Al-Hijra Ila Al-Shamal* (*Season of Migration to the North*)', *Research in African Literatures,* 28.3 (1997), 128-40, (p. 135).

Its two main characters – Mustafa Sa'eed and the narrator, Meheimeed[37] – in many senses mirror each other, to the extent that Meheimeed begins to fear his own dissolution or conflation with Sa'eed. Both characters are marked by having made a 'migration' to the north, and each faces a quandary of origins on return. Despite having myriad similarities – educated abroad, seeking to assert a sense of rootedness, even sharing the same love object – Meheimeed and Sa'eed are mutually antagonistic figures: the former seeks to hypostatise his village community of Wad Hamed in time, while the latter's arrival carries with it the seeds of its destruction (although, as I shall discuss, Wad Hamed already contained its own). In *Season*, roots are mapped onto two related, oppositional axes: one cultural (conceptions of 'the East' versus 'the West'), the other socio-political (the 'old ways' versus 'Modernity'). Such oppositions raise implicit questions of synthesis or incommensurability. Meheimeed's return from the West indeed evokes stories of the *Nahda*, an Arabic social movement that, in its literary manifestation, presented a traditionally romanticised tale of East-West relations: one in which (according to Waïl S. Hassan) a 'synthesis' between different value-systems is sought for. Hassan speaks, for instance, of the '*Nahda*'s conception of the ideal relationship between east and west, north and south'.[38] It was partly in response to this romantic tradition, and in light of the problematics of colonialism and (mutual) cultural fetishisation, that Salih claims to have written *Season*: 'I have re-defined the so-called East / West relationship as essentially one of conflict, while it had been previously treated in romantic terms. We

[37] The name of *Season*'s narrator, revealed in subsequent novels (Hassan, p. 170n).
[38] Waïl S. Hassan, *Tayeb Salih*: *Ideology and the Craft of Fiction* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), p. 85.

know better now'.[39] The nature of this conflict, however, is not as binaristic as this implies – indeed, I intend to show that *Season* enacts the pitfalls of hypostatising roots and questions the very basis of Meheimeed's conception of tradition.

What, then, constitutes Meheimeed's conception of roots? *Season* begins with Meheimeed returning to his homeland after seven years; his opening words are couched in such a hyperbolical assertion of rootedness and belonging that the opposite can be suspected: he is protesting too much. A 'frozen substance' now being melted by the 'life warmth of the tribe' (1), Meheimeed takes comfort in a series of stereotypical and picturesque images: the 'merry whispering' of the wind (particular, he claims, to his village (1)), and the sight of palm trees, which form the most significant and recurring metaphor of rootedness and stability for Meheimeed:

> I looked through the window at the palm tree standing in the courtyard of our house and I knew that all was still well with life. I looked at its strong straight trunk, at its roots that strike down into the ground [. . .], and I experienced a feeling of assurance. I felt not like a storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose. (2)

On meeting his family, drinking tea, and reciting the Quran – a nexus of familial, cultural, and religious roots – Meheimeed concludes that 'Yes, life is good and the world as

[39] Interview in Mona Takieddine-Amyuni, ed., *Season of Migration to the North by Tayeb Salih: A Casebook* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1985), p. 16.

unchanged as ever' (2). His rootedness involves an evaporation, and melting away of his memories of London, whose attributes are figured as a 'piece of ice' melting in him, and a 'fog [. . .] that rose up between [my people] and me the first instant I saw them' (1) that then dissipates. Europe is cold; London (in Arabic too, as Hassan notes),[40] the 'foggy city.' We find no synthesis here: his contention is that both cannot co-exist within him. The village represents an ideal of home, as Meheimeed admits: 'I used to treasure within me the image of this little village, seeing it wherever I went with the eye of my imagination' (49). While abroad, Meheimeed also preserved an image of his grandfather's house in his 'mind's eye' (70). In a less ambiguous form than Si Mokhtar, Meheimeed's grandfather embodies rootedness, 'something immutable in a dynamic world' (48), for Meheimeed: seemingly impervious to death, he is not only rooted, but allied with indigenous trees (which Meheimeed opposes, tellingly, with the western archetype): 'He is no towering oak tree with luxuriant branches [. . .], rather he is like the sayal bushes in the deserts of the Sudan, [. . .] defeating death because they ask so little of life' (73). His very dwelling bespeaks permanence and ties with nature: 'The fate of this house is bound up with that of the field: [. . .] if drought sweeps over the field it also sweeps over the house' (72). Indeed, he is figured as a metaphorical fusion of religious traditionalism and pre-industrial society: 'The prayer beads were slipping through my grandfather's fingers all this time, up and down like a water wheel' (82). But, fittingly, the features that seem to speak of 'tradition' and resistance to change are embodied, as with Si Mokhtar, in a man with few years left to live. The house's 'vast and ancient door made of harraz [. . .] from the wood of a whole tree' (70) suggests an everlasting

[40] 'The "fog" rising in front of his eyes is not a proverbial Arabic expression; rather, it is an image that specifically evokes London (nicknamed "the foggy city" in Arabic)'. Hassan, p. 118.

resistance to the outside world, but Wad Baseer (the local carpenter) 'no longer makes such doors,' making new doors from zan wood and iron from Omdurman; the water-wheel is now replaced by a pump (70) – to Meheimeed, the mechanisation of agriculture or the outsourcing of materials mean a move away from a timeless kinship-centred agricultural mode. In sum, Meheimeed's perception of roots is predicated on Wad Hamed remaining forever the same – and of course, it doesn't.

I have suggested that Meheimeed and Mustafa Sa'eed are antagonistic mirrors of each other. They both encounter a crisis of origins, but for opposite reasons. For Meheimeed, the village of Wad Hamed is a symbol, an idyll (which will be destroyed). Mustafa, by contrast, *becomes* a symbol for his partners (and this destroys them, and, in turn, him). In brief, Meheimeed *follows* myths and stereotypes; Mustafa *exploits* them. To woo his partners, Mustafa is content to paint himself either as the representative of a romantic *Nahda*-esque fantasy, or as the symbol of a fetishised Black Africa. Ann Hammond, an Orientalist, 'yearned for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons. In her eyes I was a *symbol* of all these hankerings of hers' (142; my emphasis). On meeting her, Mustafa offers a romanticised tale of cross-cultural encounters: 'At last I have found you, Sausan. I searched everywhere for you and was afraid I would never find you. Do you remember?' (143) – a fantasy she gladly reciprocates: 'I too have followed your footsteps across the centuries' (143-4). Mustafa indeed revels in such reciprocal delusions:

> It was one of those rare moments of ecstasy for which I would sell my whole life; a moment in which, before your very eyes, lies are turned into truths, history becomes a pimp, and the jester is turned into a sultan. (144)

Indeed, it is his partners' (or victims') very susceptibility to such mythmaking that attracts Mustafa to them. Isabella listens with a 'Christian sympathy' (38) to his Othello-inspired tale of losing his parents to the Nile, much as Othello's tale of 'moving accidents by flood and field'[41] moves Desdemona to pity: 'often did I beguile her of her tears, / When I did speak of some distressful stroke / That my youth suffered' (I.iii.157-9). Othello loves Desdemona for showing him pity ('She swore [. . .]/ 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful: / [. . .] She loved me for the dangers I had past; / And I loved her *that she did pity them*' (I.iii.161-2, 168-9; my emphasis)), while Mustafa desires such pity because 'the sympathy will be transformed into a desire upon whose taut strings I shall play as I wish' (*Season* 38). The myths he fashions for them, 'intricate and terrifying threads of fantasy' (145), cause crises of identity that ultimately lead to the suicides of Ann, Sheila and Isabella – Isabella's, for instance, follows a crisis of faith, having renounced her Christianity to worship Mustafa as a 'black god' (106). Key to Mustafa's belief that he can master such 'terrifying threads of fantasy' is his ability to manipulate them without, himself, becoming entwined; he places great emphasis on remaining in control, while his partners fall into his trap. However, by continually presenting 'African' culture through the lens of the coloniser, he risks emptying out these cultural signifiers of any authentic content – for instance, in the creation of a bedroom, a 'den of

[41] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by E. A. J. Honigmann (London: Arden, 1997), I.iii.136. Subsequent references are made parenthetically in the text.

lethal lies' (146) that mixes pell-mell artefacts from disparate, and deracinated, African cultures:

> I took her to my house, a den of lethal lies that I had deliberately built up, lie upon lie: the sandalwood and incense, the ostrich feathers and ivory and ebony figures; the paintings and drawings of forests of palm trees along the shores of the Nile, [. . .] suns setting over the mountains of the Red Sea, camel caravans [. . .] sand dunes [. . .], baobab trees [. . .], naked girls from the tribes of the Zandi [. . .], fields of banana and coffee on the Equator, old temples [. . .]; Arabic books with decorated covers [. . .]; Persian carpets, pink curtains, large mirrors on the walls, and coloured lights in the corners.' (146)

As Hassan points out, these images are taken from a great variety of cultures – 'from ancient Egypt to tropical Africa, medieval Arabia, Persia, and contemporary Sudan, not to mention the bordelloesque bedroom';[42] they therefore represent no particular cultural identity. Rather, they represent the undiscriminating and homogenising perspective of colonial fantasy – such as that, in John E. Davidson's view, of the British arriving in Sudan in the 1890s, who saw northern and southern Sudan as 'a homogenous South'.[43] In a sense, Mustafa acts out (or rather parodies) what Fanon, in *Les Damnés de la terre*, describes as the desire to 'go native' – *performing*, though not becoming, the coloniser's ethno-cultural stereotype, in order to ultimately reject it:

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[42] Hassan, p. 97.
[43] John E. Davidson, 'In Search of a Middle Point: The Origins of Oppression in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*', *Research in African Literatures,* 20.3 (1989), 385-400 (p. 385).

> Retrouver son peuple c'est quelquefois dans cette période vouloir être nègre, non un nègre pas comme les autres mais un véritable nègre, un chien de nègre, tel que le veut le Blanc. [. . .] se faire le plus indigène possible, [. . .] couper les ailes qu'on avait laissé pousser.[44]

The problem with this strategy in Mustafa's case is that, firstly, it is not a genuine anticolonial gesture: his boast that 'I'll liberate Africa with my penis' (120) has less to do with liberating Africa than with manipulating and seducing Europe's women (Nabil Matar, for instance, concludes that Sa'eed 'had prostituted his cultural heritage, from Persia to South Africa, for the sake of lust').[45] The second problem is that the role-playing escalates beyond his control: his myths follow an arc from an ostensibly controlled and 'playful' nod to colonial stereotypes – 'I'm like Othello – Arab-African [. . .]. My face is Arab like the desert of the Empty Quarter, while my head is African and teems with a mischievous childishness' (38) – to the mimicking of master-slave relationships – as his slave-girl 'Sausan,' Isabella exhorts Mustafa to 'Ravish me, you African demon. Burn me in the fire of your temple, you black god. Let me twist and turn in your wild and impassioned rites' (106) – to the actual enactment of such violent fantasies with Jean Morris, who finally persuades him to murder her, like Desdemona, in her bed. Morris is as fatally bound up in this reciprocal play of fantasy as Mustafa; she actively fantasises about her own death, and wishes to see Mustafa become the fatally-enraged Othello figure. In court, Mustafa, however, claims not to be an Othello: 'I am no

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[44] Fanon, p. 210.
[45] Nabil Matar, 'Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*: Circles of Deceit', in *Casebook*, ed. by Mona Takieddine-Amyuni, pp. 117-122 (p. 117).

Othello. Othello was a lie' (95). But in being drawn into murder, the line separating performance from reality is finally effaced: Mustafa *becomes* a lie.

In an interview, Salih contends that Mustafa returns to the Sudan in response to this self-effacement, and in search of cultural rootedness:

> I think that he went to the village not to act another role, but in all sincerity to search for his roots. Sadly, however, having acted for too long he simply could not become authentic and he had to create another theatrical role for himself in the village [. . .] In fact, what happened in London repeats itself in the village.[46]

Not only does Mustafa have to play a role once in Wad Hamed – by day, that of the simple farmer (and by night, locked in a clandestine shrine of western paraphernalia (137)) – but he fundamentally upsets the village in exacerbating already-existing tensions between traditional and modern ways of life. This in turn throws Meheimeed's conception of his homeland into disarray: 'The world,' he notes, 'has suddenly turned upside down' (134). We have seen that Meheimeed's conception of roots rests on certain features of his community: the fixity of its people, a nostalgia for traditional agriculture, and the comfort drawn from Islamic custom (tea, prayers, the Quran). But, point for point, we see that none of these roots remains unsettled: Mustafa Sa'eed's appearance alone is enough to trouble Meheimeed's notion that 'I know this village street by street, house by house [. . .]' (47), but Sa'eed also sets in place agricultural modernisation

[46] Interview in Muhammadiyya, Ahmad Sa'eed, et al., eds, *Al-Tayyib Salih: 'abqari Al-Riwaya Al-'arabiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-'awda, 1976), p. 133.

programmes that indeed benefit the community – 'The Omda and the merchants absolutely loathed him because he opened the villagers' eyes and spoiled things for them' (101) – and encourages his wife Hosna Bint Mahmoud to become (in the words of Mahjoub, Meheimeed's best friend) 'something new – like a city woman' (101). What ultimately destroys Meheimeed's sense of stability is, of course, the turmoil brought about through Hosna's suicide and her murder of the Wad Rayyes, whom she was forced to marry (in contravention of Islamic law, in fact, as Hassan notes),[47] and Meheimeed's sense of powerlessness in preventing it. While Mustafa played a role in encouraging Hosna to break from local 'tradition' – one defined by Mahjoub as 'Women belong to men, and a man's a man even if he's decrepit' (99) – it is clear that the seeds of antipatriarchal resistance were not sown by him alone: although the majority of the village elders (male and female) sympathise only with Wad Rayyes – Mahjoub aborts Hosna's funeral ceremony, and even Meheimeed's grandfather denounces womankind (123) – Rayyes' ex-wife Mabrouka, having slept easily through the murder (128), offers frank opposition to the dominant, and particularly male, village views:

> When some of the women wanted to commiserate with her she yelled, 'Women, let everyone of you go about her business. Wad Rayyes dug his grave with his own hands, and Bint Mahmoud, God's blessings be upon her, paid him out in full.' Then she gave trilling cries of joy [. . .] and said to the women 'It's too bad, but if anyone doesn't like it she can go drink river water.' (128-9)

[47] Hassan, p. 114.

Meheimeed's conception of his village's stability cannot accommodate such turmoil, but he in fact misses the larger picture: there is a more fundamentally permanent, and defining aspect of their society's makeup, one which is obscured by Meheimeed's romanticism: in brief, it is the continuing inequalities of the centre-periphery division of wealth, investment and opportunity, and their entrenchment by the corruption that has taken root in the governmental elites. Meheimeed idealises the 'simple native'; he tells Mahjoub, a farmer, that 'People like you are the legal heirs of authority; you are the sinews of life, you're the salt of the earth' (99). Mahjoub indeed abandoned secondary education, insisting 'This amount of education will do me [. . .]. We're farming folk like our fathers and grandfathers' (98), although he also works as a local socialist democrat and on various local committees (98) – a fact that heightens Meheimeed's conviction that, despite working for the Ministry of Education, he helps his community less than Mahjoub does:

> 'It's you who've succeeded, not I [. . .] because you influence actual life in the country. We civil servants, though, are of no consequence.' (99)

Meheimeed, at times addressed by the locals as 'Effendi' (85) (a term reserved for government officials) perceives himself as ineffectually looking on at village events; floating on the river Nile, he concedes that 'if I died at that moment, I would have died as I was born – without any volition of mine. All of my life I had not chosen, had not decided' (168). Mahjoub, attacking Meheimeed on this inaction, also identifies the far

more fundamentally enrooted (and characteristic) feature of the Sudan – *everything is in Khartoum*:

> Don't we pay taxes? Haven't we any rights in this country? Everything's in Khartoum. The whole of the country's budget is spent in Khartoum. [. . .] What's the use in our having one of us in the government when you're not doing anything? (118)

While Meheimeed admires the simplicity of rural life and the continuity of its social relations, it is precisely this romanticised ideal that blinds him to the centre-periphery inequalities that are often exacerbated by modernity. Meheimeed, countering Mahjoub's assertion that women in Wad Hamed 'belong to men,' asserts '[b]ut the world's changed [. . .]. These are things that no longer fit in with our life in this age' (99); in return, Mahjoub identifies a deeper systemic inequality:

> 'The world hasn't changed as much as you think,' said Mahjoub. 'Some things have changed – pumps instead of water-wheels, iron ploughs instead of wooden ones, sending our daughters to school, [. . .] beer instead of arak and millet wine – yet even so everything's as it was.' Mahjoub laughed as he said, 'The world will really have changed when the likes of me become ministers in the government. And naturally that,' he added still laughing, 'is an out-and-out impossibility.' (100)

The systemic inequality, and the barriers to rural peasants changing society, is fostered by government officials 'smooth of face, lupine of mouth, their hands gleaming with rings' (118), and who nevertheless claim that 'No contradiction must occur between what a student learns at school and between the reality of the life of the people. Everyone who is educated today wants to sit at a comfortable desk, [. . .] an air-conditioned house [. . .] an American car as wide as the street. If we do not tear out this disease by the roots we shall have with us a bourgeoisie that is in no way connected with the reality of our life' (119). Meheimeed, however, feels powerless to influence these officials. Mahjoub in fact offers another antagonistic parallel to Meheimeed: rather than being fixated on an idealised, indeed hypostatised, conception of Wad Hamed, he is pictured as at once breaking from, and retaining connections with, the 'traditional' way of life. Being 'connected' with his community means that Mahjoub is, conversely, less conservative about changing it. This is gestured to, for example, in his separating, and replanting, a branch of one of Meheimeed's treasured date palms, maintaining its roots and yet placing them in a new setting (a gesture Geesey identifies as pointing to 'the "hybrid zone" in which he now resides, that is, newly independent Sudan'): [48]

> Mahjoub swore at the small palm tree when he eventually succeeded in separating it from the trunk of its mother without breaking its roots. He heaped earth on to the large wound that was left in the trunk, [. . .] then threw it down to dry out in the sun. (131)

[48] Patricia Geesey, p. 133

Despite trying to reassert a longed-for sense of authenticity, Mustafa Sa'eed ultimately elects for suicide in the Nile: his hope is that his sons will feel more authentically rooted than he was, and will lack the 'germ [. . .] of wanderlust' (67). The problem, as I have suggested, was not his voyaging abroad or cultural mixing, but rather emptying his cultural signifiers, and ultimately himself, of any genuine meaning. Mustafa demonstrates the twin dangers of reciprocal cultural mystification (or *wahm* – 'illusion' – as Salih termed it) and of reducing a tradition purely to a set of fetishised signifiers. Meheimeed, for his part, finishes floating in the Nile, likewise choosing between life and death. Having found that a sense of rootedness based primarily on romanticising and eternalising social structures, he laments 'Where, then, were the roots that struck down into times past? Where the memories of death and life? What had happened to the caravan and to the tribe?' (134). Meheimeed's ideal had been of a people living – as Nile-dwelling tribes indeed had – in direct relationship to the river (as suggested above, for instance, in the image of his grandfather's house). Unlike Mustafa, variously described as a rubber ball on which no water could settle (20) (by which we can infer a lack of cultural or geographical rootedness; the inability to 'absorb' the Nile), or as having a mind like a sharp metal knife (2) (an efficient instrument, but unprejudiced by morals or sentiment – and ultimately his undoing, in Jean's murder), Meheimeed had claimed to be deeply, and unambiguously rooted in Wad Hamed: a 'seed sown in a field' (5) and not a 'storm-swept feather' (2). Finally, however, he discovers a 'middle way' (108). Floating on the Nile, and arriving at a point 'half-way between north and south [. . .] unable to continue, unable to return' (167), Meheimeed ultimately renounces his passivity and his

fantasy of being consubstantial with the land – instead existing *in* (specific)[49] *relation* to it, and to his kin:

> Then my mind cleared and my relationship to the river was determined. Though floating on the water, I was not part of it. [. . .] All my life I had not chosen, had not decided. Now I am making a decision. I choose life. I shall live because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge. (168)

Identifying and yet separate, he thus inaugurates the potential for agency and change – maintaining links with his kin, but also taking up his responsibilities to his people's *future*. This gesture aligns *Nedjma* and *Season*, in the position, and continued role, they confer to roots and origins: here, too, there is no attempt to renounce roots – but they must not take on the 'monolithic' form that Glissant cautions against.

L'Amour, la fantasia; Vaste est la prison

Djebar's works offer a continued, and never fully realised, attempt to elaborate both a personal and a collective autobiography of her people, and her country – one continually cautious of effacing the subject it touches, and yet obsessively returning to an endlessly fragmented portrait. Works such as *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Vaste est la prison* sketch

[49] I refer here to Peter Hallward's use of this term (in his *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001)). Unlike the 'specified' (i.e. being entirely historically determined or objectified), the 'specific' implies individual subjectivity; unlike the 'singular' (a 'single immanent unity, without constituent relations' (1)), it remains relational.

the form of potential cultural and genealogical roots – some of which strongly recall certain topoi addressed in *Nedjma* and *Season* – and yet restlessly reappraise and refract these through the twin lenses of exile and linguistic separation. I intend to demonstrate how Djebar investigates and problematises, on a personal level, the relationship of the (author-)narrator to 'her' people, and, on a wider level, that of her people to their roots in the past. To approach this, I shall first consider certain alienating factors – those that distance and 'uproot' Djebar's narrators – before considering the nature of certain points of identification and rooting (even if problematical), and then finally considering what *motivates*, or requires, Djebar to make such continued returns to the questions of roots, origins and genealogies.

'Elle ne se voile donc pas encore, ta fille ? [. . .] – Elle lit! répond avec raideur ma mère.'[50] The proud boast of her mother – that her daughter studies – is an ambivalent blessing for the narrator. *L'Amour*, *la fantasia*'s opening image – that of the 'Fillette arabe allant pour la première fois à l'école [française]' (11) – provides the kernel of much of the narrator's ambivalent relationship with her people, as it generates both an educational and a cultural divide. As her schooling prevents her being cloistered at puberty like most Arab girls – 'enseveli[e] à la verticale' (131) and 'incarcéré[e]' (207) in the harem – it offers her a unique freedom: 'la mobilité du corps dans mon cas, et donc [. . .] ma future liberté' (203). However, it is precisely because it is *unique* that the narrator feels (indeed, is) separated from her 'tribe': '"Pourquoi moi ? Pourquoi à moi seule, dans la tribu, cette chance ?"' (239). The narrator expresses, however, the feeling

[50] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 203. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text, as *L'Amour*.

of being neither totally outside nor part of the harem; her home life and continued links with the community (such as also attending the Quranic school) lead to an adolescence on the harem's fringes, 'une adolescence rêveuse, sur ses marges, ni en dehors tout à fait, ni en son cœur' (144). Attending a family gathering, for instance, she feels culturally ostracised as her participation does not feel sufficiently 'natural': her 'westernised' body, which she attributes to her education, 'éprouvai[t] du mal à [s]'asseoir en tailleur' (144) and her self-consciousness leads her to feel less 'authentically' part of the collective: 'Ce cri ancestral de déchirement [. . .] ne sortait du fond de ma gorge que peu harmonieusement. Au lieu de fuser hors de moi, il me déchirait' (144). Her French education is experienced as inherently alienating, as it offers no sense of connection with her native land or community (an anxiety that implicitly aligns local flora and fauna with a sense of belonging):

> J'apprends des noms d'oiseaux que je n'ai jamais vus, des noms d'arbres que je mettrai dix ans ou davantage à identifier [. . .] Ainsi, le monde de l'école est expurgé du quotidien de ma ville natale tout comme de celui de ma famille. A ce dernier est dénié tout rôle référentiel (208)

This anxiety is not merely felt by the Isma (the narrator of *Vaste est la prison*), but is deepened by locals' suggestions that her education will benefit only her. Much as Mahjoub criticises Meheimeed for not helping the village, or the Keblouti who suggest that Si Mokhtar and Rachid have not brought any significant benefits back to the tribe, Isma's neighbours query the value of a 'caravel that never returns':

> ‘Elle sort, elle lit, elle va ainsi dans les villes, nue [. . .] dans le monde ennemi, enfin le monde libre [. . .]… [P]auvres ses parents quand ils verront qu’elle n’en reviendra jamais !... A quoi bon la caravelle qui s’en va loin dans les océans pour quelles richesses qu’elle *ne rapportera pas* [. . .] ! [. . .] [E]lle ne comprendra jamais car elle ne sera jamais de nos maisons, de nos prisons, elle sera épargnée de la claustration et, par là, de notre chaleur, de notre compagnie ! [. . .] [D]’où vient-elle, d’où sort-elle, vraiment, elle, l’étrangère !’[51]

The *écart* established through her educational privilege provides Djebar (and her narrators) with an increased mobility: not only to move outside of the harem, but to be ‘[rivée] à deux villes, toute sa vie : entre Alger et Paris…’ (*Vaste* 110). In *Vaste est la prison*, the narrator, proclaimed by her nurse at birth to be ‘une voyageuse, une nomade partie de cette montagne, pour aller jusqu’où, plus loin encore !’ (242), makes continued assays at *positioning* herself between France and Algeria – negotiating what Rushdie characterised as an exiled writer’s uncertain territory: ‘Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy’.[52] What *Vaste*’s narrator is negotiating is whether, writing (and in French) in a continuous *va-et-vient* between two countries, her writing position is necessarily ‘rootless,’ or, conversely, bestowed with a certain ‘space’ defined by this very movement. The narrator regrets, on the one hand, that the unique freedom of body permitted by her

[51] *Vaste*, pp. 278-9 (my emphasis). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text.
[52] Rushdie, p. 15

educational divide severs her from a maternal heritage, and claims that this renders her a 'fugitive':

> *Ayant perdu* [. . .] *ma richesse du départ, dans mon cas, celle de l'héritage maternel, et ayant gagné quoi, sinon la simple mobilité du corps dénudé, sinon la liberté.*
>
> *Fugitive, donc, et ne le sachant pas.* (*Vaste* 172)

However, this very position *as* fugitive is endowed with a certain specificity: speaking of '*l'instant où je prends conscience de ma condition permanente de fugitive*' (172), the narrator adds '*– j'ajouterai même : d'enracinée dans la fuite*' (172; my emphasis). There is a shift, then, from being a '*Fugitive* [. . .] *et ne le sachant pas*' (172) to an eventual recognition and acceptance of this 'entre-deux' (113). What accounts for this change is that the narrator discovers that she need not 'root' herself squarely in one or the other 'camp' – that she need not feel guilty that 'Bien que je fusse à Paris, [. . .] je me sentais "chez moi"' (*Vaste* 114). Listening to a French poet-singer called Léo at a concert in an Algerian village thirteen years after Independence, the narrator assumes that the Algerian members of the audience, who 'tous avaient alors fredonné les mêmes chansons françaises [. . .], tout en s'inquiétant pour un cousin arrêté ou torturé' (*Vaste* 57), must, as fans of Léo, be 'tous francophiles ce soir' (58) – and is rebuked by her friend: ' – "Leophiles" plutôt, corrigea mon compagnon' (58). At this point, the narrator begins a fundamental re-evaluation of a relationship she had previously felt obliged to view as

oppositional: 'cette soirée au théâtre s'était déroulée pour moi hors territoire, ni en France ni en mon pays, dans un entre-deux que je découvrais soudain' (59).

If Djebar's narrator comes to see this in-between space, or *entre-deux*, as a potential rooting point – one strengthened by the sense of solidarity implied, in *Vaste est la prison*, in descriptions of other Algerian women experiencing exile or flight (a grouping which, as Hiddleston notes, need not imply any shared 'feminine' essence: 'The women of Djebar's narrative share not a fixed position but the experience of evasion')[53] – this does not, however, designate a specifically *Algerian* rootedness (as the narrator notes, they are rooted 'dans la fuite'). What threads, however frayed, can be said to bind her to Algerian women (or men) who are *not* in flight? There are in fact both cultural and genealogical ties that continue to matter to Djebar. One nexus of nostalgia and belonging consists of several interrelated cultural ties linking family, (often religious) culture, and local idiom. For the narrator of *L'Amour la fantasia*, in contrast to her French education, there is a certain comforting 'authenticity' both in the Quranic school itself – in 'sa pénombre [. . .] L'image du maître [. . .] et ses vêtements traditionnels' (*L'Amour* 205) – and in the process of learning written Arabic (the narrator evokes an earthy physicality in the act of tracing its liana script (204)). She reflects fondly on the celebratory ululations with which her mother would mark her having learnt a new *sura* by heart: 'La circonstance était jugée par ma mère assez importante [. . .] pour que le cri ancestral s'élançât' (206). Aurally, too, the narrator evokes the same comforting sense of being 'swaddled' (*langé*) by the sounds of dialectical Arabic – 'langé des mêmes bruits originels' (146) – as she

[53] Jane Hiddleston, *Assia Djebar: Out of Algeria* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 100.

would feel if swaddled, by her father, in a woollen marriage burnous (itself woven by the tribeswomen): 'la tradition exigeait que le père [. . .] enveloppe sa fille de son burnous et lui fasse franchir le seuil dans ses bras' (*L'Amour* 121). This metaphorical fusion of language, marriage and family (a nexus of elements whose combination can be signalled, indeed, in the very evocation of 'swaddling,' in a manner akin to Freud's notion of the 'intermediate idea')[54] means that each facet tends to evoke the other: at her marriage in Paris ('noces parisiennes, envahies de la nostalgie du sol natal' (*L'Amour* 123)) the narrator laments her separation from her father and such traditions, and begins to think of her partner as *lui* (124) – the traditional Arabic form of address. The narrator, in fact, often roots herself thus through language – whether in secretly referring to her French-speaking beloved in *Vaste* as '"mon chéri" en arabe' (*Vaste* 89), or reminiscing with her brother[55] in *L'Amour* about the local idioms of their childhood home, such as *hannouni*, a term of endearment that would lose its particularity in translation (*L'Amour* 95):

> Il suffit qu'elle prononce 'hannouni' à mi-voix, et tu te dis, sûr de ne pas te tromper : 'Elle est donc de chez moi !' (94)

[54] Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature: Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works*, ed. by Albert Dickson and James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 59. Freud cites Zoë-Gradiva's archaeopteryx – an image jointly evoking the ideas of her father and her lover – as an example of 'the single concrete expression of the identity of [. . .] two figures.'

[55] Having local linguistic roots in her hometown does not, of course, mean that she had an uncomplicated home life; Djebar also wishes that she had had more contact, and a closer relationship, with her brother – 'Mon frère, dont l'adolescence navigua vers les horizons mobiles' (*L'Amour* 94). As Hiddleston notes, 'The warmth she mentions on first recapturing the term "hannouni", then, is [. . .] coupled with a sense of distance from her brother'. Jane Hiddleston, '"Le silence de l'écriture": Arabic and its Absence in the Works of Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar', *Revue Critique De Fixxion Française Contemporaine* 3 (2011), 29-39 (p. 31).

The narrator of *Vaste* also sometimes evinces an attachment, similar to that of Meheimeed for his grandfather's house, to the 'authentic' or 'natural' appearance and apparent permanence of old Algerian houses presented in her film-documentary: 'Cette maison je l'avais choisie pour ses murs qui, par-derrière, paraissaient courtauds, pour sa masse aux piliers solides, à la couleur terreuse' (*Vaste* 299). Similarly, *L'Amour*'s narrator is disappointed to find a 'modern' Quranic school that – irrespective of its curriculum – has dispensed with traditional appearances: 'Je fus déçue. Par ses bâtiments, l'horaire de ses cours, l'allure moderniste de ses maîtres, elle ressemblait à une prosaïque école française…' (*L'Amour* 206). There rests, then, in Djebar, a continued, perhaps romanticised, connection to the trappings and comforts offered by this religio-culturo-familial matrix – one which undoubtedly posits, at times, a more collective notion of 'the people' than that recognised by these very people, such as when speaking to Hania (a woman who herself felt the need to return to her home village for each of her pregnancies, 'se croyant, seulement là-bas, vraiment elle-même'):

> photographier les paysannes des montagnes de mon enfance, pour quel usage ? demandait-elle avec exigence. Je tentais de dire combien j'aimais, dans mes retours 'chez moi,' regarder les gens, comme pour la première fois. Les gens ? disait-elle avec un regard dévorant. 'Les gens dehors ! répondais-je. Vieux, enfants, fillettes et jeunes filles au-dehors et hors de cette ville' (*Vaste* 310)

Djebar's most fundamental search for roots is evident in her attempt to 'm'abîm[er] dans les méandres de ma généalogie' (*Vaste* 214) – a collective, and specifically feminine

history impelled by a certain, pressing, ancestral duty: 'Ma fiction est cette autobiographie qui s'esquisse, alourdie par l'héritage qui m'encombre' (*L'Amour* 244). She follows out this duty in spite of an ever-present desire to 'Ne pas prétendre "parler pour," ou pis, "parler sur" [. . .]'. [56] But why narrate a *feminine* genealogy, and why is it perceived as a duty? One reason is simply the lack of *written* accounts of Algerian women in the historical record. Another is that their oral history, even when narrated by women, tends to occlude the female line in favour of the male:

> Pourquoi, ai-je songé tout en rêvant encore à la grand-mère, la mémoire féminine, en cercles concentriques, revient inlassablement aux pères, laisse dans l'ombre (et naturellement dans le silence du non-écrit) les véritables drames, les défaillances, la chute d'une femme ?' (*Vaste* 212)

At the birth of Isma's blue-eyed brother, for instance, the village women rejoice: '– Il a les yeux bleus, [. . .] un vrai seigneur il sera ! Un marié !... – Les yeux de son père, il est de la lignée paternelle !' (*Vaste* 239). At Isma's birth, however, there is no great celebration among the village women (even Isma's grandmother adds in consolation 'Tu auras un garçon, la prochaine fois !' (242)), and her mother chooses to conceal the fact that Isma has her deceased aunt's eyes:

- Tu auras un garçon, la prochaine fois ! rétorqua la grand-mère [. . .]

[56] Assia Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 9.

> Certes, les yeux bleus, c'était l'ascendance paternelle – alors que sa fille avait les yeux noisette, elle l'avait remarqué mais *n'en avait rien dit à quiconque*, c'était la couleur miel de Chérifa (242; my emphasis)

It is this feminine ancestral occlusion that the narrator wishes to address. In a series of chapters entitled 'corps enlacés,' listening to her female relatives spinning a genealogical skein 'de telle montagne à telle colline, en passant par la "zaouia," par le hameau, puis enserrant le cœur de la ville' (*L'Amour* 186), *L'Amour*'s narrator uncovers – and thus inscribes – an invisible genealogical community preserved through oral testimony; but she recounts this, partly, to register how such tribal ancestries have become 'dust' following Independence: one clan of resistors remaining in the Dahra mountains 'se sentent encore "aristocrates" alors que ne leur restent plus que des biens en poussière' (*Vaste* 229). This is not an attempt to rekindle a tribal social organisation, or to assert an ancestral and autochthonous primacy to the land; on the contrary, it highlights the disillusionment at an Algerian government that has failed to meet the people's own aspirations:

> ce n'étaient plus les étrangers installés là en maîtres [. . .] qui se révélaient étrangers ! Ainsi, parmi leur descendance, ceux qu'ils savaient de leur sang, et donc s'étaient-ils imaginés, avec leurs mêmes aspirations, c'étaient ceux-là des étrangers, des espèces hybrides en grand nombre (*Vaste* 330).

Crucially, the genealogy that Djebar's narrator wishes to trace is one of *dissent*: she wishes to uncover an (oral) genealogy of female rebellions – a resistance she wishes to carry on through the freedom – and distance – of writing. Rekindling *this* lineage, rather than an old ancestral glory, is what returns the narrator to her 'only' origin:

> Ecrire en langue étrangère, hors l'oralité [. . .] –, écrire m'a ramenée aux cris des femmes sourdement révoltées de mon enfance, à ma seule origine. (*L'Amour* 229)

Conclusion

In their persistent engagement with the questions of origins and exile, Kateb, Djebar and Salih offer a complex system of belonging and non-belonging: each presents narrators and characters who are in certain senses bound by ties to community, family and indeed nation (and their poetical tropes of streams, bloodlines and roots certainly evoke, and play on, traditional nationalist metaphor); but these threads pull them in differing directions. None presents a persistently homogenous national entity with or against which they can situate themselves, though certain affinities are drawn on positively. In fact, this heterogeneity is rather the point: ethnic and historical origins are registered and valued, but are never presented as the sole, distilled essence of a nation; there is no need to turn nationalistic metaphor into ethnocentrism, a denial of competing genealogies and histories, or a fixation on how things once were. If anything, *Season*'s critical treatment of Meheimeed's nostalgic ideals (of home and the pre-industrial) argues

for progressive societal change (such as that effectuated by Sa'eed and Mahjoub, who do not cling to existing economic organisation – Mahjoub as a political activist, and Sa'eed as a left-leaning economist).[57] Meheimeed's final discovery is that he can 'belong' to his community without requiring it to remain frozen in time; tragedies such as Hosna's death, as I shall discuss in *Silence and Screams*, ensue from refusing to register this internal heterogeneity. Salih claimed to have reconfigured the East-West relationship in terms of conflict (rather than 'romantic' synthesis),[58] but this is not entirely borne out in our reading: certainly, conflict is evident, but at home as well as abroad. But in fact, considering each other as exoticised opposites (ice versus fire, black versus white) is tied much more closely to the personal tragedies in *Season*. And although 'synthesis' is perhaps a romanticised term (whether applied to East-West relations or the Sudan's social shift from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft), the novel ultimately *combines* rootedness and hybridity, and openness to change, as the way forward, as Mahjoub's symbolic tearing and (successful) grafting underlines. As we saw above, *Nedjma* also figures national development as a series of *greffes douloureuses*. Here, too, it is a 'mal nécessaire, une greffe douloureuse apportant une promesse de progrès à l'arbre de la nation',[59] though the violence of the grafting is registered (poetically, too: Algeria is 'la nation entamé[e] par la hache [de Lamorcière]').[60] The image of violent grafting does not imply, however, that the original is supplanted (or the grafting rejected): Majhoub's tree survives; *Nedjma*'s nascent nation resists becoming the property of any of its suitor-invaders. This

[57] Sa'eed's academic research is centred on 'an appeal for humanity in economics' (p. 35).
[58] Interview in Mona Takieddine-Amyuni, ed., *Casebook*, p. 16.
[59] Kateb, p. 96.
[60] Ibid.

is the how the topos of roots and graftings is employed: in ideological and poetical terms, it asserts the viability, and difficulties, of forming a cross-cultural nation.

In their ongoing dialogue with the dead, Djebar and Kateb both delve into the past and their ancestors out of a sense of duty – but this does not posit a future that excludes others (indeed, the original Keblout was not an autochthon, but an exile, 'établi en Algérie par un pur hasard').[61] The persistently 'arborescent' figures applied to the oldest generations in *Season* and *Nedjma*, and similarly the prevalence of shadows and dust are not conceived as obsolescences that will disappear in the bright young day of a newly modern nation, nor are they invested with the authoritarian dominance that the 'root' suggests, for example, to Deleuze and Guattari; instead, these perceptions of roots present a specific set of relations that are neither limitless nor limiting. In other words, the notion (or poetics) of the 'root' is not in itself the problem: we (as individuals, as a nation) do not have to reject this notion to 'move on'; but it is not a sufficient basis for national identity – indeed, the search for roots, and recognition of their importance, is balanced by a recognition of their ultimate *untraceability*. In nation-theory terms, this most closely matches Andrew Smith's nationalist-symbolist approach, of which *ethnie*[62] is only one element, rather than the 'primordialist' position. For Djebar, the comforting matrices of family, culture and religion serve as something of a *mythomoteur*; they function as binding threads, but they also serve to highlight the distance between those holding them. And although, in each novel, the narrators' nostalgia for (or distance from) the past or from 'their' people *is* sometimes perceived as a *coupure béante* (despite what Glissant

[61] Ibid., p. 117.
[62] As I noted above, Smith's *ethnie* does not mean ethnicity.

claims in the *Discours antillais*), such a dislocation is also positively revalued – they exist, and persist, in *relation*: not being bound (or slavishly affectionate) to roots permits room for independent (if not uprooted) growth.

The function of landscape

nous sommes nous-mêmes la ville à moins qu'elle ne soit nous

(*Qui se souvient de la mer*)[1]

'Tout homme', avers Glissant, 'est créé pour dire la vérité de sa terre'.[2] But the poetics of relation that Glissant outlines in his *Discours antillais* is specific in one very particular respect: such a literature speaks not only *of*, but *with*, one's native land. To understand what Glissant claims to be specific to Caribbean discourse, and what he believes engenders this specificity, it would be well to look now at the passage where he presents his treatise on landscape:

> On dit qu'il y a littérature nationale quand une communauté contestée dans son existence collective tente de rassembler les raisons de cette existence. [. . .] Or le réalisme, théorie et technique de la reproduction littérale ou 'totale,' n'est pas inscrit dans le réflexe culturel des peuples africains ou américains. [. . .] La misère de nos pays [. . .] comporte une dimension d'histoire (d'histoire non évidente) dont le seul réalisme ne rend pas compte. [. . .] Une conséquence immédiate d'une telle appréciation se rencontre dans la *fonction du paysage*. Le rapport à la terre, rapport d'autant plus menacé que la terre de la communauté est aliénée, devient tellement fondamental du discours, que le paysage dans l'œuvre cesse d'être décor ou confident pour s'inscrire comme constituant de l'être. Décrire le

[1] Mohammed Dib, *Qui se souvient de la mer* [1962] (Paris: Minos, La Différence, 2007), p. 162.
[2] Edouard Glissant, *La Lézarde* (Paris: Seuil, 1958), p. 105.

> paysage ne suffira pas. L'individu, la communauté, le pays sont indissociables dans l'épisode constitutif de leur histoire. Le paysage est un personnage de cette histoire.[3]

We can clearly see what motivates each facet of this poetics. Firstly, it is a *national* literature, expressing the presence and validity of a community in response to an outside threat. Fanon has taught us that it is only as a nation that a community can now hope to justify and fight for its existence. Secondly, in the Caribbean context, Glissant claims, the community's relationship with the land is further threatened when they feel alienated from it, in Martinique's case as the community has been transported to a new land. For Glissant, these two motivating factors – a threatened existence; alienation from one's land – directly influence the form that literature will take: with the community thus threatened and in an uncertain relationship with the land, landscape comes to the fore. Indeed, the question of the people's relation to the land is so urgent that landscape cannot be mere background, but manifests itself as a full character ('comme constituant de l'être'):

> le paysage dans l'œuvre cesse d'être décor ou confident pour s'inscrire comme *constituant de l'être*. Décrire le paysage ne suffira pas. L'individu, la communauté, le pays sont indissociables dans l'épisode constitutif de leur histoire. Le paysage est un personnage de cette histoire. (199; my emphasis)

[3] Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), pp. 198-99.

This is clearly not a realist approach; Glissant suggests that the ruptured historical trajectory of the Caribbean people, and their current 'misère' (198), are not suitably expressed by conventional literary realism. In a *poétique de la relation*, we find neither the accurate description offered by realism, nor, in J. M. Dash's opinion, [4] simply the artful conceit of poetic fallacy, but, in Glissant's view, a stage further: landscape and the (human) being are *fused*.

Now, it would risk being reductive to read here a binary opposition of landscape as either 'décor ou confident' or as a living symbiosis; we can fairly easily imagine a middle ground. What Glissant is indicating appears to be a poetics that features a stronger emphasis on the poetic fallacy – to the point that it in some sense exceeds the bounds of 'simpl[e] [. . .] poetic fallacy' – and also a more direct or urgent reason for using it: the community's troubled relationship with the land. Before I consider the implications of this claim in a wider literary context, and assess to what extent the privileging or extension of this technique would be a distinguishing feature of 'cross-cultural' literature, it may be prudent to first define the poetic fallacy, and present a little of its history, in order to then consider what would constitute a divergence from it.

As a literary technique, the poetic fallacy has existed since the earliest forms of literature; [5] it is a form of personification by which we attribute animate characteristics (such as feelings) to the inanimate (such as the landscape). Quintilian, considering the

[4] J. M. Dash, Introduction, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. xxv ('Nature is not simply *décor consentant* or pathetic fallacy').
[5] Cudden notes that it has been used 'countless times since Homer onwards'. Cuddon, J. A., ed. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), s.v. pathetic fallacy.

related technique of prosopopoeia,[6] noted that it had the power to 'bring down the gods from heaven, evoke the dead, and give voices to cities and states'.[7] The pathetic fallacy was originally named and defined – in often disapproving terms – by Ruskin, in *Modern Painters*. It is properly 'pathetic' in its inspiration, as Ruskin believes its use, or need, springs instinctively from a passion speaking through us; and it is 'fallacious' as the image is not objectively true – it occurs when the force of external circumstances impresses on us to the extent that we fail to see clearly. He believed its use implied a certain loss of reason in the face of overwhelming external influences – 'Even in the most inspired prophet it is a sign of the incapacity of his human sight or thought to bear what has been revealed to it.'[8] For Ruskin, it was a technique noble insofar as the passion prompting its use was sufficiently strong: greater poets were moved by greater things. Thus, while Coleridge's personification of a dancing leaf is deemed simply 'morbid' (i.e. untrue) and unwarranted, Isaiah's pathetically fallacious description of the destruction of Assyria is justified by – indeed, a necessary response to – the horror of what he sees, to the point that Ruskin in fact considers this altered perception, however unobjective, to possess a form of truth:

> A poet is great, first in proportion to the strength of his passion, and then, that strength being granted, in proportion to his government of it; there being, however, always a point beyond which it would be inhuman and monstrous if he pushed

[6] There are two main senses for prosopopoeia: the first is the rhetorical technique by which 'an imaginary, absent or dead person is represented as speaking or acting'; the second is effectively synonymous with personification, and denotes when 'an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as a person, or as having personal characteristics, esp. the power to think or speak; an instance of this; = PERSONIFICATION *n.* 1.' (*OED*).
[7] Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, Book 9, Ch.2:31. <http://rhetoric.eserver.org/quintilian/9/chapter2.html>.
[8] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. iii, pt. 4 ('Of many things') (New York: Wiley & Halsted, 1859), §16, p. 170. Further references cited parenthetically in the text.

> this government, and, therefore, a point at which all feverish and wild fancy becomes just and true. Thus the destruction of the kingdom of Assyria cannot be contemplated firmly by a prophet of Israel. The fact is too great, too wonderful. It overthrows him, dashes him into a confused element of dreams. All the world is, to his stunned thought, full of strange voices. 'Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, 'Since thou art gone down to the grave, no feller is come up against us.' (§ 14, p. 168)

It is surprising that Ruskin, in an essay preoccupied with the 'dominion of Truth' (§ 14, p. 171), offers this exception: he in fact considers that these moments of emotionally inflected, subjective perception *transcend* poetic artifice and belong to truth's dominion. We should note the difference in opinion between Ruskin and Glissant in their views on the irrational; Ruskin would not valorise it – the poet should indeed feel strongly, but must maintain his reason – whereas Glissant repeatedly cites unreason and delirium as strategic tools (as Dash notes).[9] But what is most interesting, however, is that for Ruskin, it is a matter of what *motivates* the pathetic fallacy – and not the technique itself – that determines whether it is base or noble, warranted or no. Just as with Glissant, he is concerned with the external factors that prompt a particular poetical technique.

Let us consider Glissant's hypothesis that certain socio-political circumstances make this poetic appeal to landscape more urgent: if this heightened prominence of landscape reflects a contested community and an alienated and uncertain relationship with the land,

[9] J. M. Dash, *op cit.*: 'Glissant seems close to the Proustian belief in the link [. . .] between sensation and memory. Glissant too observes that it is not the rational mind that restores the past [. . .]', p. xxxv.

it follows that if these circumstances are replicated elsewhere, we may find a similar gravitation to this technique. I propose that this can be observed in the writing of several North African[10] writers: not because they are North African, but because their own circumstances present analogous pressures and uncertainties with respect to their native lands. In the works of Dib, Kateb, Salih and Djebar, the poetics of landscape show a striking resemblance to the idea of this confluence of *paysage* and *personnage*; and if we consider when and why such moments occur, then we may see how (or if) they relate to Glissant's poetics of relation. Although the pathetic fallacy is not by definition restricted to images of landscape (it may be applied to any inanimate object), it is the most common implementation of the technique, and is also the aspect that Glissant foregrounds in *Le Discours antillais*. And although this is a potentially vast field given the lengthy history of the technique, we can subdivide its use. On a very basic level, the metaphorical equation, or comparison, of land (or indeed a village, a country, a nation, etc.) with a human (or other animate) being can take two, or arguably three, potential forms:

1) landscape seen as a human
2) a human seen as landscape
3) landscape seen as a living (though not necessarily human) force

To focus these immense fields, one helpful method may be to categorise the potential forms of contact, or interaction, between the human and the land. Though one is animate

[10] The UN's country classification places Algeria and Sudan in Northern Africa (or North Africa), and South Sudan in Eastern Africa. Salih was from what is currently termed Sudan. United Nations, 'Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical sub-regions, and selected economic and other groupings', 11 February 2013 <http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm> [accessed 30 September 2013].

and the other inanimate (or unthinking), they can both be subject to comparable external factors: in a physical sense, each can, for example, be attacked, destroyed or restored, invaded or appropriated; as for the mental sense, it is not unusual to speak of memory being imprinted in both landscape and man. And in the violence of a colonial or postcolonial context, all of these actions are likely to strike a strong chord – indeed, metaphors of embodied landscapes feature prominently in colonial and nationalist rhetoric. Though such nationalist rhetoric is found, and reflected on, in the works below, Glissant's notions of a contested community and alienation from the land are also evident at a more individual level in these works – in other words, the poetical function of landscape is employed not only to portray relations between countries, but also to express the relationship of the cross-cultural author to their own, and other, countries. To connect these novels, I will investigate whether there may be a structural similarity in their employment of landscape metaphors: are particular tropes drawn on more than others in these works, and if so, are they consistently employed for similar ends? Why, for example, is a poetics of landscape paired with experiences of cross-culturality and colonialism? I will limit my discussion to the most prominent forms of landscape metaphor in these works: firstly, the equation of landscape with woman – what is often known as the *femme-patrie* – and then several key landscape tropes: the destruction and restoration of the land, landscape as memory, and the figure of the city. As ever, this separation is artificial, as each trope can be observed working in relation to the others. Lastly, I will also briefly consider the related question of *itinerary*, or movement through the landscape, as the physical itineraries followed in these works – if mapped out – can speak to us as much as the land itself.

Section I: the femme-patrie

To begin, then, I will address the most consistently employed technique in each of these works: the *femme-patrie*. This trope – the portrayal of land as a woman (or vice versa) – can be found in literary and other writings since the dawn of literature; as a metaphorical trope, it predates literature and is found abundantly in legend: nation creation myths, for example, often invoke the female figure (*Eire* takes its name from a fertile land goddess, *Ériu*;[11] Japan's principal deity was a sun goddess). Western and Eastern cultures have long promulgated feminine animistic ideas through concepts such as, among many others, Mother Nature; Gaia and Terra Mater (the Greek and Latin terms for this concept, and also borrowed for the 'Gaia hypothesis' proposed in 1979 by James Lovelock);[12] the Sumerian figure Tiamat; and Gayatri, the Hindu goddess of creation. Only the Egyptians ventured the idea of an Earth Father (Geb); for them, the sky, instead, was female.[13] The majority of these have long since died out as commonly held beliefs, but studies such as Anne Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* [14] and Peter Hulme's 'Undeveloped Estates',[15] as well as others by Hooper[16] and Casteel[17] have all noted how the colonisation of America (or, for Hulme, the West Indies) was accompanied by the creation of a 'symbolic realm'[18] that humanised – indeed, feminised – the virgin, and alien, landscape as a site for both

[11] 'Éire.' *Wikipedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eire> [accessed 1 June 2013].
[12] James Lovelock, *Gaia: a new look at life on Earth* [1979] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[13] 'Geb.' *Wikipedia*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geb> [accessed 1 June 2013].
[14] Anne Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).
[15] Peter Hulme, 'Undeveloped Estates: Dominica and the Landscape of the New Imperialism' in Hooper, Glen, ed. *Landscape and Empire 1770–2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 111-126.
[16] Glen Hooper, ed., *Landscape and Empire 1770–2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
[17] Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Second Arrivals: Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of the Americas* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007).
[18] See Kolodny, *op cit*.

colonial expansion, and for fulfilment of the Lockean imperative[19] to make land as productive as possible. We shall see shortly how this is echoed in the rhetoric of France's colonial endeavours. Throughout world literature, too, the trope of the *femme-patrie* can be found in various forms: metonymically in the *Iliad*, whose contests for land are inseparable from those for its women (it commences with both parties vying for Chryses' daughter, for example, and is later dominated by attempts to (re)possess Helen); or metaphorically, in the ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, when the eponymous hero calls upon the whole of nature to mourn the death of his friend; and we need only glance at the Song of Songs to see the analogy developed into a poetics, with the speaker's lover revered for having 'eyes like the fishpools in Heshpon', a 'stature [. . .] like to a palm tree', or teeth 'like a flock of sheep that are even shorn'.[20] If we turn to Revelation, we find the (heavenly) city as woman, and the joining of lands figured as marriage: 'And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband'.[21] So in a very real sense we may claim that this equation of woman with land has existed for millennia.[22] Furthermore, studies such as Carolyn Merchant's early work have suggested that 'nature and woman have been regarded as interchangeable by scientific thought since the Renaissance'.[23] And if we consider the metaphors present in even legalistic language, such as the tenets of French nationality law, we can see an implicit connection with this way of thinking: the ideas of 'blood' and 'land' are clearly evoked in the terms *jus soli* ('right of land')

[19] see Hulme, p. 116.
[20] (4:2)
[21] (21:2)
[22] See also Rita A. Faulkner, 'Assia Djebar, Frantz Fanon, Women, Veils and Land.' *World Literature Today* 70.4 (1996), p. 847: 'The ancient metaphor equating land with women and women with land can be found in texts ranging from the Koran (Surah II, verse 233: "Your women are a tilth for you [to cultivate] so go to your tilth as ye will"), to ancient Western, to modern Arabic literature.'
[23] Qtd in Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), p. 5.

and *jus sanguinis* ('right of blood'). From a reliance on *jus soli* under the *ancien régime*, emphasis switched to *jus sanguinis* under the Napoleonic code[24] – perhaps, as James Brown Scott suggests, a reflection of a growing 'spirit of nationality and Fraternity for Frenchmen'[25] – and finally both requirements were merged under the Second Republic with the requirement of 'double *jus soli*' for the children of foreigners. The very corporeality of man has long been tied to the language of his incorporation in the State.

What, then, marks out the usage of this trope in a cross-cultural context? I suggest that it is less the originality of the *femme-patrie* trope, but rather a combination of sociological factors more common among cross-cultural writers: an uneasy recognition of the land as of a father- or motherland, for example; or, conversely, the desire for connection, and so a conflation of the ideas of the *mother* and mother *country*. Or the relationship with a foreign land may be expressed in terms of desire – for its women, or for the *femme-patrie* itself. I will now examine how some of these permutations of the *femme-patrie* appear in Djebar, Kateb, Salih and Dib, and consider how such factors prompt and influence its use.

I (i): married bodies

The marriage motif, rhetoric that could ably be drawn upon by colonial rhetoric that espoused the idea of France 'protecting' its colonies from themselves,[26] takes on a variety

[24] This change was put in place by the 1804 Napoleonic Code (and was continued under Napoleon III's Second Empire) despite Napoleon I's personal preference for *jus soli*. James Brown Scott, 'Nationality: Jus Soli or Jus Sanguinis' *The American Journal of International Law* 24.1 (1930), 58-64 (p. 61).
[25] Ibid.
[26] See for example Lahouari Addi, 'Colonial Mythologies: Algeria in the French Imagination' in Carl Brown ed., *Franco Arab Encounters* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1996), pp. 93-105.

of functions in Djebar's work, and likewise in Salih's. In both cases, what we see is an ironic reflection of a rhetoric that seeks to naturalise the possession of one country by another. However, each example also has a double function: on the one hand, it ironises the felicity of this union; on the other, each offers a form of ambiguity that in some sense destabilises this image and renders the invader-invaded relationship unclear. Let us consider how Djebar's narrator notes the arrival of Amable Matterer's invasion fleet at Algiers. First, the city itself – a '[t]riangle incliné dans le lointain' – is evoked in terms intimately suggestive of a female body:

> Devant l'imposante flotte qui déchire l'horizon, la Ville Imprenable se dévoile, blancheur fantomatique [. . .]. Triangle incliné dans le lointain et qui [. . .] se fixe adouci, tel un corps à l'abandon, sur un tapis de verdure assombrie.[27]

Given the Islamic context, we can also note the play of the unveiling image; by this point, we cannot tell exactly what kind of unveiling it is: as well as the nuptial suggestion, the city is making her first appearance 'dans un rôle d'Orientale' (14). The fleet's approach, however, is provided with an imaginary audience, whose manner – silent and 'suspendu en une apnée d'attente' (14) – does suggest that of, for example, wedding guests. But the idea that the Algerian onlookers are simply a passive audience is quickly put down: 'Qui dès lors constitue le spectacle, de quel côté se trouve vraiment le public ?' (14). The French shipmen, too, are pictured as hushed guests, 'dressés côte à côte aux rambardes [. . .], à peine si l'on perçoit une interjection ici, un juron là' (15) as they approach the

[27] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 203. Subsequent references are made parenthetically in the text, as *L'Amour*.

city, whose dazzling whiteness – variously described as an 'éclat laiteux' (15), 'blancheur fantomatique' (14), an 'excès même dans la blancheur de la cité' (15), and somewhat synaesthetically as a 'soie de lumière [. . .], prodiguée en flaques étincelantes' (15) (evoking, perhaps, that of a wedding dress) – freezes them with its splendour; the 'groom' has not fully anticipated his bride's beauty:

> comme si le panorama aux formes pourtant attendues [. . .] se figeait dans une proximité troublante. (15)
>
> [. . .]
>
> La marche des vaisseaux [. . .] se fait si lente, si douce que les yeux de la Ville Imprenable paraissent les avoir fichés là, au-dessus du miroir d'eau verte, dans l'aveuglement d'un coup de foudre mutuel. (16-17)

Most important, perhaps, is the destabilising of the image created so far: we have witnessed a silent city/woman being 'courted' by the French fleet, but here the city dares to return the gaze; Matterer, the first lookout man, 'regarde la ville *qui regarde*' (15; emphasis added). Indeed, it is Algiers that appears to hold the French fleet captive; although the city is 'la proie' (16), the fleet becomes transfixed – troubled even – by Algiers' feminine, even coquettish, beauty. We have, then, a subversion on two fronts: firstly, the image of the demure and passive bride is challenged by her return of the gaze – the 'groom's' authority is questioned, and there is even a suggestion of desire on Algiers' part. Secondly, at the chapter's close, the implicit irony of the comparison is suddenly made explicit: we witness a self-conscious unmasking of the marriage conceit

playfully elaborated heretofore. In the last lines, the narrator juxtaposes the ostentatious conceit of the marriage and 'coup de foudre mutuel' with the bloody reality of what would follow; at the same time, the marriage conceit is maintained, but unmasked as a *violent* one – rather than a *cortège nuptial*, we have one of murder:

> Et le silence de cette matinée souveraine précède le cortège de cris et de meurtres, qui vont emplir les décennies suivantes. (17)

In *L'Amour*, we see a playfully literalistic – yet ambiguous – metaphorical refashioning of the Dey Hussein's famous, final reply to the French envoy: 'Le Roi de France n'a plus qu'à me demander ma femme !' (16); we shall later see a number of parallels in *L'Amour* when this city-as-woman figure is metonymically reversed.

In *Season of Migration to the North*,[28] we also find a 'living' landscape and the equation of women with land, and what again underpins the marriage trope is, it seems, the question of violence. As many critics have noted, [29] the comparison of Africa to a woman has been a commonplace, but in *Season*, in a characteristic reversal, it is now Western women who are equated with land; for Mustafa Sa'eed, one of the principal narrators, his potential brides are shores to be invaded (164), or mountains to be conquered (41). As a complementary image, Mustafa is frequently conflated with water (or in the next example, alcohol) – the first physical description of him, for example,

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[28] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1969). Henceforth referred to as *Season*. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text.

[29] See for example Abdul JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature.' *Critical Inquiry* 12.1, p. 71.

notes that the 'strength you were aware of in his head, brow, and nose became dissolved in the weakness that flowed with the drink over his eyes and mouth' (13-14). The water figure serves various purposes: Mustafa's fluidity metaphorically suggests not only his weakness of moral character, but also his crisis of identity – he cannot remain 'solid,' or a stable subject – and, crucially, it signals his conflation with the Nile and its function as a North-South bridge. Indeed, his final (dis)solution, it seems, is to drown himself in the heavily flooded Nile (67), literally incorporating him into its waters. Tellingly, for a man conflated with water, his lovers are presented as features of the landscape with which water would interact – they are shores, trees, mountains, ships; this indeed establishes a connection between him and them, but in most cases it involves *violent* contact. For example, Mustafa seduces Ann Hammond by promising to be a 'bridge between north and south' (68); shortly after this, a further and more explicit parallel is established with the Nile and with Mustafa's own obsessive – and relentless – quest for the North:

> And the river, the river [. . .] flows northwards, pays heed to nothing; a mountain may stand in its way so it turns eastwards; [. . .] sooner or later it settles down in its irrevocable journey towards the sea in the north (69)

Through a repeated reworking of this landscape metaphor, we see an attempt to link the effect Mustafa has – and the fate set to befall his fiancées – with the tragic inevitability of natural disaster: Mustafa claims he 'mean[s] [Isabella Seymour] no harm,' for example, 'except to the extent that the sea is harmful when ships are wrecked against its rocks, and to the extent that the lightning is harmful when it rends a tree in two' (41). The same

image arises with Jean Morris (whom Mustafa ultimately kills, at her bidding) though the direction of violence is appropriately inverted in this case, as she is the only partner to control him:

> Here are my ships, my darling, sailing towards the shores of destruction. I leant over and kissed her. I put the blade-edge between her breasts (164)

And yet, although Mustafa freely identifies himself as the 'snake god' (39) of the Nile (clearly recalling the serpentine Congo that Marlowe follows in *Heart of Darkness*) claiming 'new victim[s]' (39), and although he (rhetorically) attempts to explain the deaths as a natural reversal, or return, of the colonial violence that the North visited on the South – 'The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread [. . .]. They imported to us the germ of the greatest European violence' (95) – Mustafa nevertheless admits that he is not, in fact, enacting a conflict between two worlds; though, ironically, it is just such an interpretation by his lawyer that convinces the jury to spare him: 'But Professor Foster-Keen turned the trial into a conflict between two worlds, a struggle of which I was one of the victims' (33). What drives Mustafa is, in the end, desire itself, rather than a desire to return the germ of colonial violence – as he notes: 'It was I who killed them. I am the desert of thirst' (33). His sexualised geography, in fact, mirrors the exoticising character of his (and indeed, his partners') desire, as we saw in *Roots*: it communicates his, and their, desire for an exoticised 'Other.' Furthermore, the (unexpectedly) violent outcomes of these affairs are matched with a landscape poetics that can easily be made to take on a destructive character.

What we see in Djebar and Salih's appropriation of the *femme-patrie* is, in each case, largely the opposite of what it first appears. The contact between two worlds is rendered as the amorous approach of two 'bodies' in *L'Amour*, but this image ultimately reveals an inner violence. In *Season*, we have an initial suggestion of dominance or violence – Mustafa appears to acquire women as territorial possessions – but here it is the figure of violence that is the masquerade. They employ a potentially stereotypical metaphor (the *femme-patrie*), but with a sense of ambiguity that mixes violence and desire: as a poetic trope, it is easy to cliché (Prof. Max Keene's war between worlds; Matterer's fleet preparing to 'marry' Algiers), but we can see that these implementations rely on the ambiguity, and mutability, of this trope. From a cross-cultural perspective, it ably communicates the different parties' ambiguous movement between desire and violence, acceptance and rejection – or rather, a troubling combination of the two.

I (ii) Destruction of the land

We shall turn here from intimations of violence to the question of actual violence performed on the land, or on its people. As Elaine Scarry points out, even where individual humans are concerned, there is already a problem with the expression of pain: the lack of a proper vocabulary to describe its effects creates 'the inherent difficulty of accurately describing any event whose central content is bodily pain or injury'.[30] But when the subject is a large body of people – such as a nation or community – or, even

[30] Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 13.

more so, when it is the landscape itself, there is no individual enunciation of pain. Landscape cannot speak or feel. The figure of the living or personified landscape would seem ideal, in this case: a personified landscape could indeed bleed, speak, or cry out, in response to its own destruction. If we consider the works of Djebar and Dib, we can find examples of attacks on the physical landscape that serve a metonymo-symbolic purpose, and conversely, the damage inflicted on people being imprinted not on them, but on their physical surroundings.

For the first type, let us turn to *L'Amour*. Towards the end of the Algerian War, the dispirited French soldiers, suffering from '[l]a déception et l'ennui' (234), are pictured vandalising a village, leaving it overturned 'comme un champ' (234):

> les provisions séchées ont disparu ou ont été écrasées, les coffres à étoffes sont éventrés, les toits des maisons démolis, [. . .]. Les robes de noces ont été suspendues aux arbres par dérision, traînées dans la boue, par-dessus les chambranles des portes arrachées, pour simuler un carnaval grotesque (234-5)

As we can see, though the targets are physical – the houses, the grain, the (Islamic) wedding dresses – they are symbolically motivated; the soldiers attack symbols of belonging, abundance, and perhaps Islam, its nuptials, or its women. We have, then, an attempt to raise the soldiers' spirits by effecting a 'carnivalesque' reversal of their fortunes; the nature of carnival is to temporarily reverse power relations – a boy

becoming bishop for the day, for example – and this is what occurs here, though in grotesque fashion. And as with carnival, there is ultimately no change in these relations.

If we look at Djebar's *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* [31] and Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer*,[32] we can find varying examples of the second type, where violence against the people is presented as an imprint on the landscape. In *Blanc*, as the spiral of violence increases in Algeria, we see the state itself being bled dry (or bled white): 'Un État indépendant et souverain se constitue en 62, exsangue' (126). The play on the title's *blanc* (white; blank) continues when the ashes of the dead are pictured as falling particles of dust in postcolonial Algeria's atmosphere – a 'Poussière lente qui rend la journée peu à peu lointaine, blancheur qui insidieusement efface' (59) – particles that perhaps catch in the narrator's eyelashes: 'Je vous verrais entre mes cils [. . .] contre la fenêtre entrouverte' (61); it is a 'brouillard mortel' (59). This 'meteorological' metaphor recalls at once the 'blanc de l'oubli' (61) – the attempt to 'efface' individuals – and the inescapable nature of the now fratricidal violence: it is literally raining the dead. In *L'Amour*, we find analogous effacements of the landscape – a 'campagne [. . .] [qui] se vide irrémédiablement' (253-4) – when its people, the Hadjout, are wiped out by the French. Following the decimation of the tribe, their local flora and fauna are similarly bound for extinction; both the people and – as if by consequence – their environment literally disappear:

[31] Assia Djebar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995) (subsequent references will be to *Blanc*, and made parenthetically in the text).
[32] Henceforth *QSM*.

> Les Hadjouts [. . .] voient leur tribu disparaître, comme disparaîtra, vingt ans plus tard, le magnifique lac Halloula et son peuple d'oiseaux innombrables (254)

In *QSM*, by contrast, we find very little description of literal violence, but an environment whose oneiric imagery mirrors the physical and psychological traumas of the Algerian people under occupation (walls move and capture citizens, people are turned to stone and frozen into living tableaux of grief, mummies and minotaurs roam the streets). This was a conscious choice on Dib's part: he eschewed realism in favour of surrealism, considering the former less able to depict the horrors of the Algerian War. He noted, in his Postface, for example, that Picasso's *Guernica* featured '*pas un élément réaliste* [. . .] *– ni sang, ni cadavres – et cependant il n'y a rien qui exprime autant l'horreur*' (218-219). One way to communicate the mass mental trauma of colonisation and violence is through visible changes – or, in *QSM*, metamorphoses – that they bring about in their environment. We see a direct impact whenever the populace is physically or mentally threatened: when the people are frightened and angry, their panic sees the sun, too, pick up speed:

> la foule s'écoule avec une hâte fébrile, et son mouvement précipite la marche du soleil qu'elle pousse promptement au déclin. L'image des femmes saluant l'astre reparaît devant mes yeux : du respect, la même foule est passée au reniement, à l'outrage, qui vouent l'ennemi aux gémonies. (130)

By contrast, when the populace has lost hope – when its resistance runs out, or, perhaps, when its people have been colonised – there is no longer outrage and scorn, or flurries of activity; the city's streets are now 'que les dépouilles [husks]' (106), the inhabitants' torpidity transfiguring the neighbourhood: 'Ce quartier ne remue qu'une chair inconsistante, son sang et ses pensées, naguère si riches, ne forment qu'une boue grise répugnante' (105). We can in fact see the same device in Djebar's *Blanc*, where modern-day Algeria's political corruption is projected onto the body of the state:

> toute la terre d'Algérie, ses monts, son désert, ses oasis, ses bourgades… sa puanteur aussi, sa laideur, son grouillement de vers, ses corbeaux sur les arbres revenus (56)

What marks out this conflation of people and environment in *QSM*, however, is the *literal* nature of such images: they are not the ordinary comparisons, similes or conceits of pathetic fallacy, but physical reality: the crowd's panic does accelerate the sun; terrified people are literally *petri*fied; the city's walls begin to move directly following the death of the narrator's mother (149); and the unending deaths and disappearances create 'des vides béants dans la trame de la ville' (137). Though physical violence has, certain exceptions aside,[33] been kept from our sight, this has resulted in a very real *imprint* in the cityscape.

There are, however, positive forms of destruction in *QSM*. The narrator himself is marked by passivity – in fact, as Tremaine has argued, the narrator shows an almost

[33] In one section, we in fact hear of bombardments, gunfire, and cadavres hung from scaffolds (pp. 97-99).

childlike need for protection[34] – and though he chooses to *study* the town's changes (the proliferation of constructions; the flight patterns of its nightmarish birds), he does not actively seek to remedy them, refusing to pass on a decrypted message because 'le sort de notre cité, sinon de la population, est déjà décidé ; [. . .] qu'ajouterait la connaissance d'un ultimatum, qui anticipe peut-être sur l'événement, mais n'apporte pas de salut ?' (169). It is, rather, his own child, Mamia, who gestures to one solution, much to her father's horror: 'Tout démolir' (208). (I shall next consider the role of the sea(-mother) as a destroyer, too, as its final inundation, and destruction of the constructions, serves as the metaphorical restoration of the city.) Mamia's mother, Nafissa, is directly involved in the resistance movement, which tries to demolish these constructions. The name *Nafissa*, in Arabic, in fact means the place of residence (150). We have already seen that woman and place have been commingled to express the ambivalences of intercultural contact, and its violence; and we have seen here how the landscape, and cityscape, continue this link with the human in order to communicate mental and physical damage. It may be useful at this point to see if the same approach is maintained when the opposite phenomenon – the restoration of the land – is considered.

I (iii) Restoration of the landscape

If colonisation, or the abandonment of hope and resistance, are figured in *QSM* by images of petrification, dessication, or even fossilisation, the analogous counterpoint is the image of the sea and of water; and, as the *mer/mère* word play of the title implies, the

[34] Louis Tremaine, 'Psychic Deformity in Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer*', *Research in African Literatures* 19.3 (1998), 283-300.

sea in *QSM* is manifestly feminine. The few inhabitants who have not left the city for the underground (once again, a physical space: though 'la ville du sous-sol' (214) may well evoke the anticolonial resistance or 'underground,' *QSM* presents an actual, cavernous, subterranean mirror-city) are finally submerged beneath its waves. The destructive force of the waves demolishes all the constructions, and submerges the desiccated inhabitants (we could perhaps recall here a similar notion of long-awaited regeneration in *Nedjma*, where Si Mokhtar dreams that the tribal lifeblood 'retrouvera sa chaude, son intime épaisseur'[35] and of restoring the fabric of the tribe, though this is a figurative counterpart to *QSM*'s literal). Since Nafissa (the mother figure) has been consistently conflated with the sea (the sea's voice is confused with hers, for example (191)), it is not surprising to see the sea, in turn, given maternal attributes: during the night, it sings to the inhabitants; when it finally restores the city, the inhabitants are covered 'rapidement du *bercement* inépuisable de ses vagues' (216; my emphasis). On the other hand, we could also make another, somewhat darker, interpretation of this engulfing: as I shall discuss in *Itineraries*, there is a clear possibility that *QSM*'s narrator finally makes a complete psychological withdrawal from the horrors above; his escape into the underground city (which may be a purely psychological escape) is, then, accompanied by a metaphor of natural *oblivion* – in this sense, the sea's inundation could reflect a psychological tabula rasa, rather than just a restorative force. The role of the divine as a destructor and redeemer is traditionally offered as an ultimate, just answer to earthly corruption (biblical apocalypse, for example); faced with colonial violence but no such justice, the proposed answers are its destruction (and popular rebellion), or, alternatively, personal oblivion – and

[35] Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1956; repr. 1996), p. 121. Subsequent references are made parenthetically in the text.

conveniently, the tidal wave encompasses both of these functions. In *L'Amour*, too, we find an analogous suggestion of the sea's restorative role when a female prisoner, who gives birth to a stillborn baby while on a ship bound for France, is urged by her fellow Algerians to bury it in 'L'océan de Dieu ! [. . .] Tout est pâturage de Dieu et de son Prophète !' (216).

Such a heavy reliance on water metaphor is perhaps unsurprising: given all animal and plant life's dependence on it, water may naturally evoke ideas of restoration or renewal. In *Nedjma*, we see this expressed in negative terms, through its lack: Rachid, having lost his mother and never having met his father, is likened to Constantine's dried-out river Rhummel – a river 'ne recevant que de brèves pluies sans promesse, comme une infusion de sang à un vieillard dont les os gisent déjà desséchés' (162):

> pseudo-torrent vaincu par les énigmes du terrain, de même que Rachid, fils unique né à contretemps d'un père assassiné avant sa naissance (168)

The intermittent spurts of the Rhummel create a discontinuous channel; the bond between parent and child is, for Rachid, similarly broken, and his birth (also in a cave, and by his dying parent) occurs in equally unforgiving conditions. Water here serves metonymically for life and the restorative power of reproduction, but in *Nedjma* these are both imperilled. We might also note the nationalist undercurrents in this water/blood metaphor: Algeria is, as Si Mokhtar notes, not yet a nation; here the metaphor implies that the Rhummel

(Constantine's major river) lacks the water (or blood) to bring the land fully to life.[36] Here as elsewhere, Algeria is depicted as a land of ancient history and ruins, awaiting reinvigoration: it needs a new *generation*, in both senses.

A further instance of the restoration trope can be found in *L'Amour*, though it again highlights what, by contrast, is impossible to heal. The narrator, approaching a village long after the end of the Algerian War, commences a chapter by detailing how the physical landscape has been restored:

> *Conciliabules de-ci, de-là, au hasard des vallonnements reboisés qui ceinturent les hameaux reconstruits ; de nouveau, murs en pisé et barrières de roseaux s'élèvent [. . .] ; par-delà la courette, mon regard rencontre la même montagne* (225)

She has come with the intention of tracing an oral history, conducting '[c]onversations éparpillées où ma filiation maternelle crée le lien' (225). What becomes clear is that, in this case, the patching-up of the landscape echoes a like *attempt* to smooth over horrific past memories. The narrator wishes to know if any of the women have suffered '"*dommage*" – '*le mot secret et arabe*' (226) employed to avoid using the word rape. There follows a reconstruction of the individual and collective effort *not* to mention the act:

> *'J'ai subi la France,' aurait dit la bergère de treize ans, Chérifa* [. . .].

[36] We might also note that Constantine stands where Cirta, the capital of Numidia, once stood.

Les soldats partis, une fois qu'elle s'est lavée, qu'elle a réparé son désordre, qu'elle a renoué sa natte sous le ruban écarlate [. . .]*, la femme, chaque femme, revient* [. . .]*, marche pour affronter le monde, pour éviter que le chancre ne s'ouvre davantage dans le cercle tribal* [. . .] :

— Ma fille, y a-t-il eu 'dommage' ?

[. . .] *La jeune femme, cheveux recoiffés, ses yeux dans les yeux sans éclat de la vieille, éparpille du sable brûlant sur toute parole : le viol, non dit, ne sera pas violé. Avalé.* (226)

For Djebar here, memory is water – indeed, she worries, '*puis-je prétendre habiter ces voix d'asphyxie ? Ne vais-je pas trouver au plus de l'eau évaporée ?*' (227). And it is again water when the *zaouia*, where so many tribes were dispersed or killed, is revealed as having hardly any orchards left (200); the fires – started by Saint-Arnaud – that gutted the orchard and consumed the trees – like the fires that consumed those Pélissier trapped in caves – are finally extinguished, not by water, but by transcribing an account of Saint-Arnaud's deeds. In this case, in correcting a moral wrong, we see nature (metaphorically) appeased:

Les vergers brûlés par Saint-Arnaud voient enfin leur feu s'éteindre, parce que la vieille aujourd'hui parle et que je m'apprête à transcrire son récit. (200-201)

By conflating present and past fires, and commingling history with the landscape, Djebar uses the apparent permanence of landscape to suggest that historical memory is

physically *inscribed* in it – in some senses it is, as we shall see. I shall discuss the question of memory in greater detail shortly; for the moment, though, we might reflect on the reasoning behind these motifs of destruction and restoration. I suggest that presenting a fusion of land and the human provides, firstly, a direct and anthropomorphic emotive appeal: we are more easily moved by images of bleeding or death – the state being 'bled white,' for instance, brings state-wide violence to a 'corporeal' level that we identify with. A corollary of this is the implicit claim to the legitimacy or 'organicity' of a state (or community): a body is a complete unit, an assembly of parts. There is an implicit nationalism in the evocation of the state-as-body: every village, every community 'naturally' forms part of a whole. When, as we have seen here, the community or nation itself is under attack – is *contestée*, as Glissant would put it – we may forgive the probable appeal of such rhetoric. A further motivation may simply be the difficulty of expressing inarticulable horrors: when a human subject cannot articulate his pain, mapping this pain on to the environment allows it to 'speak' for him – in this way, we can express hysteria and political resignation (as in *QSM*), or political corruption (as in *Blanc*) without the need of a speaking subject.

I (iv) Living Cities

For Glissant, given the Martinican context of *Le Discours antillais*, the word *paysage* typically refers to landscape, rather than cityscape, as critics such as Chevrier note.[37] I

[37] Jacques Chevrier ed., *Poétiques d'Edouard Glissant : Actes du colloque international, Paris-Sorbonne, 11-13 mars 1998* (Paris: Presses de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999), p. 8.

would like to consider here, though, the role of the city, as texts such as *Nedjma*, *QSM*, *L'Amour*, or even *Season* – which are often centred in an urban setting – all present a high degree of association, or even conflation, of the human with the cityscape. *Nedjma* presents an obsession with *villes-mères*, while *QSM* sees human grief form a physical part of the cityscape, and cities that, in contrast to their petrified inhabitants, are comprehensively human. *Season*, like *Nedjma*, sees the female object of desire strongly conflated with the city, and *L'Amour* offers a negative counterpoint to the 'marriage' we saw earlier: here, Badra's marriage is inseparable from the acquisition of land, just as she is from the city itself.

One purpose for such a conflation in *QSM* appears to be to tie together an individual's experience of grief with that of the community – a community in turn tied to the city, which is seen as feeding on grief and death. The grief of one woman at the disappearance of her husband eventually reduces her to a stream of blood:

> La femme d'Ismaël s'assit au milieu de la cour et [. . .] hurla telle une louve, s'arracha les cheveux, se griffa profondément. Elle ne fut plus, après un instant, qu'un flot de sang qui franchit la maison, [. . .] passa sous la porte cadenassée et, selon toute probabilité, alla courir dès cette minute à travers les rues sur les traces d'Ismaël. Depuis, ce ruisseau continue toujours à couler ; chaque fois que l'on rentre ou sort, on doit l'enjamber. (173)

If the blood now circulating metonymically stands for this woman's grief, and its inescapability (it must be stepped over), it also allows the community to share it with her, as the current effectively becomes a site of pilgrimage: 'il vient même des gens, des femmes surtout et des enfants, pour y tremper les doigts, et marquer leur front de ce sang' (173). This collectivity of grief expands as the stream of blood ties together each inhabitant in a circulatory network:

> Attirés des quartiers les plus éloignés, ils forment un cortège ininterrompu. À croire que l'image d'Ismaël [. . .] hante non seulement bel et bien la ville, puisque la coulée vermeille ne cesse de parcourir les rues, de se ramifier à l'infini pour se rejoindre après les détours et remonter à la source, mais encore possède en elle une inépuisable [. . .] force qui la [. . .] transportera partout. Qui a dit ou pensé, comme moi, qu'Ismaël était un homme perdu [. . .] ne le dira plus. Voici notre ville désormais enserrée dans ce réseau de sang, réseau si rigoureux qu'il ne laisse échapper aucun d'entre nous. (173-4)

What we see here is not only how grief and violence tie together the city's inhabitants, but that the image thus created – of a city whose streets circulate with victims' blood – postulates an organism whose very lifeblood is dependent on civilian deaths. The City of *QSM*, of course, frequently abducts its inhabitants (e.g. 116); though the people and city are 'organically' linked here, this does not imply a benevolent symbiosis. Rather, they are unwillingly part of a greater organism – colonialism is presented, by extension, as a parasite or infection, affecting the ordinary functioning of the city; transformed (or

possessed) by its influence, the city begins to attack its own inhabitants (we might think of how, once colonised, the native police force is used to control the inhabitants). By a literal inversion of the City, the Underground City (which forms the 'fondements vivants et actifs' (216) of the city above, and which 'reproduit [. . .] la configuration de la ville' (215)), the narrator does, however, postulate a properly symbiotic relationship. The passages of the underground city describe an endless neural network ('une infinité de conduits, d'antennes' (214)); its defences are conveniently 'à l'abri de toute attaque, [. . .] de toute infiltration' (214-215). It appears to be a perfect safe haven – though it is worth noting that, given the fixed narrative focalisation, we can never in fact verify that the Underground City (or indeed the monsters he sees in the city above) exists independently of the narrator's mind, or if he has simply withdrawn further into his own in response to such trauma. In either case, the Underground City, freed from the influence of the constructions and monsters above (or, if you will, from colonialism), is a living, protective (even if idealised) cityscape – one where the people enjoy an unalienated relationship with the land.

We find a related form of this inseparability in the frequent conflation of woman and city in *Nedjma*, *L'Amour* and *Season*. A consistent trope in each is the attribution of city-like qualities to women. We see Nedjma – elsewhere abundantly equated with nature and the natural landscape – shown with skin that shines like metal (73), or a throat that has 'des blancheurs de fonderie' (73); or we see her, pursued by many suitors, figured by one as an entire, hunted city ('une cité traquée' (173)). *Season* shows an endless oscillation between woman and city; Mustafa's fetishisation of land and territorial possession makes

him desire Mrs Robinson for her 'bronze complexion that harmonised with Cairo' (*Season* 26), and later Isabella for her 'bronzed legs' (36) – indeed, Isabella is 'a glittering figure of bronze under the July sun, a city of secrets and rapture' (37). London is 'another mountain, larger than Cairo' (26), Cairo 'that large mountain [. . .], was a European woman just like Mrs Robinson' (25), while Jean Morris is, appropriately, a 'mountain of ice' (156). In *L'Amour*, the beauty of Badra (whose name means 'lune pleine' (98)), a young bride from Mazuna, is inseparable from the people's pride in their city:

> on parlait maintenant de la beauté de Badra – ses yeux verts, son teint de lait, sa gorge opulente, sa taille élancée de jeune palmier, ses cheveux de jais [. . .] – comme une preuve de la splendeur passée (98)

It is worth pausing here to consider the poetical interplay of this *femme-ville* trope in *L'Amour*: through a number of parallels, the two episodes – the 'courting' of Algiers (and its people); the handover of Badra (and her city) – are clearly tied together. The Dey Hussein likens the handover of Algiers to giving away his wife; Badra's father also promises never to marry off his daughter to the son of the Aga of Oursenis: '"je ne lui donnerai jamais ma fille"' (101). Algiers, before the handover to France, 's'apprête à vivre sa dernière nuit de cité libre' (53); Badra is thus twinned with not one, but two, cities: 'Mazouna vivait sa dernière nuit de cité libre et la vierge [. . .] laissa enfin couler ses larmes' (103). When Badra is finally handed over, the Aga considers himself 'doublement riche' (103): presented with a copper cup to celebrate the marriage, he notes

that he will inherit the spoils of a recent battle as well as the girl – a combination underlined when Badra appears, bedecked with the combined wealth of the city: 'Elle semblait porter à elle seule tous les bijoux de la ville' (114).

Most interestingly, though, is the use of the *femme-patrie*, or *femme-ville* trope to convey a surprising power inversion – surprising in that both feature a feminine (or feminised) subject asserting control over the male military presence: the beauty of Algiers, as we have seen, freezes the ships in their advance; Badra's brilliance silences the warriors who interrupt her wedding and seize her city: the victorious Bou Maza 'admirait Badra sans s'avouer que cette proie l'éblouissait' (108). In each case a female figure momentarily holds the male, aggressive one; and yet in each, we know in advance which side will ultimately be handed over. Perhaps this is one reason why the *femme-ville* trope is employed: out of a certain authorial pride or admiration for these locations, as what we see is the 'best' daughter being conferred (by force) to an outsider. Just as Badra is beyond compare in Mazuna, and is to be given to another town, Algiers is perhaps, by implication, the foremost of Algeria's cities (too worthy, perhaps, to be 'given' to France). Badra is famed for her beauty, but she represents a dying age: her beauty attests to her city's *past* splendour (98).

In *Nedjma*, too, we can observe a similar effect, as the *villes-mères* (165) that obsess Rachid – Constantine and Bône – are repeatedly evoked by their former names, Cirta and Hippone. Indeed, Jacqueline Arnaud notes a strikingly similar mixture of power and defeat in the mythology surrounding these *villes vaincues*:

> Kateb établit un parallèle entre le pays et Nedjma, '(son) sang et (son) pays' (175), et de même entre les villes vaincues et les femmes conquises. Il s'agit des cités numides chargées d'histoire, Cirta et Hippone, sœurs de la prestigieuse Carthage, leur alliée, toutes trois mythes de puissance et de défaite.[38]

These two aspects, the *ville-mère* and the *ville-femme*, appear to mirror the relationship implied by *mere* and *femme*: as a *ville-mère*, Constantine (or Cirta) embodies its long history; as a *ville-femme*, it serves, much like in *Season*, as an object of desire. For example, the fragment that considers Rachid's *villes-mères* leads into a consideration of Constantine's ruins steeped in blood (165), whereas the passage in which Bône is pictured seducing Rachid (166) segues into a discussion of Nedjma (in a sense, Rachid displaces his desire onto Constantine and Bône, the two cities he knows Nedjma travels endlessly between). Once again, however, though these cities are presented as alluringly feminine, they nonetheless resist taking a suitor: Algeria is, much like Nedjma and her mother, 'un pays [. . .] de femmes fatales' (61), and Africa itself 'mangeur d'empires' (65). This is the paradox of the employment of the *femme-ville* trope in *Nedjma*: it presents a land that, however many times it is conquered, remains unconquerable – the Turks, Romans, Arabs, and French all dispute its favours, but none has been able to exert total control over the land. Hence the depiction of a nation endlessly in gestation, and one which asserts its independence by having no dominant bloodline or confirmed lineage: 'comme les Turcs, les Romains et les Arabes, les Français ne pouvaient que

[38] Jacqueline Arnaud, 'Les villes mythiques et le mythe de Nedjma dans le roman de Kateb Yacine', *Journée Kateb Yacine* (Manouba: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de la Manouba, 1990), p. 9.

s'enraciner, otages de la patrie en gestation dont ils se disputaient les faveurs' (96). This rooting image is, indeed, a precise inversion of *QSM*'s parasitic trope: in *Nedjma*, it is the land that takes control of the invader.

II Landscape as memory

I have until now largely discussed the *femme-patrie* trope in the context of the human *body* – either as a complete body, or as one of its systems – but it may be useful to consider the question of memory separately, in line with the conventional mind/body dichotomy. The mind, and memory, though they have a biological foundation, are more easily aligned with other mental phenomena, such as consciousness, than with pulmonary or circulatory processes. Landscape, however, is a fundamentally physical concept (unless we consider landscapes of the mind, such as they may be in *QSM*). The conflation of landscape and mind, then, suggests an unlikely combination of the physical (and unthinking) with the seemingly immaterial. If we study the trope of landscape *as* memory in works such as those of Kateb or Djebar, however, this is precisely what we find: each presents a landscape physically imprinted with individual and collective memories.

L'Amour, for example, depicts the caves where Pélissier asphyxiated entire tribes. In order to prevent a detailed historical record of subsequent mass murders (Pélissier's having been recounted), Saint-Arnaud orders that only a simple record should be kept, 'sans poésie terrible, ni images' (90). And to the extent that there are no such detailed

records, he succeeded. Djebar, however, points to the 'frozen' people or scratch marks left in the caves as an alternative form of 'written' record: in this case, an account of the deaths is literally inscribed in the land, leaving the 'passion calcinée des ancêtres' (93). The fact that no one – if Saint-Arnaud had his wish – would have recounted the deaths does not deny their being *there*: Djebar depicts an inverted landscape in which the dead await contact with each other:

> Le paysage tout entier, les montagnes du Dahra, les falaises crayeuses [. . .] s'inversent pour se recomposer dans les antres funèbres. Les victimes pétrifiées deviennent à leur tour montagnes et vallées. Les femmes couchées au milieu des bêtes, dans des étreintes lyriques, révèlent leur aspiration à être les sœurs-épouses de leurs hommes qui ne se rendent pas. (93)

These caves are thus presented as a physical storehouse of memory: they retain the traces of the lost.

Nedjma frequently evokes the structures (or ruins) that lie beneath those of the present day in Algeria. The violence of the invasion is remembered not only symbolically, such as in place names (Algiers' *place de la Brèche* (146), for example), but also physically: Rachid's house lies by a wild garden that 'submergeait les décombres d'un quatrième immeuble rasé par l'artillerie de Damrémont' (145); nearby, the present-day prison was

built over an abandoned powder magazine (146) – it is, as Seth Graebner notes, 'an historical powder house':[39]

> ce fut alors la conquête, maison par maison, par le sommet du Koudia (aujourd'hui la prison civile [. . .]) qu'occupait la batterie de siège, [. . .] puis, par la place de la Brèche à partir de laquelle allait être bâtie la ville moderne, enfin par la porte du marché, l'entrée de Lamoricière en personne [. . .]… L'heure à laquelle se montra le chef des Français, dans les décombres qu'un siècle n'a pas suffi à déblayer (*Nedjma* 145-6)

The *Koudia*, over which a prison is built, was once a site of anti-French resistance: the transfer of authority is impressed in the town's new makeup – we see here, then, a similar engraving of memory in the cityscape. It is probably not by accident that this passage is followed by a reference to popular memory:

> Non loin de là était né Si Mokhtar [. . .], boxé par le préfet après les manifestations du 8 mai, et qui défila seul à travers la ville, devant les policiers médusés, avec un bâillon portant deux vers de son invention que les passants en masse *gravèrent* dans leur mémoire :
>
> Vive la France
>
> Les Arabes silence ! (147; my emphasis)

[39] Seth Graebner, 'Kateb Yacine and the Ruins of the Present', *Substance* 36.1 (2007), 129-163 (p. 152).

The submerged, or supplanted, architecture in *Nedjma* functions as a physical counterpart to the memories of anticolonial resistance engraved in the populace's mind. Indeed, if we turn briefly to Djebar's *Vaste est la prison*, we find a comparable overlaying of archaeological record – ruins of Roman times, and ancestral remains of Berber peoples. The semi-autobiographical narrator, Isma (a filmmaker, as Djebar was) criticises herself for being interested in filming the Roman aqueduct, but being unaware of the remains of her ancestor buried beneath her feet: 'J'étais donc là ce matin, sur la grue, dans les airs, au-dessus exactement du corps de l'ancêtre et je n'étais que de l'horizon, que de l'aqueduc romain'.[40] Though the remains of several civilisations are in the same land, one stratum is obfuscated, indeed, negated. Hence Isma's criticism of historians' over-reliance on the written record, rather than that left by the land, 'puisque les nouveaux "docteurs " vont aux archives' (322). Djebar favours the stony remains of archaeological record – even if undiscovered – over the setting in stone of historical record: as Matterer notes of the invasion of Algiers, '"Le public amateur en aura des lithographies"' (*L'Amour* 27).

This association of ancestral memory and the land is a response to several requirements: the desire to assert the history (or memory) of a civilisation with little or no written records of its history; or in other cases, an attempt to signal the impossibility of absolutely effacing a people: the very permanence of the landscape seems to carry with it a certain sense of (in this case, counterhegemonic) authority – as Glissant contends, the landscape is able to 'speak' for the menaced population, even if it is here an historical

[40] Assia Djebar, *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p.322. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text, as *Vaste*.

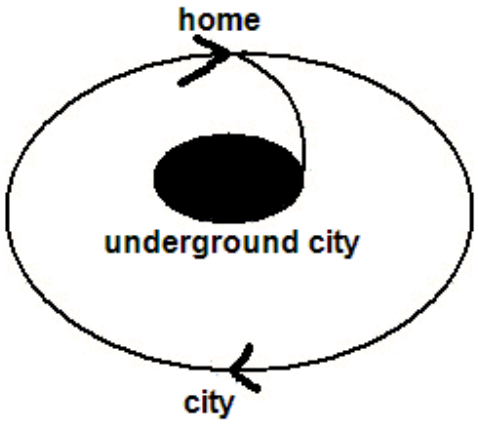
one, and the menace one of effacement. And though these evocations of landscape as memory can offer no *verbal* record, each presents the landscape as a silent witness of past aggressions, and so offers a form of permanence in the face of an aggressor and historical oblivion.

III Itineraries

Having considered the function of landscape and its interrelation with the people and with the narrator's psyche, I wish to turn briefly here to one final aspect, which is the question of movement through the landscape, or itineraries. Though each of the works I have considered offers a narrative in varying degrees of fragmentation, we can nonetheless consider whether the actual physical *trajectories* followed by its characters could in a sense mirror the themes and questions developed in other aspects of the work. The following can only be a sketching out of certain fundamental trajectories, but even these may exhibit a correspondence with, for example, a cyclical, centrifugal (or centripetal), or polarised narrative structure. My theoretical precursor here is Franco Moretti, whose work *Graphs, Maps, Trees* also charts the physical distribution and movement of characters, in village narratives such as Mary Mitford's *Our Village*.[41]

[41] Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 36ff.

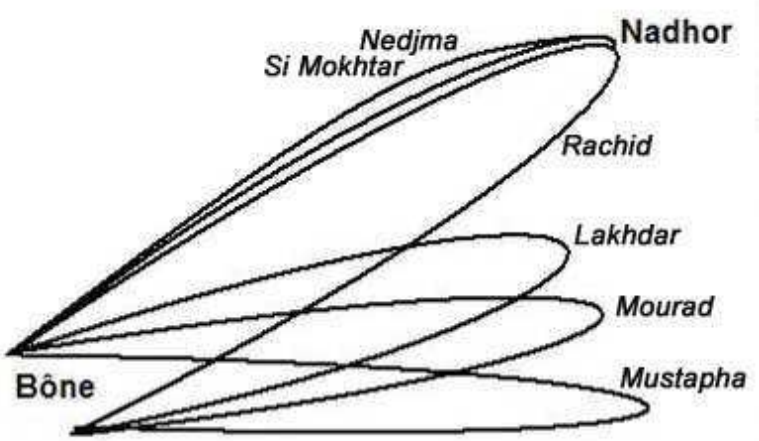
Let us consider *QSM*, for example. If we literally map the course followed by the narrator each day, we see that it circulates between two major zones: the family home, and the centre of the city (El Hadj's shop and so forth). Considering that this does not change except at the novel's close, when the narrator enters the underground city, we can obtain the following basic itinerary:



(fig 1: *QSM*)

This shows, ultimately, a centripetal movement: it first appears circular, but eventually tends to its own centre – the narrator disappears from the map when he moves underground (or, alternatively, loses all bonds with outsiders and retreats inward psychologically). We might also note that this path depicts a closed circle: it features no way out, but only a collapsing in on itself.

Though their trajectories are *recounted* in a fragmented fashion, the routes followed by *Nedjma*'s protagonists clearly demonstrate a series of circular trajectories – though some are unfinished:

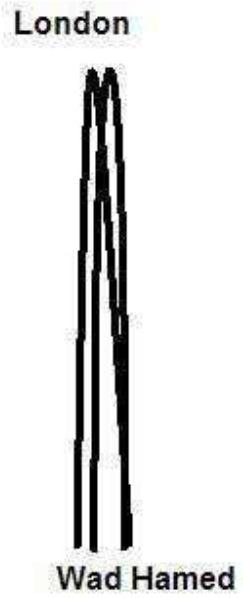


(fig 2: *Nedjma*)

Rachid, Si Mokhtar and Nedjma head to the Nadhor, where Si Mokhtar dies and Nedjma remains. Lakhdar, Mourad and Mustapha all commence their (differing) itineraries in Bône, only to return there, and ultimately disperse. We cannot equate these circular returns in *Nedjma* with any sense of resolution or completion, however. Indeed, critics such as Tremaine have written extensively on the 'absence of itinerary' in *Nedjma*.[42] What we can see, however, is a mirroring of the circular (or spiral) time and structure that Kateb evokes in *Nedjma*; we also see, perhaps, a physical itinerary that recalls the repeated cycles of pursuit (of women) – whether Nedjma's generation, or her mother's – that maintain the country in a state of endless gestation: a cyclicality that Aresu characterises as *Nedjma*'s 'cyclical vision of the birth, destruction, and rebirth of national entity'[43]. The novel's fragmented narrative structure is not reflected in the physical itineraries of its protagonists – rather, as a series of spirals, moving circularly towards an analogous position at a *later* point in time, the itineraries in fact create the three-

[42] Louis Tremaine, 'The Absence of Itinerary in Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*', *Research in African Literatures* 10.1 (1979), 16-39.
[43] Bernard Aresu, *Counterhegemonic Discourse from the Maghreb: The Poetics of Kateb's Fiction* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993), p. xii.

dimensional geometry of the spiral, rather than a circle: a form that is matched by the returns and revisitings of key scenes that we find in the narrative (an idea which I shall return to in *Polyphony*'s mirrored scenes and impoverished returns).



(fig 3: *Season*)

In *Season*, we see both Meheimeed and Mustafa pursuing a South-North journey, and returning to Wad Hamed. For a narrative that, much like Mustafa's 'very poor poem' [. . .] 'relies on antithesis and comparisons' (153), we see two strong identifying features here: the polar opposition of the two centres, and the twin returns (a trajectory also mirrored by the novel's title: a *migration* is a return journey). In Mustafa's case, however, these centres are, in fact, unequally weighted towards London, his return less significant than the journey out – this dominant direction is clearly visible if, returning to landscape metaphor, we consider again his conflation with the (north-flowing) Nile, which we are told 'flows northward, pays heed to nothing [. . .] in its irrevocable journey towards the sea in the north' (69). Mustafa, furthermore, considers that he ought to have

committed suicide in London, ending his trajectory at its peak; his weak will accounts for his return, and in fact displaces the symmetry implied by this apparently symmetrical trajectory, just as Meheimeed will also, at the last, break free from his and Mustafa's twinned path.

L'Amour would present the greatest difficulties in physical mapping: its floating narrator, who avowedly has 'la mémoire nomade' (255), focuses on a series of discrete centres through time. There is movement within each, but there is no central character travelling between them; there is no odyssey. Instead, we only have fragmented glimpses of different lives and memories. This, however, appears to reflect two concerns of Djebar's: the focus on the local, on those women who do not *have* freedom of movement; and secondly, the fragmentary nature of memory and (her task of) its re(-)membering.

Conclusion

Glissant proposed that a heightened importance of the landscape would emerge in those communities whose land was menaced, and who were themselves in uneasy relation to it. To this he added his assertion that the individual, community and land are each 'indissociables dans l'épisode constitutif de leur histoire' (199), and that this fusion of roles would also be reflected in an uncertain divide between man and landscape in literary works. What we have seen in the works of Kateb, Dib, Djebar and Salih appears to enter into relation with Glissant's thought, responding to *analogous* socio-cultural

pressures: though the history and social contexts differ, we see a search for an aesthetic form that can, for example, communicate anger at, or alienation from, one's own country – we see just such a question when Djebar's narrator in *Vaste* queries how to figure modern Algeria's transformation from a woman to, in her view, a ghoul ('ne l'appelez plus femme, peut-être goule'(345)):

> comment – en quelle langue, selon quelle forme esthétique de la dénonciation et de la colère – rendre compte de telles métamorphoses ? (150)

In other words, their poetics figures not simply the alienating role of colonialism, but the author-narrator's sense of distance from her own community; there is, in Djebar's case, a tension between her individual position and that of the community, even though they are, as Glissant notes, bound together.

It is perhaps the very malleability of the human form – its ability to age, grow, or indeed grow corrupt – that renders the *femme-patrie* trope useful to authors expressing a changing or complicated relationship with their land: the uncertain parentage and offspring of Kateb's Algeria, or the evolution of Djebar's relationship with her homeland, for example. (Mustafa's mother, too, is difficult to recognise, her face shifting 'like the surface of the sea' (*Season* 19)). And though each of these authors consistently chooses to present a *femme*-, and not an *homme-patrie* – perhaps given the central themes of desire and possession – this is not done unthinkingly: though a trope with longstanding literary precedent, we see it parodically reformed in *Season*, or, at points, self-

consciously parodied in *L'Amour*. Indeed, Djebar's narrator in *Blanc* at times questions her own poetics: 'l'Algérie en homme, en homme de paix, dans une dignité rétablie est-ce pensable ? Pourquoi pas, pourquoi toujours "ma mère," ma sœur, ma maîtresse, ma concubine, mon esclave Algérie ? Pourquoi au féminin ? Non.' (120-21) In one sense, however, the critical function of the *femme-patrie* trope is very traditional: we could argue that there has always been, in the pathetic fallacy and the animate landscape, a potential, verging on a tendency, for political critique. The pastoral genre, one of the oldest forms of nature writing, and one typified by the adoption of the pathetic fallacy,[44] was criticised for this very reason. George Puttenham, writing in 1589, noted that the pastoral (of which the eclogue and bucolic are part) used the pleasant natural surroundings, or *locus amoenus*, as a veil for otherwise dangerous critique:

> the Poet devised the *Eglogue* [. . .] not of purpose to counterfait or represent the rusticall manner of loves and communication, but under the vaile of homely persons and in rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters, and such as perchance had not bene safe to have beene disclosed in any other sort[45]

Furthermore, the idea of a matrix of history, society and landscape that Glissant speaks of is convincingly echoed in the evocation (or uncovering) of ruins and remains: in response to an external aggression, the physical landscape serves an important poetical function, in the imprinting of collective memory in the land. We have seen how the

[44] See Brian Loughrey, *The Pastoral Mode* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 8.
[45] George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie Contriued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of proportion, the third of ornament* (London: Richard Field, 1589), Book 1, Chapter 8, pp. 30-31. EEBO link: <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:11025:18>

physicality of the healing metaphor, too, is as often related to mental restoration as to physical. When Djebar's narrator refers to memories 'tying' together the members of a now dispersed tribe (*L'Amour* 186), or Dib to a city-encompassing network of blood, the *physicality* of the metaphor is being drawn upon in order to render solid, to concretise, the relations between individuals. For Dib's narrator, this is a matter of no small import: the presence of a verifiable physical environment through physical contact is, for his narrator, the litmus test of the real versus the non-real, and the frontier between the two realms: 'À chaque objet, je prenais soin jusqu'ici d'assigner un rôle évident, défini : au fond du cendrier que voici, par exemple, je tenais à jeter ne fût-ce qu'une pincée de cendre de cigarette [. . .] pour me prouver que c'était bien un *cendrier*, et rien d'autre' (104-5).

One possible criticism of this apparent confluence with the natural realm, and of evoking the reassuring organicity of the human body, is that it may simply bring these works back into a Romantic fusion of man and environment. To answer this, we might first gesture to the *community* of experience asserted in these works, and, secondly, to the crucial function that the organic serves: the corporeal metaphor presents a bulwark against the dangers of dehumanisation, depersonalisation and objectification. War deals in numbers and formations; Montagnac admires the very geometry of the invading troops, 'Ces nuées de cavaliers légers comme des oiseaux, se croisent, voltigent sur les points, ces hourras, ces coups de fusil dominés, de temps à autre, par la voix majestueuse du canon, tout cela présentait un panorama délicieux' (*L'Amour* 67). The troops, divorced from their individuality and humanity, becoming points in a pattern. We might compare

this to the dangers of a fascist aesthetics, which beautifies war while depersonalising and annihilating man, as for example in Marinetti's manifesto on the Ethiopian War:

> War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony. [. . .] War is beautiful because it creates [. . .] the geometrical formation flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages[46]

In valorising the physical landscape, and evoking the human imprint it carries, we have one method, endlessly reinterpretable, by which to respond collectively to the threats of historical and cultural effacement. The individual, the community, make an appeal to the landscape as the *embodiment* of their histories; each, in reciprocal relation, offers to give expression to the other. It is this loss of the individual, and of the human, that *QSM*'s narrator fears when warns that 'Le moment viendra où mes forces m'abandonneront, où je me mettrai à hurler comme une bête' (187). As I have argued, there is an implicit nationalism in the poetic depiction of a people or country as an organic unit (such as the *femme-patrie*), and in the figure of the animate landscape. This should not be criticised as a throwback to nationalist rhetoric – to the 'oneness' of a people, such as the 'Français de souche': a community does not focus on its internal differences when faced with an external threat, but does the opposite, and to express this, the pathetic fallacy is apposite. This fact is, I believe, foundational to Glissant's poetics of landscape. It is why Dib's terrified crowds form an homogenous mass; it is why the multifaceted city of Algiers

[46] Qtd in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 235.

becomes a ravished bride in *L'Amour*; it is why *Nedjma*'s inchoate and unborn state translates into a Rhummel attempting (unsuccessful) blood transfusions. These images connect citizens, whole cities or nations through a corporeal metaphor selected in response to a threat to their safety, independence, or even existence. In this, Glissant's poetics of landscape leaves a deep imprint on the poetics of Djebar, Dib, Kateb and Salih.

Le silence de l'écriture: [1] silence and screams in Djebar, Salih and Dib

L'étoile, – et rien ne crie ; la pierre se déchire, légère, et rien ne crie ;

ces mains, ces yeux, ces lèvres, ni l'autre ville ne crient.

(*Qui se souvient de la mer*)[2]

Le passé reconnu

(les manques dépassés)

(*Le Discours antillais*)[3]

'Longtemps, dans la nuit de l'esclavage, la parole fut interdite, le chant interdit, mais aussi l'apprentissage de la lecture puni de mort'.[4] There have always been times when the desire to express oneself has met with fierce opposition from without; there has never been a time when there were not also barriers to expression within us. For Glissant, the period of slavery is one particularly characteristic of the former: the master-slave relationship enforced, and maintained, silence and obedience. What interests Glissant, I believe, is what happens when the injunction against speaking runs up against the need to communicate, and this is where he turns to, and theorises, the role of the scream: what prompts it, and what purpose it serves. These conjectures interest me as, though the system of slavery is *archetypical* for such control – indeed, for Glissant, the universe of

[1] 'Le silence de l'écriture' is the title of the opening chapter of Djebar's *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995).
[2] Mohammed Dib, *Qui se souvient de la mer* (Paris: Minos, la Différence, 2007), p. 55. Subsequent references will be to *QSM*.
[3] Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 436.
[4] Ibid., p. 462.

slavery is 'implacable' and 'muet'[5] – it is by no means the only environment that inhibits our freedom of movement or expression: we might turn to life under colonialism in Dib or Kateb, or the muted existence of the women Djebar reveals 'buried' in the harem. For now, let us turn to Glissant's treatment of these two opposing, yet linked extremes.

Since they occupy opposing ends of the vocal sound spectrum, we can think of silence and screams as antithetically opposed; on the other hand, they share the feature of being non-verbal acts that can, nevertheless, serve to communicate, or may serve the express purpose of non-communication (i.e. refusing to speak). Unusually, however, Glissant reinterprets the scream as a form of concentrated *meaning* – much like using a Creole linguistic code to confuse a slavemaster, the scream can be used to 'camouflage' a word:

> Puisqu'il est interdit de parler, on camouflera la parole sous la provocation paroxystique du cri.[6]

Not only the *act* of screaming is seen as communicative, the scream is seen as an act of discourse in itself: 'Le vacarme est discours. Il faut comprendre cela'.[7] This claim may not be as outlandish as it seems: Glissant argues that a form of verbal delirium can be a quite reasonable response to attempts to inhibit verbal expression – babbling, for example, could function as linguistic camouflage (just as pre-systematised Creole acted as a system of 'ce signifié-insignifié [. . .] la phrase en rafale'),[8] or the intensity of a scream could

[5] Ibid., p. 238.
[6] Ibid., p. 239.
[7] Ibid., p. 238.
[8] Ibid., p. 239.

reveal shades of meaning: 'Il semble qu'intention et tonalité se soient conjuguées pour l'homme déraciné, dans l'implacable univers muet du servage. C'est le volume du son qui signifie : la hauteur du son porte le signifié'.[9] On this point, we might briefly turn to the most famous depiction of a scream, Munch's *Skrik*, given its interplay of mental anxiety, alienation, and the explosive scream; Munch himself noted that his painting was composed at 'the time when the terror of insanity reared up its twisted head [. . .]. I was being stretched to the limit – nature was screaming in my blood – I was at breaking point…'[10] Here too, as Sue Prideaux notes, there may be a form of creative potential in the painting's alienated scream: though sometimes seen as depicting 'the dilemma of modern man',[11] the scream itself may offer a form of *productive* chaos: '[a]nother interpretation is that *The Scream* is the fundamental starting point for the creative artist. It is the panic-chaos that is the source and necessity of all creative inspiration'.[12] Glissant is not alone, then, in noting the creative-productive potential of the scream.

On the most general level, Glissant's idea of a *poétique forcée*[13] (a strategy that I shall analyse in my *Opacity* chapter when considered specifically from a language perspective) is simply when the ability to communicate becomes impossible owing to a barrier to expression; this is not the same as any mere questioning of self expression, however complex or difficult.[14] Glissant considers the world of slavery to be one that enforces silence, rendering self-expression impossible: 'le corps aliéné de l'esclave, au temps du

[9] Ibid., p. 238.
[10] Qtd. in Sue Prideaux, *Edward Munch: behind the Scream* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 152.
[11] Ibid., p. 151.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Glissant, p. 236.
[14] Ibid.

système servile, est en effet privé, comme pour l'évider entièrement, de la parole. S'exprimer est non seulement interdit, mais comme impossible à envisager. [. . .] Dans un tel contexte, l'expression est précaution, réticence, chuchotement, trames brin à brin dans la nuit nouées'.[15] By contrast, the transition to freedom (and uninhibited orality) sees an eruption of free(d) expression, with the scream marking the turning point: 'Quand le corps se libère (quand vient le jour) il accompagne le cri, qui est explosion.'[16] Glissant asserts that this earlier privation of expression has marked Caribbean cultural production; that it has resulted in forms that place an emphasis on orality and lived rhythms;[17] and – which I shall consider in particular now – that this takes the form of an '*éclat du cri originel*' and a landscape '[qui] n'est pas saturé d'une Histoire mais bouillant de tant d'histoires convergentes, éparpillées à l'entour, pressées de se joindre sans s'annihiler ni se réduire'.[18] What I wish to investigate is whether the instances of screams and silence in Djebar, Dib, Kateb and others, though produced in differing contexts of trauma and oppression (war, rigid patriarchy and colonial rule, for example), enact a similar explosion of histories, and if so why. Glissant, we should note, does not posit either silence, or the scream that inaugurates freedom, as the end point of a process, but rather as steps towards a future 'ethnopoétique'[19] (a term that, despite its curious name, does not refer to ethnicity) – the ultimate liberation of the scream into words: 'il s'agira [. . .] de développer un cri (que nous avons poussé) en parole qui le continue'.[20] As we shall see, the scream trope can indeed signal a cathartic transition into (greater)

[15] Ibid., p. 238.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., p. 264.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., p. 245.
[20] Ibid.

freedom, but in certain contexts it also functions as a coping strategy in an inescapable situation. Or indeed, the former situation may revert into the latter. Silence will be seen to function, at times, as a politically progressive aesthetic strategy, and at others, as a means of representing (or approaching) horror and continued subjugation.

When we consider the term 'silence,' and likewise that of 'screams,' we necessarily invoke a very broad range of significations and interpretations, even in the literary field. In addition to the points in Glissant that I have sketched out above, I shall define my terms a little more precisely here. The basic categorical division in the literary study of silence introduced by Pierre Alexandre Hecker in *Silence in Shakespeare*[21] might serve as a good starting point, though I shall modify it a little. Hecker identifies three literary paradigms for the study of silence:

i) literal silence (actually occurring silences: designated pauses in speech, ellipses, gaps in the text)

ii) 'thematic' silence ('the *idea* of silence not necessarily accompanied by a literal pause'; for example, 'The question of the symbolic nature of women's silence, the paradoxical nature of the role of silence in an aural (and oral) medium, [. . .] and the relationship between silence and death')[22]

iii) a combination of i) and ii) ('silences that marry form and content')[23]

[21] Pierre Alexandre Hecker, *Silence in Shakespeare* (unpublished M.Phil dissertation, University of Oxford, 1994).
[22] Ibid., p.3.
[23] Ibid.

In fact, though not in his tripartite division, Hecker effectively postulates a fourth type:

iv) subjects not broached – or, avoiding the subject

Hecker chooses not to focus on this, given that his interest is in what Shakespeare did write about, rather than what he didn't;[24] and though I recognise the danger of attributing authorial motives to the non-inclusion of certain issues or events, we might in certain cases wish to consider this anyway: in *Nedjma*, for example, where the Sétif massacre clearly *is* central to the story, but is not given extended treatment, or in *Qui se souvient de la mer*, where, as Tremaine notes, 'the words "Algeria" and "revolution" are conspicuously absent from the text, as is, in fact, any specific historical reference to colonialism or the struggle for independence in North Africa'.[25] In these cases, we would not be introducing a critic's personal hobbyhorses, but considering an instance of narrative occlusion. In this chapter, however, these will not be my focus, which I shall restrict to the first three forms. (For screams and cries, we could observe the same basic distinction of literal treatment, thematic, or a combination of the two.) Critics such as Blanchot also point usefully, and importantly, to a related form of narrative silence, when an author refuses to write at all: in the Second World War, for example.[26] Though Blanchot, writing in 1941, advises against this moral self-silencing, critics such as George Steiner have presented a strong case for authorial silence, as a strategy of protest and non-cooperation, when under a totalitarian rule that would be immune to

[24] Ibid.
[25] Louis Tremaine, 'Psychic Deformity in Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer*', *Research in African Literatures* 19.3 (1988), 283-300 (p. 283).
[26] Maurice Blanchot, 'Le Silence des écrivains', *Journal des Débats* (19 April 1941), p. 3.

denunciation or satire: 'the word should have no natural life, no neutral sanctuary, in the places and season of bestiality. Silence *is* an alternative'.[27] Lastly, one more category may prove useful:

v) structural silences (or *paralipse*)

For this, I turn to Gérard Genette, and his study *Figures III.*[28] The technique of *paralipse* is the occlusion, or omission, of a certain contemporaneous fact by the narrator, such that an event is narrated without mention of a particular fact, person, or suchlike, being present. This may take the form of a momentary omission, or a continued denial of revelation (such as the prolonged *cachotterie* of Stendhal's narrator in *Armance* with respect to his impotence).[29] It is not the same as a temporal ellipse, as the event is not jumped 'over'; the narrator 'passe *à côté* d'une donnée'.[30] This kind of silence may arise when, for example, Mustafa, in *Season of Migration to the North*,[31] repeatedly censors his own memories of a murder, or when Meheimeed occludes his feelings of love from his own narrative. I shall consider this briefly to show how silence can work on a narrative structural level, but will return to consider it more fully when I consider questions of *opacity*.

[27] George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1967), p. 14.
[28] Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).
[29] Ibid., p.212.
[30] Ibid., p.93 (emphasis in the original).
[31] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1969). Henceforth referred to as *Season*.

Before turning to specific examples of silence and screams in my corpus, I shall briefly consider the question of the *unsayable*, as this, I believe, will be one of the key issues for both of these tropes, since each is implicity concerned with the question of expression. Wittgenstein's famous closing dictum, *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen*,[32] tends to be quoted in critical works considering silence; it is sometimes interpreted to suggest that there are concepts or considerations that cannot be comprehended within language: this is why Steiner, for example, reflects that 'With Wittgenstein, as with certain poets, we look out of language not into darkness but light'.[33] Silence may be posited as a strategy when linguistic expression cannot make sense of its object, or perhaps when a moral code compels us not to treat it; Djebar, for example, queried at the African Literature Association conference whether authors should hold back from describing horrific events if this causes pain to the victims:

> [Djebar] questions the possibility of writing during exploding violence, in the midst of a state of rage; and she questions the propriety of even speaking in the presence of survivors (if there are any). The speaking, she argues, must in reality be a listening to the silence, the fear and the persistent memory that is left. Words, she says, can only gradually emerge from the horror.[34]

[32] 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractacus Logico-Philosophicus*, ed. by David Francis Pears and Brian McGuinness (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003), p. 89 (proposition 7).
[33] Steiner, p.21.
[34] Richard Priebe, 'Literature, Community, and Violence: Reading African Literature in the West, Post-9/11', *Research in African Literatures*, 36.2 (2005), 46-58 (p. 56).

Representing horrific events not only poses moral, but technical problems for authors. Richard Priebe suggests that representations of violence, for example, tend to have one of three main effects on us: 'the representations may either overwhelm us with a sense of banality, impress us with the demonic, or offer a sense of the sublime'.[35] The risk of desensitisation is ever-present when recounting such events. There is also the question of ethics: how can we write (or read) about horrific events in an ethical manner – and are we compelled to try? I shall be suggesting that the tropes of silence and screams are one way of *negotiating* narration of such events; but they will also be shown, at points, to obscure their object. This, however, could be part of the author's intentions. At this point, let us turn to silences themselves – thematic and literal – before we turn to characters typified by silence, and then, finally, the operation of silence in the workings of the novel.

Silence

i) *Petrified speech*

Any reader of *Qui se souvient de la mer* cannot fail to notice the role played by the city in controlling its progressively numbed and stupefied populace. In *the function of landscape*, I attempted to show that there exists only an uncertain boundary between the fabric of the city itself and its inhabitants. This is no less so when we consider the question of speech (and horror) as the populace's cries are often transmuted into stone. Not only, then, does this convey the oneiric, and nightmarish nature of their experience (a common feature of nightmares being the inability to speak within the dream, and the

[35] Ibid., p. 47.

tendency to awake from it with a cry), the substance involved in the transformation is associated with the very system controlling them (the walls, the City, and so forth). We might recall here Glissant noting that, under slavery, each aspect of the slave becomes the property of his master (even pleasure);[36] in this case, the people are dispossessed of their own words, expression becoming impossible. For example, when confronted by a talking mummy, the fear controlling the narrator first immobilises his voice, and then his whole body:

– Allez, me dit à cet instant une des momies sans ouvrir les yeux. On va nettoyer ce quartier et le barrer. [. . .] je m'éloignai machinalement. [. . .] D'autres bouchaient la rue adjacente, qui m'intimèrent par leur expression l'ordre de m'arrêter. Je fis un pas et au second, me desséchai, changé en pierre. En moi, seul le cœur resté vivant battait. Je voulus parler, mais ma voix s'était fondue aussi dans la pierre.[37]

Discovering himself turned to stone, the narrator is by force turned into a fixed observer (he cannot move); looking around, the sees that he has in fact joined an assembly of statues – a vast field of body parts, united in the impossibility of movement or speech:

> Sur la chaussée s'amoncelaient autant de statues inertes que de bustes mutilés, de bras, de jambes, dans des poses et des mouvements inachevés. Je fus poussé sur le grand tas d'où sortaient quantité de mains ouvertes qui paraissaient crier : 'Aidez-moi !', mais dont aucune ne bougeait. Quelques-unes de ces statues [. . .]

[36] Glissant, p. 238.
[37] Dib, p. 121.

eurent l'air de me reconnaître [. . .]. J'étais incapable de détacher mes regards des leurs, hypnotisé, ou de me délivrer de leur silence.[38]

Given Dib's predilection for works such as *Guernica*, we can see the appeal of such a silent tableau: description of a similar scene with *real* bodies and limbs piled up may be too horrific an endeavour – so instead, we are offered a 'bloodless' massacre. Dib considered Guernica to offer an oneiric testament to an event that '*appartenait déjà* [. . .] *à l'inconscient collectif*';[39] he admired Picasso's ability to register, as it were indirectly, a traumatic event that was shared but that had not been represented and given a recognisable (though altered) form: '*c'étaient des cauchemars qui le hantaient autant que les autres hommes, mais il a été le seul à savoir leur donner un visage que chacun reconnaît désormais*'.[40]

Not only do we find the literal inability to speak figured by metaphors of petrification, but, in addition, moments where political intimidation appears to silence individuals who wish to speak out. Fatoma, for example, is ready to give an account of what happened the previous night, but stumbles back in fear, and turns to stone, before she (or, indeed, anyone else) is able to communicate it:

La femme Fatoma s'avança et dit :

– Voilà.

[38] Ibid., pp. 121-2.
[39] Ibid., p.219 (italics in the original).
[40] Ibid.

> Elle voulut me raconter et fut subitement prise de hoquets. Comme si elle eût entrevu un danger terrible, elle recula de quelques pas en titubant [. . .]. Changée en pierre. Deux larmes s'écoulèrent de ses yeux et restèrent suspendues, gemmes dures et grises, sur ses joues. Il en alla de même pour les autres femmes. Entouré par le silence de cette assemblée de marbres, moi seul vivant.[41]

It would appear from these examples that speech becomes petrified in *QSM* when individuals are faced with a frightening authority figure. Indeed, after a screaming, collective demonstration is put down by the authorities (a section I shall return to, when considering *cries*), the narrator aligns the loss of hope with non-movement, with submission, and a growing fear, not only of speaking out, but of speaking *at all*:

> À quoi cela avancerait de s'insurger ? Après la pauvre chose que fut la protestation contre le monstrueux pouvoir des murs, lesquels ont repris leur expression verrouillée, il est préférable de n'y point songer. [. . .] Apprendre à vivre sans bouger dans un espace restreint, de plus en plus restreint, un trou, à respirer à peine, ne pas soulever la poitrine ni faire le moindre bruit, rêver peut-être, mais non vouloir : l'anéantissement[42]

This is not always the case, however, as one exception should make clear. Typically, pebbles of stone trap the inhabitants' cries within them, but in Lkarmoni's case, his rage is sufficient to break through this, and so liberates his voice from silence:

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[41] Ibid., p. 194
[42] Ibid., p. 155.

> Hier, pour la première fois, on entendit éclater une mitraillade. C'était Lkarmoni qui, ne pouvant plus se retenir, s'en prenait à sa femme. L'accès était si violent que les galets qu'il rejetait explosaient et délivraient le cri qu'ils renfermaient. [. . .] Plus nous craignions qu'il ne s'étranglât avec ce qui passait par sa gorge, et plus sa voix se renforçait, frémissait. En un sens, il nous libérait tous. [. . .] [S]a femme essayait de le calmer[43]

This is precisely the difference in Lkarmoni's case: no one can calm him (at first). The gradual wearing down of hope is what sees the city's inhabitants turned into lichen or stone, or simply stopping protesting (or listening for signs from the underground); it is Lkarmoni's violent *rejection* – witness the comparison with machine gun fire, for example – that (literally) preserves his vitality, and refuses this petrification: he seems to expel the violence of their oppressors by hurling, even vomiting it back. These two stages mirror very closely the trajectory from silence to scream that Glissant postulates; its reasoning, and poetics, follow the same logic here. As ever in *QSM*, though, the individual who acts this way (or at least, of those who do not belong to the underground) is an eccentric, who is ultimately neutralised (Lkarmoni, overcome by the violence he sees, eventually does lose hope;[44] Ismaël disappears),[45] His cry signals individual resistance, and momentary freedom, but each is curtailed. I shall look into the potentially positive effects of the cry shortly, but at this point I would like to pursue this question of

[43] Ibid., pp. 31-32.
[44] Ibid., p. 34.
[45] Ibid., p. 173.

self-silencing: the various points at which narrators make the decision to turn away from words.

Self-silencing; erasure

If Lkarmoni's example shows the will to expression overcoming pressure to remain silent, we can find in Dib, and also in Djebar, what appears to be a form of psychological retreat, or at least the temptation to follow such a course. In *Vaste est la prison*,[46] the narrator often speaks of the difficulty of writing about so many deaths and assassinations in the past century of Algeria's history; she queries whether recounting so much bloodshed might disable her writing project: 'A force d'écrire sur les morts de ma terre en flammes, le siècle dernier, j'ai cru que le sang des hommes d'aujourd'hui (le sang de l'Histoire et l'étouffement des femmes) remontait pour maculer mon écriture, et me condamner au silence'.[47] *Vaste*'s narrator postulates a double temptation when faced with the writing of so much violence: either to lose herself in it – letting blood swallow her up – or, alternatively, to stop up her mouth and absorb it:

> Je ne peux pas.
>
> Je ne veux pas.
>
> Je veux fuir.

[46] Assia Djebar, *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995).
[47] Ibid., p. 337.

> Je veux m'effacer. Effacer mon écriture. Me bander les yeux, me bâillonner la bouche. Ou alors que le sang des autres, des nôtres, m'engloutisse toute nue ! Me dilue. Me fige, statue vermillon, l'une des statues de Césarée pour plus tard, bien plus tard, être fracassée et tomber en ruine…[48]

We shall see later that Djebar frequently figures the cry as blood, or a fluid, running out of the mouth of the person crying (who is often the narrator). What we see here, as often elsewhere, is that in equating recounting with bleeding, or a torrent or some kind, the narrator implicitly postulates the desire to stopper it, as we would (typically) attempt to stop up a wound. This impulse functions subtly in Djebar, as she nevertheless retains the desire to keep faith with the dead and communicate their memory; her cry, (literally) 'expressed' as blood here, is reconfigured into a statue, a monument even, that attests to past horrors despite having no further power of words.[49] The danger of a monument is that it 're-kills' those under it; perhaps this is the risk that causes *Vaste*'s narrator, at points, to consider silence instead of narration. It is not just Djebar's narrators that negotiate this temptation, either; faced with fear of surveillance, and the horror of corpses hanging over the streets, Dib's narrator evokes a similar desire to erase himself (which would, of course, make further testimony impossible). It is worth noting that this desire occurs at one of the few moments mentioning violence directly (in the form of burning, and hanging, civilians):

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[48] Ibid., p. 331.

[49] We might query the provenance of this image of a woman frozen by horror into the form of a statue; it may recall the well-known biblical, and Quranic, tale of Lot's wife (she is never given a name), who turns to a pillar of salt the instant she dares look back on Sodom, despite the commandment not to. Actually, though both bible (Genesis 19.26) and Quran (Al-'Ankabūt 29.33) note that she dies, only in the bible does she look back and turn to salt (in the Quran, the angels pre-agree that she will die in punishment) – curious, perhaps, given Djebar's greater familiarity with the latter.

- Je les ai vus brûler des habitants.
- Tous les jours.
- Tous les jours !
- Il s'agit de représailles. Une nuit…

[. . .] d'autres histoires suivent. Qui s'achèvent toutes [. . .] par le balancement, en haut des échafaudages, de cadavres grimés. [. . .]

Quand je sors à présent, j'emprunte les voies les plus écartées, et marche vite et seul [. . .]. Vu le tour que prennent les événements, la tentation me vient fort par moments de m'enfoncer dans une galerie perdue, hors de tout passage, sans communication avec aucune autre. [. . .] Quelque chose se produit qui dépasse nos forces.[50]

Perhaps the most violent refusal of speech (and one that could as easily be considered later, when I turn to cries) occurs in *Vaste*; to understand its violence, and the significance of its central image – that of the narrator, Isma, cutting out her vocal chords – we need to consider the context of its utterance. At several points, Djebar's narrators express doubt with their narrating project – and often, this takes the form of querying the central images that have been associated with this project. In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, the narrator queries whether the link she has been entertaining with the past can in fact offer freedom to those whose cries she resuscitates. We see, throughout that work, repeated affirmations of what her role is: she listens to whispers that set the record straight

[50] Dib, pp. 99-100.

('*rectifient les chuchotements* [. . .]'),[51] 'resuscitates' or 'resurrects' the dead ('[j]e te ressuscite';[52] 'je sais qu'elle ressuscite. [. . .] Je tente [. . .] de venger son silence d'autrefois';[53] 'écrire m'a ramenée aux cris des femmes sourdement révoltées de mon enfance [. . .]. Ecrire ne tue pas la voix, mais la réveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de sœurs disparues'),[54] and shows solidarity throughout with Algerian women's struggle. And yet, at the end, she queries whether she has really achieved such a link, and whether her *tissage* of voices will have a genuine effect:

> *je m'oublie des heures à percevoir des voix sans visages, des bribes de dialogues* [. . .]. *On me dit exilée. La différence est plus lourde : je suis expulsée de là-bas pour entendre et ramener à mes parentes les traces de la liberté… Je crois faire le lien, je ne fais que patouiller, dans un marécage qui s'éclaire à peine.*[55]

This is perhaps more than the display of self-deprecation of an *apologia*; it appears to question the very enterprise that she has set out on. To what extent does *speaking*, even *speaking out* bring the changes that she hopes to see; where does it take these women? If we compare this with a later work, *Vaste est la prison*, a work in which she describes herself 'sachant qu'il me faut retrouver le chant profond, étranglé dans la gorge des miens',[56] we see an ever-sharpened attack on the value of relating such horrors: even if she serves as a mouthpiece for so much blood, how does she stop its flow, or protect her

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[51] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 200. Henceforth referred to as *L'Amour*.
[52] Ibid., p. 214.
[53] Ibid., p. 219.
[54] Ibid., p. 229.
[55] Ibid., p. 244.
[56] *Vaste est la prison*, p. 201.

friends? It seems to be the frustration at this quandary that leads the narrator to consider severing her own voice box, 'une sorte de muscle inutile':

> Il me faut arracher cette pâte de mon palais, elle m'étouffe ; je tente de vomir [. . .]. [I]l m'a fallu couper au couteau une sorte de muscle inutile qui m'écorche, crachat enserré à mes cordes vocales. [. . .] Je ne ressens pas l'horreur de cet état : j'ai pris la lame [. . .]. Le sang étalé sur mes doigts, ce sang qui ne m'emplit pas la bouche [. . .]. [J]e ne me demande pas si je souffre, si je me blesse, surtout si je vais demeurer sans voix. [57]

This solution, of course, is not what she or Dib's narrator ultimately choose. In fact, she asserts that she *is* the cry, propelled by her ancestors. Faced with expressing 'la débâcle de la fête guerrière d'hier, de l'horreur indicible d'aujourd'hui',[58] she chooses to keep writing (or crying). But the temptation to self-silence is a serious one when faced with the *indicible*. Ultimately, having no other solution, she elects to carry out this duty of testimony, aware, like Dib's narrator, that she may simply be (re)echoing others' cries. Dispiriting as this may sound, this project serves at least to prevent a deeper silencing: it counters, for example, the 'mort blanche' otherwise reserved for victims of state assassination (in *le Blanc de l'Algérie*), or the oblivion of women 'oubliées, parce que sans écriture'.[59]

[57] Ibid., p. 339.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid. (*Vaste est la prison*), p. 338.

These self-silencings provide an analogous aesthetic and ideological response to what Glissant observes about slavery and expression: the slave is, under duress, 'privé de la parole', and expression becomes 'impossible à envisager. [. . .] Dans un tel contexte, l'expression est précaution, réticence, chuchotement'.[60] The difference in Dib and Djebar is that expression is considered at an individual, and removed, level (the narrator-observer, considering self-silencing), while Glissant focuses on the (suffering) community itself. In the above examples, faced with horror and oppression, and the enormity, and responsibility, of recounting it (or even of turning back to look), the narrators all *consider* reticence, or silence – and in turn, find poetical figures for this reticence. Flight – from the object itself, and from the horror of expressing it – is an option: ultimately, they do not choose it, but their poetics communicates the pressure *not* to communicate that we see in Glissant.

Silent characters; structured silences

I have considered the temptation on the part of narrators to discontinue their narrative, or silence their own voice. This is ultimately an impossible endeavour, as doing so absolutely would entail the end of their writing (we might turn to Kateb at this point, considering the silence of his later years,[61] or the long gap between Djebar's *Les alouettes naïves* and *Femmes d'Alger*). What they can do, however, is silence characters within their narrative (or represent how others silence them). The most direct fashion can

[60] Glissant, p. 238.
[61] See Mireille Calle-Gruber, 'Comment en toucher un mot ? La voix féminine de Kateb Yacine ou le pari de la littérature: une lecture de *Nedjma*', in A.Y. Julien, C. Camelin and E.J. Authier eds, *Kateb Yacine et l'étoilement de l'œuvre* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes / La Licorne (2010)), 57-68 (p. 59).

be found in a work such as *Ombre sultane*, which contrasts the lives of two women, one of whom (Hajila), leads a restricted, cloistered existence and struggles with having to wear the veil, while the other (Isma) leads a modern life free of such concerns. Hajila's chapters recount her actions in the second person, as Isma addresses her; Hajila thus never speaks. Not only this, but the interweaving of 'je' and 'tu' chapters (Isma's in the first person perspective) is eventually reduced to a single thread of the former: Hajila largely disappears from view, her silencing imprinted in the text. A more complicated variation on this gradual narrative effacement can be found in *Nedjma*, whose eponymous heroine, sought after by the novel's male protagonists, appears to occupy the centre of the narrative despite being largely silent; or in *QSM*, where the narrator's wife, Nafissa, progressively disappears from the narrative as her involvement with the underground increases. I shall consider the broader metaphorical implications of such silent roles in my next chapter, but for now, I shall return to *QSM* in order to demonstrate how the (literal) silence of a character *other* than the narrator can contribute to an effect of narrative *opacity*: in the case of *QSM*, El Hadj's silence serves to deepen our uncertainty about the narrator's fantastical visions. Given the fixed narrative focalisation, we have no other perspective to confirm or deny his accounts; by 'confirming' them by means of silent witnesses ('Je m'éloigne aussi, emportant la même image qu'elles en moi, – la même lumière hantée d'iriaces'),[62] the narrator only draws attention to the unreliability of his account. Returning to El Hadj's shop after watching the flight of iriaces, the narrator notes a (purported) order that naturally, and conveniently accounts for the fact that no one mentions the stone and moss growing over the populace: 'Ordre: personne ne doit

[62] Dib, p. 128.

s'aviser que les autres portent des têtes de pierre moisie'.[63] All of this is then reported to El Hadj:

> Me trouvant peu après cela dans la boutique d'El Hadj, je fais allusion à toutes ces monstruosités. Comme d'habitude, mon vieil ami garde le silence. Tout en parlant, je pense : 'Cet homme comprend les choses mieux que moi. Nafissa aussi est comme lui.'[64]

Though the narrator interprets this silence as confirmation (indeed, '[s]on silence restitue effectivement aux choses leur vrai visage'),[65] we cannot divine anything from El Hadj's reticence. To compound this, El Hadj's subsequent responses simply echo the narrator's words back at him; in effect, they maintain his silence towards the narrator's accounts:

> – Nous aurons encore à souffrir.
> – J'admets. Nous… aurons encore à souffrir, dit-il, sortant de sa rêverie. [. . .] Il me sourit avec indulgence[66]

This silence, then, functions through restricted focalisation: were we given access to El Hadj's thoughts, we could unravel it; as it stands, the novel maintains a steady silence with respect to the narrator's soundness of mind (the narrator's account *may* be true and complete), and maintains us, too, in a state of ontological uncertainty. By contrast, in

[63] Ibid., p. 129.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

Season, we effectively have a *paralipse* in Mustafa's narrative accounts – one designed to conceal the unspeakable violence of the denouement. At three points prior to the description of Mustafa's murder of his lover Jean Morris, we are presented with the dialogue that takes place during it; it later becomes clear later that Mustafa has simply refused to recount what was happening. The fact of the murder is noted on page 32:

> 'Did you kill Jean Morris?'
>
> 'Yes.'
>
> 'Did you kill her intentionally?'
>
> 'Yes'

The murder is finally described on page 165. Before this, Mustafa offers these strains of dialogue:

> I hesitated that night when Jean sobbed into my ear, 'Come with me. Come with me.' My life achieved completion that night and there was no justification for staying on.[67]

and subsequently:

> On that night when Jean whispered in my ear, 'Come with me. Come with me,' my life had reached completion and there was no justification for staying on.[68]

[67] Salih, p. 68.
[68] Ibid., p. 92.

Only at the close does Mustafa lift his silence: 'I pressed down with the dagger [. . .]. I could feel the hot blood gushing from her chest. I began crushing my chest against her as she called out imploringly: "Come with me. Come with me. Don't let me go alone!"'[69] In effect, the silencing of these events turns the words 'come with me' into a covert signifier for the event itself. Mustafa is not the only narrator to use paralipse: Meheimeed, in love with Mustafa's new wife, Hosna, uninhibitedly narrates his thoughts on all matters except this. In a similar manner to Mustafa's echoing of 'come with me,' Meheimeed's *style indirect libre* permits him to state his friend's question ('"Why don't *you* marry her?"')[70] without answering it. Similarly, when he hears that Hosna, unwilling to be married to Wad Rayyes, promises to murder Rayyes, we see another of Meheimeed's deliberate omissions: 'I thought of several things to say, but presently I heard the muezzin calling [. . .] I stood up, and so did she, and I left without saying anything'.[71] These deliberate suppressions, though small, demonstrate one danger of narrative silences: their very possibility means that we have no ultimately reliable account, and no unblemished 'interiority' of narration. Mustafa, a true mythomaniac, of course rejoices in this: 'It was one of those rare moments of ecstasy for which I would sell my whole life; a moment in which, before your very eyes, lies are turned into truths, history becomes a pimp, and the jester is turned into a sultan'.[72]

[69] Ibid., p. 165.
[70] Ibid., p. 106.
[71] Ibid., p. 96.
[72] Ibid., p. 144.

On the other hand, the silencing of a character can serve a useful purpose precisely in its refusal to provide us with a 'complete' or final understanding of them; this may help avoid, for example, the risk of turning an already 'politicised' character into a mouthpiece for his or her (supposed) cause. Nedjma, given her evocation as the *femme-patrie*, her association with the *villes-mères* of Constantine and Bône or with the 'patrie en gestation'[73] (as I noted in my chapter on *Roots*), is often symbolically identified with Algeria,[74] or the Algerian nationalist cause, but refuses to pronounce on the matter (unlike, for example, Si Mokhtar, who famously proclaims 'Vive la France / Les Arabes, silence !'[75] while being led away by the police after the May 8th demonstrations). Though narrative fragments such as Rachid's speak of a country in gestation, the female character posited as the source of figurative renewal (should she favour one of her suitors) does not speak out on such matters. Jean Déjeux reads in this silence an analogy with colonised Algeria faced with a variety of *prétendants*: 'Nedjma reste silencieuse comme l'Algérie colonisée de cette époque'.[76] We might see in this silence an effort to avoid too close a political association with any particular group or faction. The lack of discourse in this case, then, could be seen as signalling a range of future possibilities; Nedjma's symbolic characterisation may raise the *question* of the future Algerian nation, but her silence prevents us from interpreting this symbol too directly, or of knowing what form it might take – her muteness, in part, permits this future mutability. As Kateb cautioned in a lecture in Algiers in 1967,

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[73] Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1956; repr. 1996), p. 96.
[74] Though, as Louis Tremaine notes, 'A considerable case [. . .] can be built in support of a symbolic interpretation of the figure of Nedjma as representing Algeria', he underlines that this association is neither simple nor certain, and 'subject to certain limitations that cannot be ignored'. See Louis Tremaine, 'The Absence of Itinerary in Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*', *Research in African Literatures* 10.1 (1979), 16-39 (p. 20).
[75] Kateb, p. 147.
[76] Jean Déjeux, *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* (Ottawa: Naaman, 1973), p. 241.

> Il ne faut pas pousser un symbole trop loin. Un symbole est toujours fragile; si on veut le littéraliser, il se détruit. Nedjma, oui, finit par symboliser l'Algérie. Cette fleur aussi peut symboliser l'Algérie si l'on se met à rêver sur le phénomène de la fleur. Il ne faut pas trop creuser un symbole; il ne faut pas vouloir en faire une vérité pure et simple, parce qu'à ce moment-la, il n'est plus symbole…[77]

Glissant offered slavery as an example context in which 'l'expression est précaution, réticence, chuchotement'; in the examples above, too, silence is anything but non-communicative – but we see it takes various forms and suits a variety of contexts. As a poetic device, it implicitly communicates the social and religious structures imprisoning Hajila; *Season*'s narrator employs silence opaquely, concealing the horror of a murder through *paralipse*, while *QSM*'s unreliable narration stems from its fixed focalisation and literal silences; Nedjma's silence creates a form of politically progressive opacity, or 'bienheureuse opacité' (a Glissantian term I shall return to in the next chapter). Each usage centres on the problem of representing, but indirectly, with reserve: here, expression is indeed 'précaution, réticence' – these silences make it possible to negotiate narration. At this point, I shall turn from the variable significations of silence to the trope of the scream – a trope whose own mutability, we shall see, helps to register the complex character of trauma, but also erects certain barriers to interpretation.

[77] Qtd in Marc Gontard, Nedjma *de Kateb Yacine: Essai sur la structure formelle du roman* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), p. 12.

Cries

What Glissant noted in his analysis of the *cri* was that it marked a final, explosive release of tension, and of horror, the moment freedom is acquired. If we study instances of cries and screams in Djebar's work or Dib's, for example, we discover that this device is used in quite a fluid manner, its signification varying – which, as I shall argue, may be perceived as one strength of this trope. We can, however, study the manner of this transformation to understand this mutability; and we might also consider what ties together this network of associations.

In various respects, Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* is structured around the physicality of the voice, and in several senses around screams. Djebar's wordplay of *l'amour, ses cris (s'écrit)*[78] announces, on the one hand, a certain conflict between the oral and written medium – how are we to communicate the physicality of sound and passion on paper? On the other, *L'Amour*'s chapter titles suggest just such an attempt, establishing a counterpoint of *clameur*, *voix, murmures*, *chuchotements*, and *tzarl rit* (ululation) – all of which evoke volume and timbre more than content. (Indeed, Djebar notes[79] that chapters such as *Sistre* attempt to mirror in French the *sound* of Arabic alliterative poetry.) I shall discuss this structural polyphony in greater detail in my final chapter; for now, let us turn to a few of the associative trajectories followed by the cry metaphor in *L'Amour*: in the first of these, the narrator evokes the conflicting emotions experienced on her marriage and the loss of her virginity.

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[78] *L'Amour*, p. 240.
[79] Lise Gauvin, *L'Ecrivain francophone à la croisée des langues: entretiens* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), p. 25.

i) Transubstantiations

L'Amour's wedding scene is permeated by the ambivalent, and highly mutable, cry of the author-narrator. Though not a 'traditional' Algerian Muslim wedding – it takes place in Paris, and is not an arranged marriage – the development of the *cri* trope mirrors the various stages of trepidation and conflict that she experiences. The cry begins as sound: we first see the narrator '[qui] vien[t] précautionneusement au cri de la défloration'.[80] This cry, 'signe ni de douleur, ni d'éblouissement' (122), expresses neither the physical pain nor the pleasure we might first assume it implied; rather, it both resembles, and contrasts with, the cry of freedom that Glissant considers. Here it marks (apparently for any wedding) at once the instant of freedom from paternal rule and the bringing to life of her body, but also a certain anguish at the immediate transferral of authority to her husband:

> Un cri sans la fantasia qui, dans toutes les noces, même en l'absence de chevaux caparaçonnés et de cavaliers rutilants, aurait pu s'envoler. Le cri affiné, allégé en libération hâtive, puis abruptement cassé. Long, infini premier cri du corps vivant. (122)

The nod to caparisoned riders already establishes a cross-chapter connection with the young Badra forced to marry against her will (102). The narrator's cry then oscillates between acceptance and denial, and comes to express pure physical sensation: she now

[80] *L'Amour*, p. 122. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text.

experiences both pain and surprise, as if riding a wave whose extremity (the crest) carries a hidden refusal:

> Le cri, douleur pure, s'est chargé de surprise en son tréfonds. Sa courbe se développe. [. . .] [I]l emmagasine en son nadir les nappes d'un 'non' intérieur. [. . .] Ai-je réussi un jour, dans une houle, à atteindre cette crête ? (123).

Subsequently, this wave of sound, dissipating, is figured as curls of rising smoke ('le cri déroula les volutes du refus et parvint jusqu'aux linteaux du plafond' (124)). For the narrator, the loss of blood, and the pain of the experience, in fact supplant the ordinary signification of the word *love* for all women:

> je dévisage [. . .] les femmes, toutes les femmes. [. . .]
> – Pourquoi ne disent-elles pas, [. . .] pourquoi chacune le cache : l'amour, c'est le cri, la douleur qui persiste et qui s'alimente, tandis que s'entrevoit l'horizon de bonheur. Le sang une fois écoulé, s'installe une pâleur des choses, une glaire, un silence. (124)

Having reflected on this lost blood and the ensuing 'anaemia' of existence, the cry of protest (*la clameur*) is fully physicalised, becoming either the blood or semen held inside her: 'elle gît en victime sur la couche, après le départ du mâle qui fuit l'odeur du sperme et les parfums de l'idole ; et les cuisses refermées enserrent la clameur' (124). We can further note that the narrator is not only compared to a wide-eyed victim and a wounded

gazelle (124), but is also implicitly aligned with the dead, frozen in calcified embraces, in Pélissier's fumigated caves: the blood on the sheet would normally have been paraded by the 'mégère parée du drap maculé' (124) as 'signes de la mort gelée dans l'amour' (124).

We have seen then, on a denotative level, the transformation of a woman's cry into a wave, then smoke, physical sensations (pain and wonder), and finally blood or semen. Its trajectory on the connotative level shifts from the freedom of liberation (in line with Glissant's logic of the initial cry), to its abrupt stifling, to the possibility of refusal, and to an ultimate malaise. We might query why a work that celebrates physicality in writing, language, dance, and that even glimpses fantasy embraces in battle, should present an account of (supposedly) consensual sex in terms of hunted animals, victims of 'viol renouvelé' (124) and a lifeless body ('corps fiché là-bas sur des monceaux de matelas' (124)). The reasons put forth by the text – mourning on the brink of a new life, the physical pain experienced, and the transferral of authority to her husband – do not appear to match the violence of these images. This cry does not communicate enough for us to fully comprehend; rather, it offers only glimpses of an intractable anxiety. We can compare this to the contradictory character of the scream that Glissant notes: it contains concentrated meaning, but this does not mean that the meaning *offers* itself to us easily. In this example, the cry's trajectory begins on a Glissantian path, of liberation from oppression: its poetical modification reflects its movement away from the initial sensation of freedom; Djebar's metaphor effectively traces, through transubstantiation of the scream, the brief moment (or hope) of liberation before handover of control to another party – and its final nadir evokes this disappointment. This conflict explains the

contradictory description of an 'infinite' cry of initial liberation that, scarcely uttered, is in fact swiftly checked ('abruptement cassé').

ii) (Im)possible revolts

If the nuptial scene's cry contains the seeds of an incipient revolt, two other incidents in *L'Amour* stage a revolt far more clearly. The first revolt is the narrator's; the second, that of a group of Algerian women, led by a matriarch. While one of the causes of anxiety in the nuptial incident was the longing of an exile for her native land ('noces parisiennes, envahies de la nostalgie du sol natal' (123)), it is, however, the narrator's very separation from the world of the harem that empowers her scream, and allows her 'revolt' to work. The harem women's revolt, by contrast, is doomed to failure, as we shall see.

The first case is in fact a description of two, related, incidents, in which a scream establishes contact – indeed, fusion – between two individuals; the narrator claims to be identifying a phenomenon here, asserting that which individuals are involved is of little import (recounting these incidents, she frequently refers to herself here simply as 'une femme'):

> Deux étrangers se sont approchés de moi au plus près, jusqu'à me sembler, durant quelques secondes, de mon sang : ce ne fut ni au cours d'un échange d'idées, ni dans un dialogue de respect ou d'amitié. Deux inconnus m'ont frôlée, chaque fois dans l'éclat d'un cri, peu importe que ce fût l'un ou l'autre, ou que ce fût moi qui le poussai (129)

The first incident occurs when the narrator, at seventeen, quarrels with her lover and throws herself in front of a tram.[81] The conductor stops just in time, and cries out his own fear: '– Ma main en tremble encore, regardez ! et il cria, vibra' (130). The narrator can later only recall the tone, the swell (*houle*), and the 'petit Blanc' accent of the stranger's voice, and identifies with it: 'Depuis, j'ai tout oublié de l'inconnu, mais le timbre de sa voix, au creux de cette houle, résonne encore en moi. [. . .] Seul cet accent des quartiers populaires [. . .], ce parler qui avait fait la voix du conducteur plus présente [me] resta tellement proche' (130). It is the frankly expressed pain of the conductor that touches her; his cry establishes an unanticipated, intimate connection with her. And yet, the narrator does not really understand her own motivations for the suicide attempt: '[elle] ne parla à personne de sa chute – crise de lyrisme ou de révolte sans objet. Découvrit-elle seulement le désespoir ?' (130). The second incident offers a mirror image of this: now, it is the narrator's scream that touches another – and this, once more, ties two strangers unexpectedly close. Months after an over-long love affair ends, the narrator, wandering through Paris, 'expels' the memories through a long scream:

> Tandis que la solitude de ces derniers mois se dissout [. . .], soudain la voix explose. Libère en flux toutes les scories du passé. Quelle voix, est-ce ma voix, je la reconnais à peine. (131)

The subsequent description sees the scream solidified into a quite mutable series of substances that implicitly obstruct or corrupt her insides: 'Comme un magma, [. . .] un

[81] Djebar returns to this suicide attempt, and in greater length, in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (Paris: Babel, 2007).

poussier m'encombre d'abord le palais, puis s'écoule en fleuve rêche, hors de ma bouche' (131); it then shifts through a variety of physical forms, most of which (like the soot) are the leftover of a finished phenomenon. The suggestion is that these are physical residues of experiences no longer of import to the narrator, who watches the flow as if a mere observer (*en témoin quasi indifférent*); they are old, decayed memories to be vomited out:

> Un long, un unique et interminable pleur informe, un précipité agglutiné dans le corps même de ma voix d'autrefois, de mon organe gelé ; cette coulée s'exhale, glu anonyme, traînée de décombres non identifiés… Je perçois, en témoin quasi indifférent, cette écharpe écœurante de sons : mélasse de râles morts, guano de hoquets et de suffocations, senteurs d'azote de quel cadavre asphyxié en moi et pourrissant. La voix, ma voix (ou plutôt ce qui sort de ma bouche ouverte, bâillant comme pour vomir ou chanter quelque opéra funèbre) ne peut s'interrompre. Peut-être faut-il lever le bras, [. . .] suspendre ainsi la perte de ce sang invisible ? (131)

I have quoted this passage at length as it highlights a particular nexus of ideas in Djebar with respect to the scream and memory. In the allusion to suffocated bodies in the depths, we cannot fail to see a return to the image of those murdered in Pélissier's caves, their cries stifled underground; the narrator, conscious – as we shall see – of her distance from her own people, appears to align her own, perhaps traumatic, memories with a time of asphyxiation, concealment and pain in her nation's history. I suggest that this most

horrible of events effectively *haunts* Djebar's writing in *L'Amour*, causing it to resurface; here, she seems to link memory's subterranean storehouses. And not only does *this* event resurface in her cry, but also – in the proleptic evocation of an *opera funèbre* – the situation of Algerian women still trapped in the harem: women whose mournful, ritualistic chant Djebar discusses elsewhere, and which I shall turn to shortly. As with the first scream, this, too, has an observer: in this case, an unknown man in the street overhears the narrator screaming, and asks her to stop. The fact that her sadness has touched another again ties her unexpectedly close to the stranger, in a 'tristesse entrecroisée' (132); indeed, it acts much like a psychological shock that cures her of a neurosis, 'exhuming' her: 'D'avoir entendu l'homme supplier, tel un ami, tel un amant, m'exhuma peu après de l'enfouissement. Je me libérai de l'amour vorace et de sa nécrose. [. . .] Aucun étranger ne m'aura, de si près, touchée' (132). The immediate, emotive (even if inarticulate) character of the scream turns it into an unlikely form of *communication*; its concentrated emotive charge connects even strangers – its 'concentrated' nature allows for such a rapid, even intimate, understanding by an unknown party (as the narrator notes, 'Deux inconnus m'ont frôlée, chaque fois dans l'éclat d'un cri' (129)). It is clear in this case what her cry was protesting about, and it succeeds: as she notes, 'Aucune écoute ne peut plus m'écharner' – no societal pressure can stifle her voice (132). By contrast, those who remain in the harem in Algeria cannot take part in a revolt of this kind; they cannot speak out, and so remain 'interred' – 'ensevelies à la verticale' (131):

> je ne suis, moi, qu'une exilée errante, échappée d'autres rivages où les femmes se meuvent fantômes blancs, formes ensevelies à la verticale, justement pour ne pas faire ce que je fais là maintenant, pour ne pas hurler ainsi continûment : son de barbare, son de sauvage, résidu macabre d'un autre siècle !... Atténuer quelque peu ce râle, le scander en mélopée inopportune. Incantation dans l'exil qui s'étire. (131-2)

We see here, then, the differing nature of the narrator's cry to that made in her native land. Though she draws on the vocabulary of chanting (*scander*, *mélopée*, *incantation*), hers is not a chant, but a scream: and this is precisely what separates her from her people and her native land. Were she in Algeria, were she cloistered, she would suffer not only under the Islamic (and state) patriarchy's condemnation of women who *do* cry out ('plus que la femme pauvre, [. . .] plus que la femme répudiée ou veuve, [. . .] la seule réellement coupable [. . .] était "la femme qui crie"' (228)), and the peer pressure to conform to restrictive, gender-based, roles. Her scream *is* a powerful sign of catharsis and release, but this expressive freedom is predicated on her geographical and cultural separation – it is her cross-cultural position that allows her cry to take breath: again, this is in line with Glissant, who asserts that a scream takes voice only on exiting the *univers muet de la servitude*. I shall now turn briefly to the chanting alluded to, to show how a cry's effect cannot be understood outside of the context of its utterance.

Djebar often alludes to the forms of permissible (female) protest in Algeria: as we have seen, she who cries out in public is not considered socially acceptable; Algerian society

does not accept ‘celle dont la plainte contre le sort ne s’abîmait ni dans la prière, ni dans le murmure des diseuses, mais s’élevait nue, improvisée, en protestation franchissant les murs’ (228). Prayer and hushed, private exchanges are accepted outlets for social pressure (an atmosphere of enforced, and controlled, silence that recalls Glissant’s ‘univers muet’). One such example is a domestic gathering of women, led by Djebar’s grandmother, for the purposes of a trance. In certain key respects, the matriarch’s dance and cries serve the same purpose as Djebar’s cry in the rue Richelieu: the ‘choir’ of trance attendees encourage the grandmother to vent her frustrations, and her painful memories, through dance and vociferation:

> – Laisse sortir le malheur ! Que les dents de l’envie et de la convoitise t’épargnent, ô ma dame !... Mets au jour ta force et tes armes, ô ma reine ! (164)

In contrast to Djebar, or to any woman who cries alone, this gathering requires a large number of attendees to support one woman (they even hold her up afterwards (164)); the order of events is understood from the beginning; and the entirety is ruled over by the rhythm of the musical ensemble (indeed, she modifies her cries to fit with the beat (165)), and supported with occasional whispered verses of the Quran (an assistant ‘chuchotait, pour finir, des bribes du Coran’ (164)). Despite the appeals to her force and her arms, the knowledge that none can escape their social predicaments is foundational to this event. Ultimately, it is a mere palliative; it may be cathartic, but it offers only a controlled, regular outlet. The pain of her past is implicitly still there – is usually fought down – but is here given a temporary release:

> Les cris se bousculaient d'abord, se chevauchaient [. . .], puis ils s'exhalaient gonflés en volutes enchevêtrées, en courbes tressées [. . .]. Obéissant au martèlement du tambour de l'aveugle, la vieille ne luttait plus : toutes les voix du passé bondissaient loin d'elle, expulsées hors de la prison de ses jours. (165)

Indeed, the grandmother is the only member of this group to avoid complaining in everyday life: 'l'aïeule, habituellement, était la seule des femmes à ne jamais se plaindre' (165). The positive nature of this lament, for the narrator, is that it constitutes an act of protest: 'elle semblait protester à sa manière', and in the narrator's view, this allows her grandmother to 'puis[er] [. . .] sa force quotidienne' (165). The negative side, however, is that her cries' cause remains indecipherable, leaving both reader and narrator to guess at it, 'comme un arasement de signes que nous tentons de déchiffrer, pour le restant de notre vie' (165). Ultimately, though, given the lack of real freedom of expression granted these women, together with the unlikelihood of altering the religious or social structures that govern their lives, they are set to remain in a 'tissu d'impossible révolte' (176). They are walking wraiths, not wanderers; they do not have access to the freedoms that permit the exiled narrator's revolt to succeed. An explosive cry may accompany the transition into freedom, as Glissant describes; but as we see here, a controlled explosion may have a socially productive function even if it does not cut them free of their painful history.

At this point, we could turn to *Qui se souvient de la mer*, for its scenes of group revolt involve some of the same features as those we have seen in Djebar's work, and again, we

see the possibility of successful action being determined by the protestors' environment: here, too, a contained population cries in protest, but can only strain at its bonds. Djebar, as we have seen, has a tendency to figure a scream in physical terms: it becomes a flood, a flow of blood, a wave, or suchlike, exiting from an individual. Dib's work literally unites a crowd through its cry; they themselves become a paste, moving and crying out as one, before exploding and circulating as though a gas, guided by anger alone:

> Compressée, notre foule reste enfin paralysée dans l'impasse où elle a été acculée, elle forme comme une pâte, et avancer là-dedans est une chimère ; l'on ne peut non plus voir au-delà. Suffoquant, je tourne sur moi-même. À ce moment, d'un coup, elle rompt ses liens et se précipite en clamant à tue-tête, sa rage, sa douleur. [. . .] Toute la souffrance que les habitants ont accumulée se déverse, tout ce qui est noué explose.[82]

Given the violence, and unity, of the protest, we might entertain some hope of it succeeding, but as with the harem's laments, it is contained with corresponding, oppressive force – in this case, by the walls enclosing, and then dividing, the protestors:

> Mais notre démonstration perd sa valeur, n'aboutit à rien, devant les murs alignés de part et d'autre de notre défilé, nous jugeant d'un monde qui n'est pas le nôtre. L'horreur qui s'en dégage nous dompte. Nous passons la tête basse.[83]

[82] Dib, p. 154.
[83] Ibid.

Though we cannot say precisely what kind of force the 'walls' represent, we can nonetheless identify the pressure of the colonial yoke; the people are denied ownership of their own land, and submit to this judgement (*la tête basse*) owing to violent coercion. (We might recall Kitchener's question to Mahmoud Wad Ahmed, and Ahmed's response: 'When Mahmoud Wad Ahmed was brought in shackles to Kitchener after the Battle of Atbara, Kitchener said to him, "Why have you come to my country to lay waste and plunder?" It was the intruder who said this to the person whose land it was, and the owner of the land bowed his head and said nothing').[84] Curiously, what happens then is a transformation of their cry; it appears to change nature. It began, like Djebar's urgent cry in the Rue Richelieu, with the real hope of escape from the source of its pain; it then degenerates into the kind of repetitive, ultimately hopeless cries we might observe in the harem, cries marked by containment, endurance and resignation:

> Nous nous *bornons* à occuper la place, tournant en rond, nous époumonant, criant, tandis qu'un souffle brûlant, lancé sûrement par les nouvelles constructions, s'abat par rafales sur notre foule et la torréfie.[85]

The narrator's question – 'À quoi cela avancerait de s'insurger?'[86] – may seem realistic in the face of overwhelming force; and yet, in this case, revolutionary action is subsequently put forth as the (only) solution: 'dynamiter toute la ville, nous dynamiter nous-mêmes… Y en a-t-il, chez nous, qui soient prêts à payer ce prix ?'[87] Indeed, as Lkarmoni's

[84] Salih, p.94.
[85] Dib, p. 154; my emphasis.
[86] Ibid., p. 155.
[87] Ibid., p. 156.

explosive cry showed earlier, glimpses of resistance and freedom are figured with a more violent and resistant cry – a peak level, or explosion, of sound. Despite the narrator's scepticism, and despite the citizens' efforts to ignore the sounds from below,[88] the underground movement, to which he has no access, provides an implicit, and silent counterpoint to the torpidity of those remaining above.

Conclusion

In studying the transformation of the cry, and its relationship with silence, I do not believe I have isolated an 'essence' that comfortably connects their usage. What they do reveal, however, is a degree of discomfort in writing. Silence, as we have seen, prevents resolution of narrative: we are kept on the edge, denied answers. If in *Nedjma*, as I have discussed here and in *Roots*, we see the spectre of a potential nation reflected in the character of Nedjma, her lack of words prevents us from gathering a vision of its future. *Vaste est la prison*'s Isma, cutting her vocal chords, destabilises us in its violence and checks us before we read in the narrator an overly reassuring faith in her project. Though silence sometimes represents the menace of historical erasure, and the quelling of resistance (such as in the silences of Pélissier's fumigations), silence is at other points positioned as an act of resistance, where an excess of description risks banality: *L'Amour*'s narrator reminds us that 'Toute parole, trop éclairée, devient voix de forfanterie,' whereas we find in 'l'aphonie, résistance inentamée'.[89] As Glissant has noted, silence can be at once a marker of oppression, and a means of dissimulation – a

[88] Ibid., p. 22 ('au moment précis où la terre tremblait, nous changions de pied').
[89] *L'Amour,* p. 201.

counter-poetics, if you will.[90] Though writing is in essence a communicative medium, it can serve a progressive function simply in relating the silences of others: Césaire's *Cahier* lets us glimpse Toussaint l'Ouverture 'emprisonné de blanc / [. . .] un homme seul qui défie les cris blancs de la mort blanche',[91] witnessing the gradual whiting out of his cell; Djebar's *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* bears witness to those who are gradually lost from sight – just as Isma can only bear witness to, though not improve, Hajila's plight in *Ombre sultane*. Perhaps, when we reflect on representations of the cry, the abundance of *physical* metaphor serves a related function: though often elicited at moments of emotional inarticulacy or inexpressibility, the cry-as-substance lends a tangible form, however contrived, to such experiences. It allows a would-be suicide and her killer to enjoy a fantasy embrace; it provides a physical mark of old, and painful memories (and their passing). There is no guaranteed, lasting catharsis, however: we have also seen the cry comfortably contained within the walls of a harem. There is a danger, of course, in too directly equating these solidified cries with the experience that gave rise to them: they do not offer a reliable bridge to the author. However, as Djebar notes, a writer must take this risk at some point, before writing ends (at which point the voice 'se tait absolument');[92] he or she must invest something personal in their work, even if this investment risks dissociation from its creator: 'la voix de celui (ou celle) qui écrit s'est en quelque sorte arrachée progressivement de sa gorge, de son corps – ce dernier, lentement

[90] One that may also resonate with cultural movements of the late twentieth century, in their turn towards negativity: Iser and Budick (writing in the 1980s) note that 'During the last two decades most of us have grown accustomed to [. . .] negative gestures [. . .] implicit in virtually all poetic, philosophical, and even historiographical language.' Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, eds, *Languages of the unsayable: the play of negativity in literature and literary theory* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), xi.
[91] Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Présence africaine, 1983), p. 25.
[92] Assia Djebar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, p. 448.

dissipé en poussière sur le sol'.[93] What is left, of course, may simply be a 'champ vain de ruines',[94] the author torn to pieces or only partially re-membered. Dib argues in his Postface (in an allusion to Adorno's famous assertion)[95] that electing to write after Auschwitz or the Warsaw ghetto presents an ethical quandary, but ultimately decides that what must nevertheless be said *should* be approached, cautiously, and with a due awareness of the risk of banality when recounting horror:

> *Comment parler de l'Algérie après Auschwitz, le ghetto de Varsovie et Hiroshima ? Comment faire afin que tout ce qu'il y a pourtant à dire puisse être encore entendu et ne soit pas absorbé par cette immense nuée démoniaque qui plane au-dessus du monde depuis tant d'années, ne se dissolve pas dans l'enfer de banalité dont l'horreur a su s'entourer et nous entourer ?*[96]

The question, then, is to find a mode of expression that permits this approach: one possibility, I have argued, is a poetics that evokes (and at points enacts) the *signifié-insignifié* of silence and screams. Hannah Arendt suggests that when faced with certain horrors, silence is our last appropriate response ('Where violence rules absolutely, as for instance in the concentration camps of totalitarian regimes [. . .] everything and everybody must remain silent').[97] We are, however, compelled to attempt a response.

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Adorno's remark, though usually quoted in isolation, was that 'The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today.' *Prisms* [1955] (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 1981), p. 34. Adorno's later *revisions* of this statement are less often alluded to.
[96] Dib, p. 218 (italics in the original).
[97] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 9.

When Dib shows us citizens deprived of speech and movement, then, their tableau offers wordless testament for what cannot, or ought not be voiced.

Resistant literatures, literatures of resistance?

Opacity in Dib, Kateb, Djebar and Salih

'What do you mean by what sort of a person?' he said. 'He was as I've described him.'

(*Season of Migration to the North*)[1]

Fut-ce pourquoi je me mis à me défier d'une écriture sans ombre ?

(*Vaste est la prison*)[2]

'Regarde, au moins ; tu auras quelque chose à raconter plus tard'

(*Un été africain*)[3]

The question of literary opacity is one that has followed Glissant throughout his critical corpus. And perhaps fittingly for such a term, it resists easy summarisation – as Glissant notes in *Le Discours antillais*, 'L'opacité ne se donne et ne se justifie pas.'[4] On the one hand, it deals with representation, realism, and the danger of reduction – and in this respect is related to his theories on fragmented structure and polyphony, where he motions against the 'clarté' of a linear narrative when representing the 'chaos de la mémoire'.[5] On the other hand, it results from a questioning of translation and the

[1] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), p.102. Henceforth referred to as *Season*.
[2] Assia Djebar, *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p.14. Henceforth referred to as *Vaste*.
[3] Mohammed Dib, *Un été africain* (Paris: Seuil, 1959), p. 168.
[4] Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 265.
[5] Ibid., p. 200n.

tension between languages, and so is related to his theory of a *poétique forcée*. Though I shall discuss structure in greater depth elsewhere, I shall turn here to what, for Glissant, justifies – and sometimes necessitates – 'opacity' in literary or cultural representation. If a written narrative attempts to consider, or evoke, a particular social problem (Glissant cites 'l'aliénation sociale ou culturelle'),[6] some might hope that the text would put itself in reach ('"à la portée"')[7] of those suffering these problems. Glissant argues against this. He believes, firstly, that a simple presentation of grievances may fail to unmask more fundamental levels of oppression; he also asserts that a work may affect us powerfully despite (or perhaps owing to) its lack of immediate clarity. Considering 'le problème de *celui pour qui l'œuvre est écrite*', Glissant notes the following:

> Une tendance généreuse de nos productions est de se mettre d'entrée 'à la portée' de ceux qui souffrent l'aliénation sociale ou culturelle. Tendance légitime, dans la mesure où agir concrètement sur les données de cette aliénation. Mais le constat presque élémentaire des carences, s'il est précieux dans un combat quotidien, peut aussi empêcher qu'on perçoive des structures plus profondes d'oppression, qu'il faut pourtant révéler. Cette mise au grand jour, paradoxalement, ne se fait pas à chaque fois dans l'évidence et la clarté. [. . .] [J]e connais nombre de contes de nos pays dont la puissance d'impact sur leur auditoire ne tient pas à la clarté de leur sens. Il arrive que l'œuvre ne soit pas

[6] Ibid., p. 200.
[7] Ibid.

> écrite *pour quelqu'un*, mais pour démonter les mécanismes complexes de la frustration et des variétés infinies de l'oppression.[8]

Glissant appears to gesture here towards a literary style that would avoid an overly direct, (supposedly) objective representation of such *carences*; one corollary of this appears to be his advocacy of narrative forms other than realism – or at least of a modified form of it, such as 'magic' realism or 'baroque' narrative, though Glissant takes care to disassociate Balzac or Zola's[9] use of realism to the employment of it '" à plat"', hors profondeur' that he is criticising – his attack is not on the validity of realism as a technique, but on its suitability in the Martinican context. The implied interpretation of realism here – which Glissant glosses as 'théorie et technique de la reproduction littérale ou "totale"'[10] – is roughly analogous with *naturalism* ('implying a concern with accurate and objective representation' (OED)), but does not properly do justice to realism or naturalism; it is, nevertheless, an aesthetic preference we also see echoed in much postcolonial literary criticism – as Eli Sorenson notes, '[a] brief glance through many contemporary [postcolonial] literary analyses would confirm [. . .] realism is indeed not as highly valued as magical realism'.[11] However, Henry James' psychological realism, for example that of *The Ambassadors*, enlists a rigidly observed internal focalisation on Strether that offers anything *but* a total representation – we are left blind to what Strether himself cannot see or comprehend; and at points, we are made acutely aware of this restriction. James himself, writing on Balzac's style, noted that 'complete' representation

[8] Ibid. (italics in the original).
[9] Glissant cites Zola as a realist (he does not mention naturalism in the *Discours*).
[10] Ibid., p. 198.
[11] Eli Park Sorensen, *Postcolonial Studies and the Literary: Theory, Interpretation and the Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 7.

is only ever an aim, or an ideal – he was quite aware of its practical impossibility: '"Complete" is of course a great word [. . .]. The element of compromise is always there; it is of the essence'.[12] So we should be wary of too easily equating realism with 'totality'. For now, I only wish to highlight Glissant's advocacy of an opaque style of narration when considering the manifold forms of oppression in the Caribbean context. Glissant proposes an aesthetic strategy he considers more *suited* to certain (social) conditions, rather than an objection to the very idea of total representation; realism is ill equipped to convey, in his view, the chaotic and dehumanising experience of the slaves' journey to Martinique – no 'totality' of perception would be possible here. Equally, a detailed realist portrait of daily life in Martinique would present two problems: it would risk restricting its focus to the description of daily experience, rather than of the deeper structures that give rise to it; it would also merely *depict* these problems, rather than mirroring them in the literary form itself.

A second aspect of opacity, in Glissant's presentation, is an 'anti-reductionist' tendency. This is a form of resistance in literature: in this sense, *opacité* is an effort to resist a universalist form of representation, or a humanism that would gloss over cultural or regional specificities, 'homogenising' difference. It is, as Glissant contends, 'L'opacité comme valeur à opposer à toute tentative pseudo-humaniste de réduire les hommes à l'échelle d'un modèle universel'[13] where we should, instead, 'consentir à l'opacité, c'est-à-dire à la densité irréductible de l'autre'.[14] Glissant's later work, of course, places ever

[12] Henry James, *Literary Criticism: Volume Two: European Writers; Prefaces to the New York Edition*, L. Edel, ed. (New York: The Library of America, 1984), p. 134.
[13] Ibid., p. 278.
[14] Ibid., p. 245.

greater emphasis on the role of *relation* (and *mondialité*) on an international scale, but this should be perceived rather as a form of social *métissage* writ large, forever opposed, however, to notions of cultural transparency or universality. We shall see later how writers such as Dib, Kateb, Salih and Djebar stage, and contest, such homogenising practices, and show the practical dangers that they present. The solution (or at least the strategy) that Glissant suggests is a positive form of opacity: a form of narration that 'represents' how the other escapes us: 'La bienheureuse opacité, par quoi l'autre m'échappe, me contraignant à la vigilance de toujours marcher vers lui'.[15] I shall turn shortly to writings that attempt just such a gesture – though, as we shall see, it is not always welcomed in the diegesis, and certain characters (such as *Season*'s Meheimeed or *QSM*'s narrator) feel compelled to resist, in turn, such opacity.

A third aspect of opacity is a certain politics of language. We cannot readily separate it from Glissant's thoughts on a *poétique forcée*,[16] as each concerns a related problem. In brief, a 'forced' poetics is one that registers a tension between the subject matter and the language expressing it; it occurs, as Glissant states, 'là où une nécessité d'expression confronte un impossible à exprimer [. . . .] [et] se noue dans une opposition entre le contenu exprimable et la langue suggérée ou imposée'.[17] It is the act of *registering* this tension that creates a forced poetics: 'La poétique forcée naît de la *conscience* de cette opposition entre une langue dont on se sert et un langage dont on a besoin'.[18] Opacity, however, in a language context, is a collective right to a kind of obscurity – 'Nous

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p. 236.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., p. 237 (my emphasis).

réclamons le droit à l'opacité',[19] Glissant avers when opening the *Discours*. What he means by this is a continued, collaborative recognition of difference and particularity (whether cultural or linguistic), against the threat of, for example, a hegemonic world language:

> C'est peut-être en effet nous (sauf hypothèse d'une langue monolithique soudain appesantie en chape sur nos pays) qui convierons ces idiomes, l'un envers l'autre, par nos poétiques conjointes, et loin de l'universalisme abstrait, à la féconde difficile relation de l'opacité consentie.[20]

Opacity in language, then, is not predicated on a tension between the speaker's use of two languages (as is the case with a *poétique forcée*); it can apply more broadly, as it deals with the relationship between speakers of (any) language, and not just those who have had one 'imposed', as was the case with French in Martinique. In one of his later works, *Poétique de la relation*, Glissant extends his reflections on opacity and language: here, as well as being a continued caution against the disappearance of minor languages and an argument towards a 'symphonie des langues',[21] he attacks the (of course false) attribution of ideological characteristics to a language – French, for example, should not be associated with ideas of 'clarity' or considered the bearer of humanism; 'Il n'y a pas de vocation des langues',[22] Glissant notes, with a likely nod to the *mission civilisatrice*. The French language was indeed positioned as a key component of this mission, and we shall

[19] Ibid., p. 11.
[20] Ibid., p. 284.
[21] Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 126.
[22] Ibid., p. 128.

see shortly, in *Nedjma*, how some such notions of form and clarity sit uneasily with the harsh realities of the French occupation of Algeria.

In sum, then, Glissant's use of the term 'opacity' encompasses a variety of distinct, though connected notions: 'opaque' narrative presentation (avoiding a purely objective, realist narrative style), anti-reductionism (and anti-universalism), and the opacity of one language with respect to another – this is not an argument for a hopeless incommensurability of language, or of culture; indeed, he urges us to see difference *in order* to understand and relate to the other (it is this 'vigilance' that allows us to 'toujours marcher vers lui'). We might query at this point whether Glissant is simply echoing a strategy found in much Modernist literature – and particularly among the diverse, at times opaque, aesthetic strategies associated with this period. We might look to hermetic passages in Mallarmé, or to Beckett, deemed by Feldman the 'most opaque of modern authors',[23] and who memorably argued against the *necessity* for clarity, or for always limiting oneself to it:

> The time is not altogether too green for the vile suggestion that art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear, any more than the light of day (or night) makes the subsolar, -lunar and -stellar excrement. Art is the sun, moon and stars of the mind, the whole mind[24]

[23] Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 2.
[24] Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta. Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 94.

The idea of writing in response to a form of trauma also finds an echo in, for example, Malcolm Bradbury's account of the emergence of Modernism. Bradbury does not use the term 'opacity,' but does observe the 'grow[th] of a manifest strain and difficulty'[25] in Modernist works; and a major factor that he posits for the emergence of Modernism itself is 'the basic assumption that our age is not simply an age of transition, but, much more ultimately, an age of crisis. In fact, one of the ways we recognize modern sensibility in art and thought is to look for symptoms of shock, disturbance and crisis'.[26] Indeed, Bradbury points to Pitirim Sorokin's contention that the Modern age itself is an 'age of crisis'.[27] In the effort to theorise modern literature, then, we can see a justification of opacity in Beckett; a linking of Modernism with a generalised sense of shock or crisis in Bradbury; and in Glissant, we find more particular and specific instances of such shock: the slave trade, its abrupt geographical displacement and the ensuing cultural mixing of the Caribbean, and latterly, the risk of 'transparency' as a negative social force in the modern world system. But Glissant does not just provide more concrete *examples* of such shock, disturbance or crisis: in advocating a counterpoetics to combat such transparency, in the form of an 'opacité consentie' or a 'bienheureuse opacité,' he also designates a socio-political *purpose* (and not just a basis) for a poetics of opacity. And though Bradbury effectively postulates an inverse relation between a text's closeness to the avant-garde and its potential for social overview, the texts I will now turn to will demonstrate how an opaque literary aesthetic can enact just such a politicised (counter)poetics.

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[25] Malcolm Bradbury, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 18.
[26] Ibid., p. 14.
[27] Ibid., p. 13.

What I intend to investigate at this point is whether this notion of opacity, as well as the idea of a 'forced poetics' – terms in certain respects quite specific to the French Antilles – speak to the poetics of North African writers like Dib, Djebar, Kateb and Salih. I shall investigate this firstly by considering opacity as a metaphorical trope: how, and to what end(s) are characters depicted as opaque, obscure, intangible, or intractable? These terms are not synonyms, but I believe they are close enough to provide points of contact – and perhaps difference – with Glissant's *bienheureuse opacité*. This is a broadly 'thematic' level. Secondly, I shall consider opacity on a stylistic (or structural) level: not in terms of the structuring of the work on a large scale, but rather how its narrative is rendered opaque through idiom, textual structuring (at the sentence or paragraph level), or omission. Glissant, as Dash notes, 'cautions against the use of techniques of realism and objectivity in depicting the Caribbean experience';[28] these instances of stylistic opacity gesture to a comparable search for an idiom that destabilises our grasp of the subject of narration. As this is a potentially broad area of enquiry, I have limited my focus to two aspects, which I shall term unresolved oppositions and restricted representation. Thirdly, and finally, my enquiry will focus on the issue of 'forced poetics' in a North African setting: whether in the form of an explicit, narrative-level critique of the use and acquisition of the colonial language, or an exploration at a more *implicit* level of the tension (manipulating language) that Glissant gestured to. Djebar's writings on language, for example, demonstrate several points of convergence with

[28] J. Michael Dash, ed., *Caribbean Discourse* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. xv.

Glissant's writings on a forced poetics; but they also ostensibly challenge some of the tenets of this theory with respect to the notion of a cultural hinterland. We shall also see, in these authors' depictions of and references to the colonial school, a reflection on language that sheds a different light on Glissant's poetics.

Section I: Narrative opacity: representations of opacity

Opacity of character

A thematic approach that centres on metaphors of obscurity, opacity or, more broadly, intractability is not only on the same conceptual ground as Glissant's, in that it evokes 'la densité irréductible de l'autre', but is also tied to an even more fundamental level of narrative, and cognitive, hermeneutics. As Derrida has noted in his reflections on 'héliotropisme' the metaphors that compose philosophical language closely associate truth and knowledge with light:

> tout le lexique du *phainesthai*, de l'*aletheia*, etc., du jour et de la nuit, du visible et de l'invisible, du présent et de l'absent, tout cela n'est possible que sous le soleil. Celui-ci, en tant qu'il structure l'espace métaphorique de la philosophie, représente le naturel de la langue philosophique.[29]

[29] Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), p. 299.

This is not even simply a Western *philosophical* phenomenon, as Derrida perhaps implies; terms such as *phainesthai*[30] or *aletheia*[31] are drawn from Greek – these associations begin at a basic linguistic level. Nor is it just Indo-European etymology that associates light with truth or knowledge: we find the same basic linguistic metaphor in, for instance, Japanese, where an explanation (説明 (*setsumei*)) incorporates the characters for 'explain' or 'profess' (説) and 'brightness' or 'light' (明). A thematics of darkness and obscurity – or indeed, opacity – draws on metaphorical and linguistic associations rooted at a basic level. If Glissant's ideas on anti-reductionism are intended to prevent the false impression of having fully grasped the complexities of a situation, or individual, why might Kateb, Dib and Salih draw on themes of light and darkness? And why, as I shall discuss now, should each choose to centre this thematics on the figure of a woman? Given that Nedjma, Nafissa and Hosna are connected with questions of Algerian nationalism, anticolonial activism, and resistance to an oppressive patriarchy, this question is also, in a very real sense, a political one.

The figure of Nedjma (for indeed, we perceive her figure more often than her voice, as I have discussed) marries an associative network of opaque images: whether drawing on images of intense light, darkness,[32] dark blood, or intangibility – all of which posit a

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[30] φαίνεσθαι 'to come to light, appear' is based on the Indo-European *bhā*, meaning 'to shine.' *OED*, s.v. -phane, *comb. form*.

[31] Etymologically meaning *not* [a-] *being hidden* [lēthō], it is 'the most important [Ancient] Greek counterpart of our "truth"'. Jan Wolenski, 'Aletheia in Greek thought until Aristotle', *Annals of Pure and Applied Logic* 127 (2004), 339-360 (p. 341). For a detailed overview of its use in philosophical and theological discourse, see Raul Corazzon, 'History of the Theories of Truth: *Aletheia* and Other Terms for Truth in Ancient Greek', 17 February 2013 <http://www.ontology.co/aletheia.htm> [accessed 30 September 2013].

[32] 'sombre orpheline' (Kateb Yacine, *Le Polygone étoilé* (Paris: Seuil, 1966, p. 156); 'Nedjma ogresse au sang obscur' (Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Seuil, 1956; repr. 1996), p. 179).

difficulty of perceiving Nedjma, or her origins – Kateb's narrators in fact spend more time narrating how we cannot perceive her than in elaborating her appearance: as one of Kateb's narrators notes, 'On connaissait Nedjma sans la connaître'.[33] We have in fact very few physical descriptions (*Nedjma* notes her elegance and 'incroyable maintien de gazelle',[34] and, as a little girl, her slender build, long legs and brown, nearly black skin;[35] *Le Polygone étoilé* notes her dark skin and sharp features)[36] and when we do she is often evoked in hyperbolic, and sometimes inhuman, terms: an *ogresse*, an 'amazone de débarras',[37] a *mauvaise chimère*[38] or a *Cendrillon*.[39] Indeed, as Mireille Calle-Gruber observes, the description of the young Nedjma ('Toute petite [. . .]')[40] soon becomes embroiled in oxymoron:

> La description, commencée comme une classique présentation du physique de Nedjma se trouve rapidement prise – emportée littéralement – dans une crue verbale [. . .]. Davantage : les éléments qui composent le portrait ne sont pas seulement hétérogènes, ils sont incompatibles. Ce qui donne un personnage rigoureusement *inexplicable*, invraisemblable, mais non sans significations lourdes de conséquences. Le lecteur est frappé par le sublime *et* la crudité de Nedjma ; son indécence *et* sa réserve ; sa perversité *et* sa candeur ; sa dureté *et* sa

[33] *Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 152.
[34] *Nedjma*, p. 100.
[35] Ibid., p. 72.
[36] *Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 148.
[37] *Nedjma*, p. 78.
[38] Ibid. pp. 166-7.
[39] Ibid., p. 78.
[40] *Nedjma*, p. 72.

> fragilité ; sa concupiscence *et* son intouchabilité. Et plus la description s'allonge et moins on 'voit' Nedjma[41]

The longest descriptive passage that concerns Nedjma in *Le Polygone étoilé* might serve as an example here: it in fact offers no description of Nedjma herself; rather, it presents her as an object of others' reflection. We see how others see her, our perception indirect, refracted – here as elsewhere, she becomes an unreachable centre around which the narrative orientates itself:

> le sentiment public était à son égard éternellement divisé, en séducteurs déçus, en soupirants de fraîche date, en spectateurs perplexes, en farouches détracteurs, en sectes contradictoires augmentant son mystère, son prestige, son culte. [. . .] Attifée de certaine façon, elle pouvait éclipser la plus fringante des Parisiennes. De pieuses femmes la rencontraient en robe courte et talons hauts, et les attaques, cette fois, venaient de l'autre bord : '*Après tout, nous n'avons pas connu son père, ni sa mère, cette bâtarde*.'[42]

'L'autre bord,' here, refers to certain Algerian women's perception of Nedjma, as opposed to that of the 'oies blanches du lycée'[43] – though the narrator's point is that Nedjma's 'sang obscur' appears to make her fall 'entre deux chaises',[44] and so she is

[41] Mireille Calle-Gruber, 'Comment en toucher un mot ? La voix féminine de Kateb Yacine ou le pari de la littérature: une lecture de *Nedjma*', in A.Y. Julien, C. Camelin and E.J. Authier eds, *Kateb Yacine et l'étoilement de l'œuvre* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes / La Licorne (2010)), 57-68 (p. 62).
[42] *Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 153 (emphasis in the original).
[43] Ibid., p. 152.
[44] Ibid., p. 180.

maligned by both camps. Inassimilable to an identified ethnic group, and unwilling to be made to 'stand for' a particular clan, family or line (or, indeed, Algeria itself) – even if this would allow her to function, in her beauty, as 'un défi à la race supérieure'[45] – Nedjma resists being 'placed' by any interested party:

> depuis que lycéenne elle avait échappé à plus d'un clan, plus d'une caste qui eût voulu en faire sa jument, lui confier les couleurs de telle noblesse de sang, telle vertu de famille, telle jeune fille qui passait pour la plus belle ou la plus fine[46]

This characteristic resistance marks much of the thematics applied to Nedjma: whether an 'astre impossible à piller dans sa fulgurante lumière',[47] too dazzling for ready perception, or a 'fleur solitaire, lointaine, irrespirable, rose noire échappée à toutes les tutelles',[48] she demonstrates a wilful independence and resistance – resistance to control, to categorisation or appropriation, and even to perception. Evidently, Nedjma is uncertainly placed between the *oies blanches* of the French school and her fellow Algerians; but even in a purely North African frame, we can observe this independence and ostentatious cultural mutability – in this case, simply through her manner of veiling herself:

> Mais les mégères émerveillées pouvaient aussi la voir au sortir du bain maure, fraîche et brûlante sous un voile blanc troussé à l'algéroise, ou clair et chaud, largement ouvert, à la tunisienne, ou d'un noir implacable, comme on le porte à

[45] Ibid., p. 152.
[46] Ibid.
[47] *Nedjma*, p. 130.
[48] *Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 156.

> Bône, Constantine ou Sétif, ou bleu foncé, à la maghrébine, qu'elle arborait souvent à visage découvert (d'autres fois se masquant d'un transparent triangle) [. . .], apparition inespérée des *Mille et Une Nuits*.[49]

Whether dressed in a provocative Western style, veiled in a myriad of North African styles, or simply naked (as we see in Rachid's drug-induced reverie in *Nedjma*), Nedjma's descriptions repeatedly evoke her multiplicity, a certain opacity in the face of efforts to describe her, and – despite the succession of abductions and her forced marriage – an ultimate resistance to mastery by any party. One aspect of opacity is that it implies an impeding layer between the observer and the subject, much like the 'vitres dépolies'[50] Sartre criticises; we find this in *Nedjma*, and *Le Polygone Etoilé*, when our perception of Nedjma is filtered through that of others – in effect, the focus is on their perception of Nedjma, rather than Nedjma herself. Winifred Woodhull, reflecting on the play of meanings on *étoile* (*nedjma* meaning 'star' in Arabic), contends that Nedjma's multifaceted identity evokes 'Algeria's "betweenness"', and sees this not only in semantic associations, but in the associations Nedjma maintains with immigrant French workers:

> as a 'star' Nedjma recalls not only the tribal bond whose renewal in the Etoile Nord-Africaine is to propel the forward-looking nationalist struggle, but also the atavistic aspect of that bond: she is both a 'star of blood' and 'our loss and ruin,

[49] Ibid., p. 153.
[50] 'le style, bien sûr, fait la valeur de la prose. Mais il doit passer inaperçu. Puisque les mots sont transparents et que le regard les traverse, il serait absurde de glisser parmi eux des vitres dépolies'. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 32.

> the evil star of our clan' (252).[51] Nedjma thus embodies Algeria's 'betweenness' because of her multifaceted, contradictory and shifting identity [. . .] and has symbolic ties to France [. . .] not only through class privilege and education, but also through her association with revolutionary immigrant workers who are themselves cultural hybrids[52]

Given the title of the *Polygone étoilé*, and the associations clearly connecting the *polygone*, at points, with Algeria (Nedjma, as the 'femme sauvage,' is seen walking through the polygon, for example),[53] we could infer that attributing this 'starred' nature to the *polygone* points to Algeria's own multiplicity (one that Kateb explores in the novel's exploded discourse). Secondly, though the rich Arabo-Islamic cultural significance of the polygonal motif has been considered in depth,[54] we might also consider that a further suggestion of Algeria's multiplicity (its opacity, even) could be read in the implicit opposition of this *polygone* with France – a country commonly alluded to simply by its geometry (*l'Hexagone*). Furthermore, though both words (polygone, étoile) refer to a geometric shape, neither in fact identifies how many sides (or points) it has – they are simply plural. Nedjma's multiplicity, then, and indeed Algeria's, are at once invoked and continually refashioned through the evocations of *polygone* and *étoile*. Glissant argues that an opaque poetics should demonstrate a resistance to reductionism. Here we see two tropes that, while evoking multiplicity, do not offer a sense of specificity – we cannot

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[51] (p. 166 in the original.)
[52] Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: feminism, decolonization and literatures* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 27.
[53] *Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité*, reproduced in Bernard Aresu, *Counterhegemonic discourse from the Maghreb: the poetics of Kateb's fiction* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1993), p. 240.
[54] See Aresu, *op cit.*

reduce these tropes to one signification any more than Nedjma's myriad suitors can claim her as theirs.

There is a further political element to this opacity. Considering the clear parallels drawn between Algeria and Nedjma – a parallel established firstly by the multiple invasions of Algeria (a country many times invaded, yet never conquered, its various invaders figured instead as squabbling suitors, 'otages de la patrie en gestation dont ils se disputaient les faveurs'),[55] and secondly by the competing claims of the suitors for Nedjma, and in the previous generation her mother (who was also 'trois fois enlevée')[56] – we might look here for a clear national metaphor, a way of reading for a response to Algeria's repeated invasions in the metonymic *femme-patrie* figure of Nedjma. But this is impossible, given the opacity and multiplicity of Nedjma's presentation: we cannot establish an unambiguous, uncomplicated, or direct equation of the two; Nedjma cannot become the representative of Algeria or its revolution. What we can do, however, is identify a political stance in this very multiplicity: at the time of *Nedjma*'s writing, the potentially independent Algerian state was indeed a *patrie en gestation*; its future form, structure of rule, and (potentially) dominant political or ethnic classes were not known or set. Nedjma's opacity is not simply employed to portray the intangible and fleeting object of male desire; her opacity, and by extension Algeria's, serve a political purpose analogous to that of Glissant's *bienheureuse opacité*, gesturing against an Algeria that would be dominated by one caste or clan, and towards one that values the 'opacity' of its

[55] *Nedjma*, p. 96.
[56] Ibid., p. 103.

elements. It is in the nature of Nedjma's description that its elements do not cohere; its opacity is immanent.

The trope of the unknowable, untouchable, or unmasterable female is by no means restricted to *Nedjma*. If we consider Jean Morris' or Hosna's presentation (in *Season*) or Nafissa's (in *Qui se souvient de la mer*), we see a thematics that centres on the difficulty of perceiving, grasping or knowing them; ultimately, each woman escapes the narrator's control and understanding. Jean Morris, for example, is figured as a 'mirage [that] shimmered before me'[57] while the narrator (Mustafa) is courting her; but this is not simply a question of evoking the flight of an as yet unreached quarry, for even once married to her, Mustafa can neither master nor fathom her. Their relationship is pictured, in fact, as a combat – one initiated and maintained by Jean:

> she said to me one day [. . .] 'I am tired of your pursuing me and of my running before you. Marry me.' So I married her. My bedroom became a theatre of war; my bed a patch of hell. When I grasped her it was like grasping at clouds, like bedding a shooting star[58]

Given the narrative focalisation (viz. never through Jean), we are not given access to Jean's motivations; and neither of the narrators, faced with her expression, can reach any conclusion about what it signifies. Mustafa, when driven to the point of violence by Jean's provocative behaviour, cannot classify her reaction:

[57] Salih, p. 33.
[58] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

> every battle would end with her ripping up an important book or burning some piece of research [. . .]. Sometimes I would be so overcome with rage that I would reach the brink of madness and murder and would tighten my grip on her throat, when she would suddenly grow quiet and give me that enigmatic look, a mixture of astonishment, fear, and desire.[59]

Meheimeed, too, is able to confront Jean, or rather Mustafa's representation of her, in the form of her portrait; fittingly, Mustafa was unable to know where to place her in his otherwise carefully ordered Western boudoir:

> Everything in the room was neatly in place – except for Jean Morris's picture. It was as if he had not known what to do with it. Though he had kept photographs of all the other women, Jean Morris was there as he saw her, not as seen by the camera. I looked admiringly at the picture. [. . .] The expression on the face is difficult to put into words: a disturbing, puzzling expression. Was the expression in the eyes anger or a smile?[60]

Meheimeed highlights that we only have access to Jean through mediated form; he is only given secondary access to her image. The painting appears firstly to reinforce the previous suggestion, that Mustafa cannot resolve (potentially) conflicting interpretations of his partner, and, secondly, emphasises that our view of Jean never escapes mediation

[59] Ibid., p. 161.
[60] Ibid., pp. 154-5.

by Mustafa. I believe what makes this important is that direct access to Jean's emotions would presumably shed light on why she longs to be murdered; we are never offered an answer – indeed, as I shall discuss later, certain repeated narrative fragments suggest that the narrator attempts to conceal from us parts of his own memory of trauma. In fact, Jean is only one of a pair (and, as we shall see, a pairing) of women in *Season* whose intractable nature is stressed in their description. Hosna Bint Mahmoud, Mustafa's wife in Wad Hamed, has several points in common with Jean: she is Mustapha's wife, is a rebellious sort (her attitude makes her seem unlike the other village women; she is described as 'like a city woman'),[61] and she shares a death that clearly mirrors Jean's – though it is Hosna's own hand, rather than Mustafa's, that turns the knife on her chest (after Wad Rayyes). The villagers consider her refusal of her forced marriage (to Rayyes) as incompatible with their values, given their ethos that 'Women belong to men, and a man's a man even if he's decrepit'.[62] Hosna's violent opposition is kept hidden at first, however; and this is perhaps one reason why the first description of her centres on darkness and stretches of silence. 'Conversation began slowly and with difficulty,' Meheimeed notes, 'and thus it continued while the sun sank down'.[63] Eventually, they speak in 'a complete and all-embracing darkness [that] descended and pervaded all four corners of the globe, wiping out the sadness and shyness that was in her eyes. Nothing remained but the voice'.[64] Meheimeed asks a series of questions, some of which Hosna only answers after a long silence: firstly, whether she loved Mustafa, and secondly,

[61] Ibid., p. 101.
[62] Ibid., p. 99.
[63] Ibid., p. 89.
[64] Ibid.

whether she would accept Wad Rayyes' proposal. Her reply is one of many (proleptic) references to the knife scattered throughout *Season*:

> She was silent for so long that, presuming she was not going to say anything, I was on the point of getting up to leave. At last, though, I became aware of her voice in the darkness like the blade of a knife. 'If they force me to marry, I'll kill him and kill myself.' [. . .] I left without saying anything.[65]

By turning Hosna into a disembodied voice, there are several immediate consequences: firstly, Meheimeed cannot read her facial expression or, indeed, even detect her presence except by her voice or her (for Meheimeed, intoxicating) perfume; secondly, the narrative does not clearly demarcate the boundary between Meheimeed's narration of the current event from that of the past: the next voice to 'float out', 'in just such darkness as this, [. . .] like dead fishes floating on the surface of the sea',[66] is Mustafa's. Indeed, the disturbing effect of Hosna's perfume also contributes to a certain unreliability of narration: on arriving, Meheimeed had already cast doubts on his perception of Hosna – 'She was a woman [. . .] of a foreign type of beauty – or am I imagining something that is not really there?'[67] – but once under her perfume's effect, he adds that 'I realized that the darkness and the perfume were all but causing me to lose control'.[68] His perfume-induced analepse to Mustafa's narrative (tellingly, to a love scene with Jean)[69] indicates

[65] Ibid., p. 96.
[66] Ibid., p. 91.
[67] Ibid., p. 89.
[68] Ibid., p. 90.
[69] Ibid., p. 92.

that Hosna's feminine beauty renders Meheimeed dimly aware of his surroundings – Mustafa's narrative is eventually, abruptly interrupted by a child's shriek.[70]

When Hosna later murders Wad Rayyes and herself, she is not only rejected personally, but associated with all women, at least for Meheimeed's grandfather – 'God curse all women!'[71] he wails. Hosna reflects a spirit of resistance to the forced marriages that are considered an accepted part of the village culture, and yet no local women support her actions – except Mabrouka, who reveals a shared will to resist: '"Good riddance!" she said [. . .] "Women, let everyone of you go about her business. Wad Rayyes dug his grave with his own hands, and Bint Mahmoud, God's blessings be upon her, paid him out in full." Then she gave trilling cries of joy'.[72] What we can perhaps see, in this suggestion that she cannot be 'read' or her actions foreseen, in the fact that she seems foreign to the villagers, and in the concealment of her resistance in literal and figurative obscurity, is a challenge to the purported 'simplicity' of Wad Hamed's people and fixedness of the village's established patriarchy and customs – a 'simplicity' that designates any fissures in its stability as extrinsic elements. Even Mahjoub, whom Meheimeed describes as 'the salt of the earth',[73] performs the novel's most iconic image of hybridity, as P.Geesey notes: 'separat[ing] a young shoot from the base of the tree [. . .] its roots hav[ing] to remain intact'.[74] The point to note here, is that Hosna's 'difference,' her supposedly excentric nature, is an undercurrent, and constituent part, of

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., p. 123.
[72] Ibid., p. 128.
[73] Ibid., p. 99.
[74] Patricia Geesey, 'Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim al-hijra ila al-Shamal* (*Season of Migration to the North*)', *Research in African Literatures* 28.3 (1997), 128-140 (p. 137).

their own society: she is *not* an 'outsider.' However, the villagers seek to deny that such elements exist within the fabric of their own community: a challenge such as this would otherwise shatter the village's equilibrium (which it does in any event). The tragedy ensues from Meheimeed's unwillingness to act, and, crucially, his failure to register Hosna's intent.

It is not just *Season* that presents a revolutionary female as obscure or opaque, or her rebellious intentions as elusive to the narrator: *Qui se souvient de la mer*'s Nafissa – whose name (with perhaps intentional irony) means 'the place of residence'[75] – increasingly escapes both her home, and the narrator's grasp of her, through her involvement with the underground resistance movement. He speaks of her as if she were absent, even when she is with him:

> Nafissa regarde de mon côté. Avec ses yeux [. . .] ouverts sous des sourcils vigoureux, et ses lèvres arquées et fermées comme si elle retenait ses paroles, elle franchit le temps, silencieuse et durable. Singulier moment et combien révélateur : loin de moi en cet instant d'*apparente présence*, je n'ai qu'une faible intuition du lieu où elle se trouve[76]

[75] The narrator notes that 'Ce nom *nafissa*, qui a pour sens tant le lieu d'habitation que l'âme qui y trouve abri et son activité, désigne aussi notre lignée et l'enseignement qui nous est légué'. Mohammed Dib, *Qui se souvient de la mer* [1962] (Paris: Minos, La Différence, 2007), p. 150 (italics in the original). Subsequent references will be to *QSM*.
[76] Ibid., p. 54; my emphasis.

The narrator maintains this characterisation: he speaks of a shimmering entity ('l'être miroitant de Nafissa');[77] she is 'incertaine [. . .] et absente';[78] 'Elle est elle-même, et soudain une autre, [. . .] ses intentions cachées';[79] he even frankly avows that 'je ne la comprends pas'.[80] As Naget Khadda notes, the narrator even draws on a form of psychological defence to deal with this strangeness, by creating a *double*:

> pour se prémunir contre 'l'inquiétante étrangeté' de sa femme, le narrateur lui invente un double: 'l'autre qui se présente à moi chaque fois qu'elle s'absente', une 'étrangère' qui assume toute l'opacité insoutenable du nouveau personnage tandis que l'image familière de l'épouse maintient ses traits traditionnels de pureté, de douceur, de sollicitude.[81]

Here we can see a manifest effort to manage, or even occlude, Nafissa's 'opacité insoutenable' – an opacity directly associated with her covert, anticolonial resistance – by sifting out the aspects that jar with his established, and simple conception of her character. I believe this attempt to cope, by rendering Nafissa's opacity transparent, prefigures the narrator's ultimate psychological withdrawal (to the, perhaps imaginary, underground city) that I considered in *Itineraries*. Wad Hamed's populace simply shuns its heterogeneous elements; *QSM*'s narrator prefers to fool himself, and so occlude such opacity. In both of these cases, however, opacity is associated with contestation, or

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[77] Ibid., p. 69.
[78] Ibid., p. 103.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., p. 55.
[81] Naghet Khadda, 'Mohammed Dib', in Charles Bonn et al., eds, *La littérature maghrébine de langue française* (Paris: EDICEF-AUPELF, 1996) <http://www.limag.refer.org/Textes/Manuref/DIB.htm> [accessed 1 June 2013].

rebellion, in a positive (if violent) sense: Nafissa's opacity masks her revolutionary intent, while Hosna's final acts uncover fissures that belie the seeming immutability of her society's customs.

The fact that *QSM*'s narrator has less purchase on Nafissa as her revolutionary involvement develops could perhaps appear at odds with an advocacy of the revolutionary cause. However, *QSM*'s narrator is not intended to represent a political actor or activist: he is, rather like Picasso's *Guernica* (whose surrealist approach to violence inspired Dib),[82] a witness to horror: indeed, he spends most of his time observing or documenting the 'événements'. Even when these observations lead to him to claim that he has decoded a secret ultimatum from the enemy, he does not take action: he decides not to divulge it, firstly for fear of not being believed, but also out of resignation, or despair: 'le sort de notre cité, sinon de la population, est déjà décidé; de ce fait, qu'ajouterait la connaissance d'un ultimatum, qui anticipe peut-être sur l'événement, mais n'apporte pas de salut ?'[83] And much like in Guernica, we are not allowed to see realistic depictions of violence. *QSM* stages its traumas opaquely – the monsters that attack the population are named (*spyrovirs*, for example), but their forms are not described; we are left to guess at what is attacking the people, and so the panic and trauma of war are figured as a faceless, ever present menace. Glissant, as I have noted, argues for an opaque narrative presentation of an history experienced 'sous les auspices du choc';[84] *QSM*'s narrator employs opacity as a psychological index of, and defence against, the horrors of occupation. It is a work, as Tremaine notes, whose 'artistic

[82] *QSM*, p. 217.
[83] Ibid., p. 169.
[84] *Le Discours antillais*, p. 131.

attention [. . .] is taken up primarily with the terrible cost [. . .] to the human psyche and with that huge section of the nation which does not choose, or actively create, but rather suffers, its own history'.[85] The 'Postface' highlights that Dib indeed saw *QSM* as 'un engagement, un affrontement total', but one that relies for this on 'des visions oniriques et apocalyptiques';[86] their opacity is what permits him to shed light on horror, as he notes: 'Ce sont les seuls projecteurs capables de jeter quelque lumière sur de tels abîmes'.[87] Just as Guernica offered a violent, yet oblique evocation of the trauma of war, *QSM*'s 'politics' is enacted not through action, but by an obscure and tragic witnessing.

Though I have focussed primarily on female characters and the connection between their opaque figuration and the questions of resistance and anti-reductionism, I shall now turn briefly to Mustafa Sa'eed himself, as his presentation draws on a thematics – of fluidity and illusion – that destabilises certain preconceptions Meheimeed held about himself and his community. Furthermore, the mirrored pairing Mustafa forms with Meheimeed[88] establishes a structural arrangement that is replicated with Jean and Hosna. This arrangement is a North-South opposition – or connection – where the actions of one character recall those of the other; and this in turn suggests that we should reflect on how these characters, and their situations, relate to each other. To return to Mustafa's presentation, then, we can firstly note, as I did in *Roots*, that Mustafa plays on his own appearance of mixed Arab-African race to arouse interest in Western women ('My face is

[85] Louis Tremaine, 'Psychic Deformity in Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer*', *Research in African Literatures* 19.3 (1988), 283-300 (p. 285).
[86] *QSM*, p. 219.
[87] Ibid., pp. 219-20.
[88] As I have previously discussed (in Roots, Origins, and the Possibility of Return), Meheimeed fears a certain dissolution of his own identity through a conflation with Sa'eed.

Arab [. . .]'[89] etc.); unlike Nedjma, however, Mustafa is perfectly happy to represent any stereotyped role, playing up to his lovers' fantasies: 'I had been transformed in her eyes into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other [. . .]. This was fine'.[90] But I want to reflect here on a different aspect of his presentation, which is his intractability. On our first meeting with Mustafa (which is to say, long after his return from London), what Meheimeed discerns is a character attempting to maintain control of his exterior expression so as to fashion a mask to hide, presumably, his former self and actions. Despite this effort, or perhaps because of it, Meheimeed will desire to uncover Mustafa's past. Meheimeed's first question, for example, tests this exterior – and disturbs it, given Mustafa's desire to keep knowledge of his past life hidden:

> I feared that the man would slip away before I had found out anything about him [. . .] – and, without thinking, the question came to my tongue: 'Is it true you're from Khartoum?'
>
> The man was slightly taken aback and I had the impression that a shadow of displeasure showed between his eyes. Nevertheless, he quickly and skilfully regained his composure. 'From the outskirts of Khartoum in actual fact,' he said to me with a forced smile. 'Call it Khartoum.'
>
> He was silent for a brief instant as though debating with himself whether he should keep quiet or say any more to me. Then I saw the mocking phantom of a smile hovering round his eyes exactly as I had seen it the first day.[91]

[89] Salih, p. 38.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., p. 10.

This mocking phantom is a persistent feature of Mustafa's presentation: it reappears when he mentions Meheimeed's grandfather,[92] and just before Mustafa begins to recount his memories, 'more distinct than ever before, something as perceptible as a flash of lightning';[93] his expression, then, is in conflict with his promise to Meheimeed that 'I am this person before you, as known to everyone in the village. I am nothing other than that – I have nothing to hide'.[94] His appearance is also associated with images of fluidity and indeterminacy. His face, for example, hovers between strength and weakness, and traditional masculinity and femininity:

> I was aware of a strange combination of strength and weakness. His mouth was loose and his sleepy eyes gave his face a look more of beauty than of handsomeness [. . .]. When his face was at rest it gained in strength; when he laughed weakness predominated. [. . .] [H]is eyes really contained a feminine beauty.[95]

When he drinks, however, the customary strength of his face dissolves: 'when he came to the third glass [. . .] [t]he strength you were aware of in his head, brow, and nose became dissolved in the weakness that flowed with the drink over his eyes and mouth'.[96] This drinking incident ends with Mustafa letting slip a memory from his past life, reciting English poetry aloud; this act not only surprises Meheimeed, it unsettles his distinction between illusion and reality: 'All of a sudden there came to me the ghastly, nightmarish

[92] Ibid., p. 11.
[93] Ibid., p. 17.
[94] Ibid., p. 16.
[95] Ibid., pp. 8-9.
[96] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

feeling that we – the men grouped together in that room – were not a reality but merely some illusion'.[97] In fact, a persistent, dramatic irony, evident in comments on Mustafa's appearance, serves to underline the futility of judging by appearance: Meheimeed reveals that 'I dismissed the idea that he was a killer – the use of violence leaves a mark on the face that the eye cannot miss',[98] while Isabella, whom Mustafa will hunt, contends that 'There's nothing to tell from your face you're a cannibal'.[99] A new awareness of the unreliability of appearance not only affects Meheimeed's conception of Mustafa, but undermines even his deep-rooted belief in the immutability of figures such as his grandfather: though Meheimeed once asserted that 'My grandfather has no secrets',[100] and is 'something immutable in a dynamic world',[101] he will come to question even this:

> And my grandfather, with his thin voice and that mischievous laugh of his [. . .], where is *his* place in the scheme of things? Is he really as I assert and as he appears to be? Is he above this chaos? I don't know.[102]

Indeed, Meheimeed eventually comes to doubt the reliance he had placed on the simplicity of life and people in Wad Hamed – a village where, for Meheimeed, 'the likes of [Mustafa] are not usually encountered'[103] – and even the *value* of such a quality in the first place: 'And thus too I experience a remote feeling of fear, fear that it is just

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[97] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[98] Ibid., p. 17.
[99] Ibid., p. 40.
[100] Ibid., p. 11.
[101] Ibid., p. 48.
[102] Ibid., p. 108.
[103] Ibid., p. 50.

conceivable that simplicity is not everything'.[104] There is in fact too great a disparity between individuals to admit of such a notion. Hosna, as we have seen, is another example, nor is she alone. If, as I have discussed in *Roots*, Mustafa and Meheimeed form an antagonistic mirroring – defined, for example, by their twin crises of origins and belonging, their similar educational trajectory, and even their relationship with Hosna – we might query why Jean and Hosna are similarly paired. As Salih himself noted in an interview, 'what happened in London repeated itself in the village'.[105] The twin fates of Jean and Hosna, each of whom finishes with a knife blade through the heart, might lead us to suspect a replication, in London and Wad Hamed, of a tragedy instigated by Mustafa's influence – the same 'contagion' striking south as it did north. However, this degree of similarity also urges us to consider the differing contexts of these mirrored acts. Jean, obsessed by the image of an Othello-like murder, appears to have an Orientalist fantasy of death at Mustafa's hands; like Mustafa, she is ultimately destroyed by an obsession with the South, in echo of Mustafa's own thirst for the 'North and the ice',[106] a victim as much as he of the 'intricate and terrifying threads of fantasy'.[107] Hosna also chooses death, but it is the *reality* of her village that compels it: given the entrenched patriarchy, and the inescapability of her forced marriage, death offers a way out. Mustafa's narrative frequently alludes to an approaching and ineluctable 'tragedy,' but it is in fact Hosna's, and not Jean's or Mustafa's, that we witness in *Season*. Their opaque representation obscures both women's motives until the last (and with Jean, is never clarified). Hosna's intended revolt remains opaque to the narrator, and the villagefolk,

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[104] Ibid.
[105] *Al-Tayyib Salih: 'abqari Al-Riwaya Al-'arabiyya*, ed. by Muhammadiyya, Ahmad Sa'eed, et al. (Beirut: Dar al-'awda, 1976), p. 133.
[106] Salih, *Season*, p. 142 (also p. 30).
[107] Ibid., p. 145.

but the tragedy results from their illusory quest for a simple, 'transparent,' and univocal community.

Section II: Narrative Opacity: Structure

II (i) *Unresolved oppositions*

At this point, I shall turn away from representations of opacity to the question of structure, insofar as textual structuring can generate an effect of opacity. To begin, I shall look at sections of text that demonstratively refuse to conclude a series of opposing (and incompatible) choices. This may take the form of two, or multiple, elements, but they must be *incompatible* – unlike, for example, rhetorical questioning, as that poses questions without answering, but the interpretation is implied by the question. By considering a couple of examples from Djebar and Salih, I hope to demonstrate how this technique of structure in turn responds to a thematic (or ideological) concern in the text.

Djebar's works frequently cite the dangers involved in the interpretation of historical materials, and the concomitant risks of occlusion, misrepresentation, and so forth. In one section of *L'Amour, la fantasia*, the narrator approaches one of the most 'unspeakable' aspects of war: the question of suspected rape. Given the culture of secrecy that often surrounds rape, together with the difficulty of interpreting evidence (whether oral or written accounts), the narrator faces a near-impossible task in recounting an incident where a French soldier, Bernard, returns at night to visit a 'jolie Fatma' who, he claims,

smiled at him that day.[108] The (extradiegetic) narrator employs an ambiguous tone throughout the description of the soldier's arrival at night, focalising the narrative through the soldier. He takes hold of her, perhaps violently ('Il la saisit aussitôt par la main, la redresse'),[109] undresses himself, and 'presse contre lui la jeune fille qui frémit, qui le serre, qui se met à le caresser'.[110] Since *frémir* can equally refer to a quiver of excitement or a shudder of fear, the narrative rests between two possibilities. The girl then kisses him and whispers to him; we cannot easily tell whether the narrative is still internally focalised (and hence the soldier's version), or whether it is the narrator's own interpretation that notes the quality of her words, 'un discours [. . .] de mots inconnus mais tendres, mais chauds, mais chuchotés. Ils coulent droit au fond de son oreille, ces mots, arabes ou berbères, de l'inconnue ardente'.[111] As the girl speaks in a foreign language, the soldier, of course, cannot understand the meaning of her words. The only reported speech is the soldier's; there are other female onlookers in the darkness, but they remain silent throughout – in effect, they become silent witnesses. The narrator in fact emphasises the impossibility of corroboration, noting the levels of narration through which the event has already passed:

> Est-ce au cours de cette descente vers la mer ou le lendemain, [. . .] qu'un certain Bernard se confie à celui qui fera le récit de ces jours d'El Aroub [. . .] ?

[108] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 236. Henceforth referred to as *L'Amour*.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., p. 237.
[111] Ibid.

> A nouveau, un homme parle, un autre écoute, puis écrit. Je bute, moi, contre leurs mots qui circulent ; je parle ensuite, je vous parle, à vous, les veuves de cet autre village de montagne, si éloigné ou si proche d'El Aroub ![112]

Neil Lazarus sees in this episode a consideration, or demonstration, of the difficulties of historiography: 'while her words and actions are manifestly meaning-bearing [. . .] we can never be sure that the interpretation that we give them, no matter how compelling and evidentially rich we make it, will be conclusive or definitive. [. . .] There will always be a gap here between "interpretation" or "adequation" on the one hand, and "how things really were", on the other. The latter, Leopold von Ranke's historiographic ideal, is constitutively irrecoverable by us'.[113] As narrator, Djebar is only left with 'les mots refroidis';[114] she provides no comment, but merely offers her readers a chance to bear witness, and in effect become a new generation of silent onlookers, thereby reproducing the position of the silent widows, and forming a further layer of historical palimpsest:

> Vingt ans après, je vous rapporte la scène, à vous les veuves, pour qu'à votre tour vous regardiez, pour qu'à votre tour, vous vous taisiez.[115]

The impossibility of interpretation here, given the lack of evidence from the girl herself, and their society's cultural and moral imperative that rape not be spoken of, is represented, then, through a narrative style that presents an unresolved choice between

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[112] Ibid., p. 236.
[113] Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 122-3.
[114] Ibid., p. 237.
[115] Ibid.

equally valid, contrasting interpretations. We might go so far as to call this a form of restricted representation – a technique that I shall consider in more detail shortly. It is often the questions of desire and violence – a thematic paring much explored in *L'Amour, la fantasia* (whose title itself refers both to love and a military manoeuvre) – that elicit this form of ambiguity from the narrator. The arrival of the French invasion fleet in June 1830, for instance, is accompanied by a pair of apparently contrasting, possible responses by Algiers' women : 'que se disent les femmes de la ville, quels rêves d'amour s'allument en elles, *ou s'éteignent à jamais*, tandis qu'elles contemplent la flotte royale [. . .] ?'[116] We might also consider the moment when the narrator of *Vaste est la prison* approaches the questions of whether a young girl has just lost her virginity to her new (and aged) husband, and, implicitly, whether she is happy or not. Here, too, we are simply presented with a series of incompatible possibilities, and no answer – the narrative thus registers the girl's impenetrable expression (her *rayonnement*), without venturing to interpret it, maintaining a careful external focalisation; it also registers, perhaps, her will to silence:

> est-ce que le vieillard fut 'en puissance,' des la première nuit [. . .] ? Les femmes ne pouvaient, comme dans les cas ordinaires, deviner, en épiant la mariée, si son visage rayonnait de secret contentement, d'une acceptation passive ou sereine, ou d'une amertume mal dominée…[117]

[116] Ibid., p. 16; my emphasis.
[117] *Vaste*, p. 211.

For the historian, these women remain silent – the task, then, is to register their position. The narrator does so, but only in a style that formally incorporates this impossibility of historical interpretation.

In *Season*, we witness a similar technique, but in reverse: rather than staging a performative irresolution of possibilities, the narrator effaces one side of a binary opposition, leaving us with a revised, 'resolved,' and reduced account. We see a conflict between the opposition implied by Mustafa's written text, and the resolution that Meheimeed brings to it; and from an ideological perspective, we can guess why. The incident I refer to is when Meheimeed encounters Mustafa's diary, which contains poetry. From the poem's appearance – 'all the crossings-out and changes'[118] – we are forewarned that its author had paid close attention to expression. The poem, however, appears to be unfinished – or at least this is what Meheimeed assumes:

> *The sighs of the unhappy in the breast do groan*
> *The vicissitudes of Time by silent tears are shown*
> *And love and buried hate the winds away have blown.*
>
> [. . .]
> *And dust and smoke the traveller's path ensnare.*
>
> *Some, souls content, others in dismay.*

[118] Salih, p. 152.

Brows submissive, others…[119]

On seeing its closing ellipsis, Meheimeed assumes that Mustafa was merely 'searching for the right word to fit the metre'.[120] Contemplating it for 'several minutes', he finally concludes it, criticising it for a play of opposites that, ironically, characterises much of *Season*:

> I gave it several minutes' thought. I did not, though, waste too much time on it, for in any case it is a very poor poem that relies on antithesis and comparisons; it has no true feeling, no genuine emotion. [. . .] I crossed out the last line of the poem and wrote in its place:
>
> *Heads humbly bent and faces turned away* [121]

So indeed, the metre now fits; but ellipsis and dual meaning are lost. If we consider Mustafa's various partners, we can clearly discern two character types: the submissive, stereotyped role-play favoured by Sheila Greenwood, Anne Hammond and Isabella Seymour, and the defiance – even rebellion – of Jean Morris (and should Mustafa have discerned it, of Hosna). By examining Mustafa's idiom elsewhere, we can confirm that he uses this locution, '*others…*', to imply a *contrast* – he introduces his tale to Meheimeed, for example, by claiming 'It's a long story, but I won't tell you everything.

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[119] Ibid., pp. 152-3.
[120] Ibid., p. 153.
[121] Ibid.

Some details won't be of great interest to you, while others…'[122] Submission and aggression are subsumed, by Meheimeed's revision, into mere passivity. This is consistent with Meheimeed's characterisation, as he is typified by inaction (as he himself notes, 'All my life I had not chosen, not decided');[123] and it is this inaction that leads to Hosna's death. In lending his own passivity to the poem, Meheimeed occludes the potential for revolt present – though unstated – in Mustafa's ellipsis. In turning an unresolved opposition into a non-opposition, Meheimeed strips the poem of its key heterogeneous element. This is in fact the *removal* of opacity, where it previously served to allude – clearly, if invisibly – to the unspeakable in Mustafa's past. Indeed, Meheimeed's textual effacement recalls the search for (a false) transparency that Glissant cautions against; while Mustafa was all too aware of female rebellion, Meheimeed's failure to register *this* resistance prefigures his subsequent failure to register, and act on, Hosna's.

II (ii): *Restricted representation*

Here I would like to expand on the notion of restricted representation, by which I mean the deliberate obfuscation of an incident in narrative through the use of omission, gaps or breaks, *paralipse*,[124] or a breakdown of form. This is 'structural' in the sense that these techniques are athematic – they could be applied elsewhere. But in the following cases, some form of trauma – be it the memory of violence, or the weight of cultural oppression

[122] Ibid., p. 19.
[123] Ibid., p. 168.
[124] As Genette, notes, 'Le type classique de la paralipse, [. . .] c'est, dans le code de la focalisation interne, l'omission de telle action ou pensée importante du héros focal'. See Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 212.

– is expressed, though not explicitly identified, through a manipulation of textual structure. We could consider these as examples, or logical extensions, of the Glissantian principle that traumatic experience should be communicated by structure as well as content.

II (ii) a) *Conflicts of form*

The account, in *Nedjma*, of Lakhdar's incarceration following the Sétif uprising, for example, offers an unlikely pairing of the alexandrine form and political executions. On closer inspection, however, we can see that the most perfect example of alexandrine form – two 6-syllable hemistitches divided by a caesura – is a refrain about the execution; otherwise, the metre teeters close to twelve syllables,[125] and is abruptly, ostentatiously broken by 'comme un veau':

Ils étaient maintenant dix-neuf dans la salle. [11]

Le coiffeur Si Khelifa hurlait toujours. [11]

La lourde porte s'était ouverte quatre fois. [13]

Tayeb n'était pas revenu. On fusillait tout près. [14]

Tout près de la prison. Tout près de la prison. [12]

Dans une verte prairie. Tout près de la gendarmerie. [15]

Mustapha s'ébrouait dans une mare d'eau noire. [13]

Un cultivateur aux yeux bleus sanglotait. [11]

[125] (In fact, besides 'comme un veau,' if we divide the syllable count (145) by the number of lines (12), we get 12.0.)

Lakhdar était monté sur le seau vide. [10]

Lakhdar présentait la narine aux barreaux. [11]

Comme un veau. [3]

Lakhdar était heureux. Heureux de sa narine. Heureux. [14]

Heureux de s'appuyer à des barreaux.[126] [10]

The penultimate line would in fact form a perfect alexandrine were it not for the addition of 'Heureux'; its repetition almost seems a wilful avoidance of standard form. The idyllic-sounding 'Dans une verte prairie' would not appear out of place in a Romantic poem, but is paired with *gendarmerie*, the scene of the torture. Only 'Tout près de la prison' is granted perfect form, and we might question the significance of this formal isolation.[127] This line, I would argue, constitutes an indirect reference to the act of execution: the horror of the act is not faced directly, but is evoked by its disturbing proximity. It allows two ideas to coalesce: the unspeakable barbarity of the execution by French police, and the poetic form brought to Algeria as part of the *mission civilisatrice*. The two ideas appear incommensurable (and a particularly grim reflection on cross-culturality); a line such as this, then, appropriates a French form while maintaining a certain unease in its use – we might compare this to the concept of a forced poetics, though here the conflict is not one with *language*, but with poetic form (this is, then, an extension of Glissantian forced poetics, but it remains a conflict of expression and *means*). The refrain of *Tout près de la prison* centres our attention on the act, while removing the

[126] *Nedjma*, p. 53 (emphasis and number of syllables added).
[127] We often find in Kateb's poetry that the alexandrine is employed to mark key lines, as if a form of emphasis or isolation (see for example *Le serpent*'s closing line ('Je passai ma jeunesse à tuer des serpents'),p.89; or the formal isolation of *Keblout et Nedjma*'s 'Ne croyez pas avoir étouffé la Casbah', p.82). Kateb Yacine, *L'Œuvre en fragments* (Paris: Sindbad, 1986).

original referent. *Nedjma* is not alone in the use of this technique – to illustrate this, I shall return briefly to *Season*, and the question of murder.

II (ii) b) *Undisclosed referents*

The repetitive fragment, closely associated with a particular referent and yet not identifying it, arises repeatedly[128] – even obsessively – in *Season*. As a poetic strategy, it allows an opaque reference to a (for example, traumatic) referent. The actual referent is the blood-stained thighs of Wad Rayyes (whom Hosna stabs repeatedly between the thighs)[129] and Jean Morris (who spreads her thighs before Mustafa stabs her)[130] – in short, the act of murder – but we are not permitted to see this. Instead, the narrator appears to enlist a metonymical substitution that focuses on 'white, wide-open thighs' rather than the sexually-tinged and bloody image of the dead bodies themselves. Though Mustafa's narrative, which he agreed to recount to Meheimeed, only reaches its conclusion towards the end of *Season*, Meheimeed has knowledge of it throughout. It therefore makes sense to us, if not to Meheimeed, why he should conflate Jean and Hosna in the following image:

> The obscene pictures sprang simultaneously to my mind, and, to my extreme astonishment, the two pictures merged: I imagined Hosna Bint Mahmoud, Mustafa Sa'eed's widow, as being the same woman in both instances: two white,

[128] See for example p. 48 ('two thighs, opened wide and white'), p. 87 ('two white, wide-open thighs), p. 111 ('The weeping of a woman under a man at dawn and two wide-open thighs'), p. 127 ('between his thighs'), and p. 163 ('her white thighs open').
[129] Ibid., p. 127.
[130] Ibid., p. 163.

> wide-open thighs in London, and a woman groaning before dawn in an obscure village on a bend of the Nile under the weight of the aged Wad Rayyes[131]

Meheimeed is haunted by the image of Jean's death, and also by the thought of Wad Rayyes possessing Hosna. Meheimeed blends the image of a woman he knows to have been murdered with that of a woman whom he loves, but who he fears will be forced to marry against her will. The unspecified time of the narrating instance complicates the issue somewhat with regard to whether the repetitive fragment's referent can be Rayyes as well as Jean – but Meheimeed's narrative is recounted (almost exclusively) in the past tense, and is ostensibly an oral narrative directed at an unidentified audience ('It was, gentlemen, after a long absence [. . .]'), which does seem to corroborate this view. Meheimeed notes that 'Such land brings forth nothing but prophets'[132] – known, of course, for their prophetic ability, but not necessarily for offering a directly interpretable message; what he does not register is the somewhat prophetic opacity of his own narrative.

II (ii) c) *Economy of expression*

Nedjma also presents us with an account typified by ellipsis, and sparseness of detail: we can relate this to Glissantian opacity in that it is a non-realist approach that refuses to

[131] Ibid., pp. 86-7.
[132] Ibid., p. 109.

give us a complete picture of the scene (let alone 'totality'); here too, it is used to represent traumatic experience, and indicates a reluctance on the narrator's part to face certain facts. One example is the narrative fragment in which Lakhdar travels with his younger brother (in a basket) and their donkey. The fragment attempts to approach its central event – a fall that leads to the loss of his brother – without noticing the stages that lead up to it (and hence, Lakhdar's culpability). What we see instead is a trancelike repetitiveness of narration that evokes Lakhdar's drowsiness, and that recounts the event in a series of simple, isolated images:

Non.

Il faut lutter contre les rêves.

Lakhdar paie le prix de la baignade et de la veillée.

L'âne boit.

Lakhdar tient la bride.

Le petit frère est heureux.

Lakhdar rêve.

L'âne boit longtemps.

Lakhdar se détourne du frère pour manger la figue.

L'âne boit.

Le soleil monte.

L'âne fait un écart.

'Ce sont les taons,' rêve Lakhdar.

L'âne fait un pas. Il glisse, comme volontairement, sur les galets.

Le petit frère tombe dans la rivière.

Il tombe malade à la maison.[133]

We can discern a similar economy of expression in the depiction of the outbreak of violence at Sétif. The contrast of prose style is fairly evident if we consider the preceding sentences:

> On peut, fort de tant de moustaches, de pieds cornus, toiser les colons, la police, la basse-cour qui prend la fuite.
>
> Un agent de la sûreté, dissimulé à l'ombre d'une arcade, tire sur le drapeau.
>
> *Mitraille*.
>
> Les Cadres flottent.
>
> Ils ont laissé désarmer les manifestants à la mosquée, par le commissaire, aidé du muphti.
>
> Chaises.
>
> Bouteilles.
>
> Branches d'arbres taillées en chemin.
>
> Les Cadres sont enfoncés.
>
> *Contenir le peuple à sa première manifestation massive ?*[134]

Though this form of narration does directly consider its object, it only offers us glimpses of it – faced with the enormity of narrating such chaos, the narrator presents a succession

[133] *Nedjma*, p. 190.
[134] Ibid., pp. 217-18.

of disparate fragments. The lack of apparent order renders us incapable of determining what will follow; in this, we might recall Glissant's cautioning against the constraints (and demands) of a linear narrative when recounting the 'chaos de la mémoire'.

II (ii) d) *Paralipse*

So far, I have considered structural effects that function through indirect reference, or that limit the range of focalisation to the extent of fragmenting the object of study. Here I wish to turn to the question of *paralipse*, Genette's term for the omission of an important thought or action from an internally focalised narrative. It also allows opacity to operate within a *realist* framework, narrating while occluding the main issue (an issue the speaker is under pressure not to express). We can see this in operation in Dib's *Un Eté africain* (a novel that considers family life, and patriarchal pressure, in Algeria against the backdrop of the French occupation) if we consider Yamna's attitude towards the plan to marry off her daughter Zakya, who is unwilling, and makes this clear to her mother:

> - Que faire ? Le mal se prend en patience, et on vainc mieux le sort par le silence.
> - C'est avec cette sagesse que vous nous paralysez. Il n'y a qu'à s'habituer à ne pas respirer et puis dire que l'air n'existe pas. Oublier le mal, oublier la fatalité à laquelle nous sommes vouées : c'est là tout ce que tu me proposes ?[135]

Yamna proposes resignation, which Zakya rejects. In the dialogue that follows – one framed by our knowledge that the mother is as aware of her daughter's view as the father

[135] *Un été africain*, p. 101.

is oblivious of it – the father speaks at length in favour of the marriage, while Zakya remains silent. When directly questioned, ('Mais toi… qu'est-ce que tu en penses ?'),[136] Zakya avoids answering the question, offering only an enumeration of wedding paraphernalia that is ready: 'Pour ce qui est de moi, tout est prêt depuis longtemps : son trousseau est complet, il n'y manque pas une taie d'oreiller [. . .]'[137] – the only thing that is *not* ready, as we know, is her daughter. Eventually, she capitulates to the idea of the marriage:

> – Fébrile:
>
> C'est entendu, acquiesce Yamna.[138]

This appears to be the obvious subtext of the scene: it centres on a clear dramatic irony, the father oblivious of Zakya's wishes, the reader and Yamna cognisant. However, what forms a concurrent *paralipse* is the as-yet unspoken (and later never fully avowed) resistance Yamna felt to her *own* marriage proposal. This is never explicitly stated by Yamna herself; we sense it, however, in her muted response to her mother in law, Mme Raï, who robustly supports the proposed marriage and the status quo, and who cites an initial reluctance that she believes they have both left behind:

> – A votre idée, que faut-il faire ?
>
> – Eh ! Il n'y a qu'à laisser passer… Elles sont toutes comme ça. Et moi, toi, nous avons joué la même comédie à nos parents. [. . .]

[136] Ibid., p. 103.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

– Bien sûr ; il ne peut pas en être autrement.[139]

Mme Raï continues, and Yamna voices some reserve – but then backtracks and blames her daughter's wilfulness on her education:

– [. . .] Elle séchera ses larmes, et ça ira mieux. [. . .]
– Hésitante, Yamna conteste avec amertume :
– C'est que, voyez-vous, Zakya me donne du souci. Elle est triste et préoccupée [. . .]. Il a fallu que ces maudites études viennent lui corrompre le cœur ![140]

When faced with Mme Raï's closing arguments, we might read in Yamna's pause that she is less supporting Mme Raï's views than reflecting on them with a resigned pessimism:

– Et qu'est-ce qu'une femme non mariée ? Hein !... Moins que rien !
– Moins que rien… c'est vrai.
– Une femme ne doit vivre que pour son mari, sa maison, ses enfants [. . .]. Il n'y a que les… filles perdues qui, pour leur malheur, ne se conforment pas à cette sainte loi. Mais qui est-ce [qui][141] fait cas d'elles, celles-là, ou les respecte ? Personne !
– Personne.[142]

[139] Ibid., p. 106.
[140] Ibid.
[141] 'que' in the original text corrected to 'qui'.
[142] Ibid., p. 107.

This conversation, occurring after the dialogue with Zakya's father, encourages us to reappraise her earlier silence and acquiescence: it was perhaps not just her knowledge of Zakya's wishes, but her memory of the same conflict years before. If we return to the start of the chapter, however – an apparently benign description of Yamna gardening and singing – the words of her song speak, in fact, of a longing for love and eternal (but in reality, lost) youth:

> Entre le chant et la parole, elle fredonne tout bas:
>
> > [. . .] *Une voix s'élève soudain*
> > *Et me répond dans la lumière*
> > *Infinie et toute tremblante :*
> > *'Au fil des saisons que les ans*
> > *Passent, mais jeune je demeure*
> > *Jeune je renais ; aussi jeune*
> > *Que ce jour encore trempé*
> > *De rosée et froid. Aime-moi !*'
>
> Yamna jette des regards autour d'elle comme si, inquiète soudain, elle voulait s'assurer qu'elle est seule. [. . .] Pourquoi des peurs si bizarres fondent-elles sur vous [. . .] ? [. . .] Rassérénée, elle retourne à son occupation.

Et le vent reprend : aime-moi…[143]

Yamna's song appears to establish a deeper, and unavowed, subtext to the scene with her husband; its formulation as a song, however, initially conceals its import. Only in retrospect do we reappraise what *had* passed for absentminded meanderings as, rather, Yamna's own regrets, betrayed by her *fredonnement*. Indeed, a direct, literal interpretation of her conversations will not reveal her disagreement. *Paralipse* operates as an absence in the text; the 'presence' of the occluded issue cannot be readily confirmed. And yet it is Yamna's *lack* of communication that comes closest to doing so. One might argue that, small as it is, this *paralipse* symbolises the unspoken failure of revolt, against enforced marriage and the pressure to comply (and not speak out), in her own generation – a failure that is present but unspoken (or occluded), and here mirrored and reenacted through an absence that forms part of the text. Glissant argued that an opaque method may be better suited to communicating the deeper structures of oppression; in the Algerian context, patriarchal oppression is a key example. The political valency of this *paralipse* is in its structural replication of the *impossibility* of debate. In *Un Eté africain*, then, we find a form of opacity (in a realist narrative) that exposes a particular structure of oppression, but indirectly, and through *form* – in short, the poetic strategy that Glissant advocates, even though the narrative mode differs. As with Dib's *Qui se souvient*, this is not an optimistic use of opacity; as Glissant notes, opacity does not 'solve' structures of oppression. But we might reflect on Sartre's argument that readers should feel a responsibility when faced with 'l'objet [. . .] mis à

[143] Ibid., pp. 95-97.

nu':[144] in Dib's case, an urgent political question arises despite – indeed, as a result of – the absence of any such unveiling. The broader question that this raises, given the novel's closing image of a hesitant, shadow-strewn Zakya, is implicit: will the next generation be any different?

Section III : linguistic opacity

III (i) *Language as a veil*

Glissant's presentation of linguistic opacity, as I outlined in my introduction, does not necessarily involve any conflict or unease in the use of a particular language; rather, it points to the acknowledgement of certain incommensurabilities that exist between languages, and asserts the danger of attributing characteristics to languages on an ideological basis – clarity or a humanistic mission to French, and so forth. We see in Djebar's writing, besides her extensive reflections on her choice of French over Arabic (or indeed Berber), an assertion of certain linguistic strategies in Arabic that overlap in several respects with Glissant's *bienheureuse opacité*, and even some of his reflections on the opacity of Creole expression. Although Glissant's reflections on the early stages of Creole point to a more specifically *combative* function of language, one that he terms 'détour' – a form of linguistic 'camouflage' designed to confuse the French interlocutor through overly dense wordplay ('[La langue créole] roule de calembour en calembour, d'assonance en assonance, de quiproquo en double sens, etc.')[145] – we can, nevertheless,

[144] 'l'écrivain a choisi de dévoiler le monde et singulièrement l'homme aux autres hommes pour que ceux-ci prennent en face de l'objet ainsi mis à nu leur entière responsabilité'. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*? (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 29.
[145] *Le Discours antillais*, p. 33.

discern an analogous strategy of camouflage in Arabic. The difference is that such linguistic camouflage, for Djebar, responds to an 'ingroup' desire, rather than as a combative response to the risk of domination by 'un Autre' through assimilation ('[une] domination [. . .] occultée [. . .] parce que le mode de domination (l'assimilation) est le meilleur des camouflages').[146] Djebar notes that discussions in Arabic, when dealing with deeply personal subjects, employ an indirect means of expression, refusing to explicitly identify the matter in hand, but thereby at least permitting its (oblique) expression, and perhaps catharsis:

> Jamais le 'je' de la première personne ne sera utilisé : la voix a déposé, en formules stéréotypées, sa charge de rancune et de râles échardant la gorge. Chaque femme [. . .] s'est apaisée dans l'écoute collective. De même pour la gaieté, ou le bonheur – qu'il s'agit de faire deviner ; la litote, le proverbe, jusqu'aux énigmes ou à la fable transmise, toutes les mises en scène verbales se déroulent pour égrener le sort, ou le conjurer, mais jamais le mettre à nu.[147]

We see here, in fact, remarkably similar strategies to the *ruse* strategies of Creole. Where it differs is the context: here it is the socio-cultural imperative to maintain discretion – indeed, an impetus to 'veil' one's language by opaque forms of reference. Despite its being a closed circle of sympathetic women, this ever-present imperative represents an implicit danger – one that does, in fact, speak to Glissant's focus on external domination. Consider, for example, that when such groups broach the subject of rape, it cannot be

[146] Ibid., p. 32.
[147] *L'Amour*, p. 176.

mentioned explicitly, but is only evoked through the euphemistic terms 'dommage' or 'blessure':[148] this *requirement* for discretion, the foundation of this sense that rape is not a subject that can be frankly 'mis à nu', can, as Soheilla Ghaussy notes, also suggest the workings of a form of domination under the guise of custom:

> In *Fantasia* silence is not, however, simply proclaimed as protest. Silence, imposed onto women and enforced and justified by 'custom' and 'tradition,' is also damaging and stifling, as Djebar illustrates when she re-creates the voices of her Arabic sisters [narrating] their experiences of rape and violence[149]

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Djebar's reflections on linguistic 'veiling' arise in a variety of contexts, reflecting something of the ambiguity of the veil trope in her corpus – it can serve, for example, as protection from the male gaze (and we see this literal formulation reworked, for instance, in Djebar's reflections on language (choice), desire, and aphasia),[150] or indeed as an element of rebellion (literally so in its use by the 'porteuses de feu').[151]

III (ii) *Forced poetics*

Considering that the polylingual background of each of the writers of my corpus, and the specific (and much considered) question of the colonial provenance of their 'foreign'

[148] Ibid., p. 226.
[149] Soheila Ghaussy, 'A stepmother tongue: "Feminine writing" in Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*', *World Literature Today* 68.3 (1994), 457-462 (p.461).
[150] See for example *L'Amour*, p. 145.
[151] Assia Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* [1980] (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 253.

language, we might expect to find evidence at points of a certain unease in its handling. And indeed we do, whether in the 'parodie burlesque'[152] of Si Mokhtar's handling of foreign languages (in (deliberately mangled) French,[153] *sabir*,[154] or the language of the Ulemas), or in Djebar's negotiating the pitfalls of 'l'exercice de l'autobiographie dans la langue de l'adversaire d'hier'.[155] But to focus the question, I shall largely limit discussion here to a set topos – one that often functions as a crucible for this issue, and its instrument of dissemination: the classroom.

The experience of learning the colonial language is not usually presented in an adversarial tone with these narrators (though for that, we might turn to the narrator Driss's rebellious *devoir sur table* at the close of *Le Passé simple*);[156] on the contrary, they show an eagerness to learn. *Season*'s Mustafa is prodigious in English, and has an insatiable desire to learn; *Nedjma*'s Mustapha falls in love with his teacher – and also, as Yves Baumstimler observes, with the seductive potential of the French language: 'une séduction bien trouble: celle de la langue française et celle de l'étrangère'.[157] This being so does not mean, however, that the classroom is not also a site of alienation. The facility

[152] Charles Bonn, *Le Roman algérien contemporain de langue française : espaces de l'énonciation et productivité des récits*, Thèse de doctorat d'Etat (Université de Bordeaux 3, 1982) <http://www.limag.refer.org/Theses/Bonn/ThesEtat1ePartie.htm > [accessed 1 January 2013].
[153] 'ne prononçant jamais un mot de français sans l'estropier comme par principe'. *Nedjma*, p. 99.
[154] When Si Mokhtar rails in front of a French customs officer, he exclaims '*L'enterr'ment di firiti / i la cause di calamiti*'. *Nedjma*, p. 114.
[155] *L'Amour*, p. 241.
[156] Driss Ferdi parodies the rigid structural norms of French scholastic method in his final examination, on the subject *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* : '*Délimitation du sujet* : a) [. . .] le Maroc, pays d'avenir, le soleil, le couscous [. . .], les bananiers, les flèches empoisonnées, les Indiens [. . .]… alors que vient foutre là-dedans la devise de la République Française ?' (p. 195). His spirited rebellion impresses his examiner, the headmaster ('c'est donc vous le Luther marocain ? [. . .] Cette habileté, [. . .] cette violence "sérieuse"' (p. 202)), before Driss mocks him and walks out (p.205). Driss Chraïbi, *Le Passé simple* (Paris: Denoël, 1954).
[157] Charles Bonn and Yves Baumstimler, eds, *Psychanalyse et texte littéraire au Maghreb* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), p. 18.

with which Mustafa is able to 'contort his mouth and thrust out his lips'[158] to pronounce the consonant clusters of English sets him apart from his peers, making him appear different – indeed, the nickname he acquires, 'the black Englishman'[159] (an echo perhaps of the Black Victorians) confers on Mustafa a tongue in cheek change of nationality. And though he argues at the time that 'I was as cold as a field of ice, nothing in the world could shake me,'[160] we should weigh this against his later psychological *reversal*: as we have seen, he finally attempts to come 'home,' in a desperate but failed attempt to return to his roots. Mustapha's (first) classroom scene in *Nedjma* ruminates on French words with an admiration that borders on fetishism – Mustapha luxuriates in the sound, and identifiably French character of certain words:

> Mlle Dubac.
>
> Cliquetis du nom idéal.
>
> [. . .] Dubac Paule. On boit son prénom comme de l'air. On le fait revenir. On le lance loin. Paule. Malheur de s'appeler Mustapha.[161]

We see, then, that this admiration is effectively based on a sense of linguistic or cultural inferiority; Mustapha is alienated from his culture, his language, and perhaps himself. While the scene does not necessarily identify the French classroom as the *source* of this alienation, it appears to concentrate Mustapha's sense of an unequal relationship between his language and culture, and France's. We witness this again as Mustapha's narration

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[158] Salih, p. 53.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., p. 22.
[161] *Nedjma*, p. 194.

progresses from a fascination with the foreign quality of new words (*fiancé*, and perhaps *shoote*) to a series of stark, even Manichaean contrasts of the French and Arab populations in Algeria, and of their respective cultures:

> Malheur de s'appeler Mustapha. Française. France. [. . .] Son fiancé joue au ballon. Il shoote fort. Fiancé. Français. Moi je suis un Arabe. Mon père est instruit. Il a une canne. Ma mère s'appelle Ouarda. Rose en français. Elle sort pas. Elle lit pas. Elle a des souliers en bois. Rose. France.[162]

In fact, this sense of a disparity will only seem to progress, for Mustapha. His punctilious enumeration of his progress in French grammar comes to serve as an ironic counterpoint to the grim realities of his domestic life. He notes, for example, his felicitous employment of the pluperfect subjunctive to describe the systemic racism his father faces at work,

> si mon père n'était Arabe, il eût été maréchal ; oui, j'en suis au subjonctif [163]

and his mastery of natural sciences to more accurately recount the domestic violence he witnesses at home:

> la glace de l'armoire a été brisée, l'os de ma mère a été fêlé, le tibia (je suis premier en sciences naturelles)[164]

[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid., p. 199.

In *Season*, however, the unease only takes hold at a later point. At first, advancement in language was simply a necessary step for Mustafa Sa'eed,[165] a means to an end: Europe. He likewise pushed aside qualms that 'schools were started so as to teach us to say "Yes" in their language'.[166] It is only later that he appears to lament his earlier pangs of wanderlust and seek an illusory homeland in Wad Hamed. However, the fact that he maintains a hidden trove of English texts and artefacts, and also refuses to respond in kind when Meheimeed addresses him in English ('do you think we've become anglicized?'),[167] indicates a reluctance to be recognised as cross-cultural in Wad Hamed. Perhaps he does not believe he would be accepted by the village community, or could not lead a 'simple' life like Meheimeed's grandfather, who, Sa'eed contends, 'has lived simply and will die simply';[168] perhaps his hidden affections for the North undermine any chance of living in such simplicity (one which, as we have seen, is illusory in any case). For Sa'eed, the adoption of another language forms a key component of a larger range of factors that both drive him from the Sudan and make him, at least in his view, inassimilable on his return.

Mustapha's concerns are different. He demonstrates at once a desire to appropriate French – a desire that, in its extreme form, transmutes into a cultural and linguistic inferiority complex. A second, fundamental problem for Mustapha – one that, as we shall see, Djebar's work also invokes – is a sense of incommensurability between the

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[164] Ibid.
[165] Henceforth 'Sa'eed' in this section, to avoid confusion with *Nedjma*'s Mustapha.
[166] Salih, p. 95.
[167] Ibid., p. 15.
[168] Ibid., p. 41.

world of the colonial school and the realities of life in Algeria; there is no meaningful connection between the community and the educational apparatus. Consider, for example, the colonial school's calendar, which does not respect the Muslim holy day of *Mouloud*; Mustapha turns up simply to register his non-participation in that day's essay, offering only a blank copy:

> … Cher Maître je ne remettrai pas la copie… c'est aujourd'hui le Mouloud… Nos fêtes ne sont pas prévues dans vos calendriers. [. . .] J'étais sûr d'être premier à la composition… [. . .] Je remettrai feuille blanche.[169]

Ultimately, it makes no *difference* whether Mustapha, as he claims, 'dépasse tous les Français de ma classe';[170] he realises that, whatever his achievements in French or natural sciences, the educational system cannot prevail over a systemic racism that elevates the Frenchman over the native. As Mustapha argues in a composition, later read back to him at a disciplinary meeting with the headmaster,

> *On sait bien qu'un Musulman incorporé dans l'aviation balaie les mégots des pilotes, et s'il est officier, même sorti de Polytechnique, il n'atteint au grade de colonel que pour ficher ses compatriotes au bureau de recrutement*[171]

Mustapha's education reveals both the allure, and the alienation that enlisting the French language presents; he highlights the incommensurability present in the system of French

[169] *Nedjma*, p. 209.
[170] Ibid., p. 199,
[171] Ibid., p. 210,

linguistic and cultural dissemination; and he correctly discerns a camouflaged form of domination in the unavowed racism of colonial society. What we see then, is a multilayered system of domination: where the narrator performs a conscious, critical (and at times ironic) reflection on the value of using the colonial language, we witness the unease that Glissant's *poétique forcée* gestures to, whereas when we see its actual practice in the classroom, we see the unconscious *result* of this domination.

Djebar's semi-autobiographical writings on language present perhaps the most ambivalent treatise on the use of the French language of any of these authors. Certainly we can discern evidence of Glissant's *poétique forcée* – as, for example, in her assertion that the French language offers her no suitable vocabulary for expressing desire (indeed, Djebar declares in an interview that 'dès que j'étais dans un besoin d'expression amoureuse [. . .] le français devenait un désert');[172] and yet, in *Vaste est la prison*, she feels anxiety in reverting to Arabic for the same purpose: '"l'Aimé" (est-ce que je me trahis moi-même, pensant ce dernier mot en langue arabe ?).'[173] We can also see in her recollections of the colonial French class an attestation of cultural negation – one that might recall Mustapha's alienation at the effacement of the Mouloud, or indeed Glissant's caution against a homogenising cultural 'transparency.' As Djebar's narrator explains, local cultural reference is effaced by the unfamiliar French context:

> J'écris et je parle français au-dehors : mes mots ne se chargent pas de réalité charnelle. J'apprends des noms d'oiseaux que je n'ai jamais vus, [. . .] En ce sens,

[172] Lise Gauvin, *L'Ecrivain francophone à la croisée des langues: entretiens* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1997), p. 24.
[173] *Vaste*, p. 28.

> tout vocabulaire me devient absence, exotisme sans mystère [. . .]. [D]ans la rue française, les parents marchent tout naturellement côte à côte… Ainsi, le monde de l'école est expurgé du quotidien de ma ville natale tout comme de celui de ma famille. A ce dernier est dénié tout rôle référentiel.[174]

The contrasting option to this negation is the (Quran-based) language study offered by the *école coranique*, which, from its description, often compares favourably with 'une prosaïque école française'.[175] Here, as in other parts of Djebar's corpus, the Arabic language is closely associated with the body, unlike her French, which remains 'au-dehors'. The narrator speaks of 'ingesting' the Quranic text ('comme si [. . .] l'on ingérait [. . .]'),[176] and carefully describes the physicality of the act of inscribing Arabic's sensuous liana script ('Quand la main trace l'écriture-liane, la bouche s'ouvre pour la scansion [. . .], pour la tension mnémonique autant que musculaire');[177] in turn, the language is associated with a kind of organic unity of the city itself, 'reconstructing' it in her body as she reads: 'mon corps s'enroule, retrouve quelle secrète architecture de la cité'.[178] The fantasy of an organic relationship with Arabic is also described in *Vaste est la prison*, where the narrator allows images of maternal warmth (indeed, a return to the womb) to mingle with evocations of a dense vegetative undergrowth (*halliers*) – though we should note that this is framed as a possible, but *lost* relationship (perhaps akin to the severing of the umbilical cord):

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[174] *L'Amour*, p. 208.
[175] Ibid., p. 206.
[176] Ibid., p. 207.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid., p. 208.

> l'écorchure dans l'oreille et le cœur, ce fut là le don de l'inconnue [. . .]. Par elle, la langue maternelle m'exhibait ses crocs, inscrivait en moi une fatale amertume… Dès lors, où trouver mes halliers, comment frayer un étroit corridor dans la tendresse noire et chaude, dont les secrets luisent, et les mots rutilants s'amoncellent ?
>
> Ne me faudrait-il pas mendier, plongée dans la nuit de la langue perdue et de son cœur durci [. . .] ?[179]

We must remember that this evocative passage (located, tellingly, in a chapter entitled *le silence de l'écriture*) arises after the narrator is lightly admonished for not knowing the local, female, and rebellious idiom for 'husband,' *l'édou* (literally, 'the enemy'). Djebar's own severance from the world of the harem, and her time overseas, entailed a disconnection from this female community: this, I believe, is why the narrator evokes this trope of separation from the mother. Such an image enacts a filial anxiety for reconnection, the impossibility of which echoes Djebar's own choice of 'la lumière [. . .] le dehors et le risque'[180] over the darkness of the harem.

Given Djebar's extensive self-interrogation over her election (and manipulation) of French, and the limitations it sometimes poses, we might be forgiven for concluding that there is a particularly neat fit with Glissant's view of a *poétique forcée*. One issue, however, needs to be addressed, as Glissant makes explicit reference to Algeria and Arabic in his *Discours*. He contrasts the greater danger of occlusion faced by languages

[179] *Vaste*, p. 15.
[180] *L'Amour*, p. 208

such as Martinican Creole compared to that of languages that can rely on a cultural hinterland ('un arrière-pays culturel').[181] Given the difficulty (or impossibility) faced by slaves arriving in Martinique of drawing on a shared cultural or linguistic heritage, they cannot rely on a later reversion to any such hinterland, and so risk the danger of their maternal languages being 'écrasée[s]'[182] by the official language. Arabic, in Glissant's view, offers this redemptive potential in Algeria, where 'le problème est relativement "simple": il faudra recouvrer la langue et la culture nationales en les soumettant à la critique créatrice de la pensée politique'.[183] But as the FLN's post-1970s policy of 'Arabisation'[184] demonstrated, Algeria also faces the risk of occlusion of one language by another, given the marginal role this programme attributed to Berber (and also French). To return to *L'Amour, la fantasia*, we can see, in the narrator's allusion to a tetrapartite division of languages, each associated with a particular domain (French for secret missives, Arabic for prayer, Lybico-Berber for their pre-Islamic mother gods, and a fourth, female, rebellious language of the body),[185] a considerably greater linguistic diversity than that envisioned by the FLN. While Glissant is not wrong to identify a cultural hinterland in Algeria, his analysis does not expose the complexity and competing claims of its linguistic heritage.

[181] *Le Discours antillais*, p. 194
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] See United Kingdom: Home Office, 'Country Information Bulletin, Algeria, 2/2004,' 9 January 2004, section 3.4.4, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/415423944.html> [accessed 1 June 2013]
[185] *L'Amour*, p. 203

Conclusion

Given that Glissant's strategy of linguistic opacity centres on the recognition of difference and the refusal of reduction, it seems appropriate that the thematic and structural techniques that may be employed to this end are considerably diverse. Whether in the unspecified multiplicity of the star and polygon, the fissures and concealed rebellions suggested but not identified through darkness, or the surrealist depiction of colonial war and insurgency, a thematic approach to opacity speaks to Glissant's anti-realist leanings; we see that, while it can suit traumatised or oppressed subjects, it is also paired with resistant and rebellious ones, women in particular. Given the urgent political situations in Algeria and the Sudan evoked here, we can see how, as with Glissant, an opaque poetics can stem from, and engage with, a particular socio-political base.

And yet, at other points, we see how techniques that are perfectly reconcilable with realism can serve the same end: the fixed, objective focalisation that presides over Yamna's unspoken inner conflict proves equally effective at discreetly negotiating, without naming, particular structures of oppression. Glissant was in fact wrong to assert that realism 'ne serait pas inscrit dans le réflexe culturel des peuples africains ou américains'[186] – this is both essentialising and disproven by the existence of Martinican (and African and American) realism – but as we have seen, his poetic strategy of non-realist, opaque literary forms in the context of oppression or trauma is often favoured by the above writers, in response to analogous pressures.

[186] *Le Discours antillais*, p. 198.

On a structural level, strategies such as elision of detail, calculated omission, a stylised reduction of detail, or restriction of focalisation all allow for the representation of trauma without the necessity of full revelation. One could argue that this is an example of form responding to a particular characteristic of trauma, which is the difficulty victims face in relating it; techniques such as the undisclosed referent, for example, evoke this form of conflict in narration. And the question of what language to begin narrating in, for narrators such as Djebar, is repeatedly posed without positing an answer – the communication of this anxiety, in this instance, is conveyed more in the act of questioning than in settling on a final response. These opaque narrative strategies – thematic and structural – mirror Glissant's aesthetic principle that although literature should engage with structures of alienation and oppression, and attempt to reveal them to us, this revelation cannot always be made in a direct manner.

We might, however, question the morality of *not* fully recounting the horrors of violence or the workings of oppression, be it colonial, patriarchal, or otherwise. This is a point of debate among 'trauma theorists' – a Freudian literary critical movement that Irene Visser sees divided between those, such as Cathy Caruth, who consider trauma narratives as 'aporetic' (the 'aporetic notion is grounded firmly in the deconstructive origin of cultural trauma theory which posits that trauma necessarily resists or defies narrative and exegesis'),[187] versus those, such as Judith Herman, who argue in favour of a therapeutic retelling through narrative: 'This contrast – which Luckhurst terms the "flat

[187] Irene Visser, 'Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Studies', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47.3 (2011), 270-282 (p. 274).

contradiction" in trauma theory[188] – raises questions about the nature of trauma narrative: whether it is aporetic, leading to increased indeterminacy and impossibility, or whether it is therapeutic, enabling a "working through" and eventual resolution of trauma.'[189] I would argue, instead, that one answer to this quite legitimate moral and artistic concern – and one reason to employ opacity – is that after a certain point, the *reader* (of such horrors) is inclined to 'switch off'; and as psychologists such as Paul Slovic maintain, the point at which we do this may be surprisingly early[190] (hence the effectiveness of, for example, charity appeals that rely on the image of a single child's distress even if thousands of people are in fact concerned). Furthermore, overtly 'mapping' a particular issue onto a fictional character – the question of Algeria in Nedjma's case, for example, or a potential North-South identity conflict in Mustafa Sa'eed – presents distinct dangers of misrepresentation, and though these characters are in some respects associated with these issues, they cannot be defined by them. To this end, an opaque presentation that purposefully avoids a final position may be politically prudent; Nedjma's *bienheureuse opacité* therefore possesses a demonstrable, and positive, political function. We also see, in *QSM* (which eschews realism on the same basis that Glissant does) that it is not only political *actors* who communicate a political message, but also witnesses: there is a clear element of protest in its (opaque) depiction of colonialism's psychological trauma; *QSM*'s opaque approach at once communicates the horror, and mirrors the narrator's inability to face it directly. Opacity can carry a profound political charge, even if it is anything but *bienheureuse*. Nor does Glissant's 'droit à l'opacité' posit opacity itself as

[188] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 82.
[189] Visser, p. 274.
[190] Slovic focuses, for example, on popular comprehension of the genocide of Darfur. See Paul Slovic, 'If I look at the mass I will never act: Psychic numbing and genocide', *Judgment and Decision Making*, 2.2 (2007), 79-95, <http://journal.sjdm.org/vol2.2.htm> [accessed 1 June 2013].

the point at which we must stop interpretation: as the tragedy of *Season* illustrates, the registering of opacity also implies an obligation to recognise that even the appearance of simplicity or univocity may disguise countercurrents that we would be well advised to heed.

Looking in the mirror: the mechanics of polyphony in Kateb, Salih and Djebar

L'harmonie majestueuse ne prévaut pas ici

(*Le Discours antillais*)[1]

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent,

Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,

(Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondances*)

Creating polyphony, as the critic Edward Said has noted, is a little like playing God. The degree of complexity in a polyphonic (or contrapuntal)[2] work requires of its creator a deep understanding of structure, of how the many parts work together to generate a whole:

> For the essence of counterpoint is simultaneity of voices, preternatural control of resources, apparently endless inventiveness. In counterpoint a melody is always in the process of being repeated by one or another voice [. . .]

[1] Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 199.

[2] The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* observes that 'Polyphony is largely synonymous with counterpoint, except for a difference in emphasis' (s.v. Polyphony); 'music which is made up of individual melodic strands woven together is contrapuntal or polyphonic' (s.v. Counterpoint). The usage of 'counterpoint' (from Latin, *punctus contra punctum*: 'note against note or, properly interpreted, [. . .] melody against melody' (ibid.)) is particularly common when describing classical music (which is why Said uses it here), but in terms of music theory, there is no difference in signification: they designate the same technique and can be used interchangeably in the forthcoming contexts. Any counterpoint composition, such as a fugue, is by definition polyphonic. Willi Apel ed., *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd edn (London: Heinemann Educational, 1970).

> Any series of notes is thus capable of an infinite set of transformations, as the series (or melody or subject) is taken up by one voice then by another, the voices always continuing to sound against, as well as with, all the others [. . .]
> For the rules of counterpoint are so demanding, so exact in their detail as to seem divinely ordained [. . .]. To master counterpoint is therefore in a way almost to play God[3]

The 'exploded' discourse that we associate chiefly with Modernism, and particularly with works like *Nedjma*, may seem a world apart from the complex and rigorously ordered structure of classical musical polyphony. The Seuil first edition of *Nedjma* was prefaced with an editorial *avertissement*, advising the reader not to be disturbed by the novel's 'procédés narratifs [. . .] parfois déconcertants pour le lecteur européen',[4] for this structure, in their view, reflected a circular, uniquely Arab conception of time.[5] We would hardly expect to warn the novice listener of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* of impending contrapuntal complexity: we are, quite rightly, expected to adapt. And as Louis Tremaine has highlighted, the idea that *Nedjma* 'would result naturally from the fact that Kateb, as an Arab, is a "circular thinker"' has been variously refuted: it is 'an assertion that is both arbitrary and unverifiable and whose philosophical and historical validity has been discounted by such respected scholars as Mohamed Aziz Lahbabi and

[3] Edward Said, *Music at the Limits: three decades of essays and articles on music* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 5.
[4] Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Seuil, 1956), *Avertissement*.
[5] It is, they assert, an 'attitude purement arabe de l'homme face au temps. La pensée européenne se meut dans une durée linéaire; la pensée arabe évolue dans une durée circulaire ou chaque détour est un retour, confondant l'avenir et le passé dans l'éternité de l'instant.'

Abdallah Laroui'.[6] As I noted in *Opacity*, at one point in the *Discours antillais*, Glissant suggests that *realism* is not in the cultural impulse of the Antillean people,[7] thereby falling somewhat into the same deterministic trap. Similarly, in terms of structure, the 'impressionnante harmonie'[8] of a work like Proust's *Recherche* is, in Glissant's view, a foreign concept. However, the structural approach that Glissant recommends to writers considering, for example, the chaos and confusion of the slave-trade, is not culturally deterministic: it is an artistic approach formulated to best represent such conditions; its eschewal of 'linear' narrative and straightforward chronology is a conscious, voluntary strategy on the author's part. Here it is as Glissant presents it:

> notre temps poétique ou romanesque ne recouvre pas cette impressionnante harmonie que par exemple Proust a reconstituée. Beaucoup d'entre nous n'ont jamais fréquenté leur temps historique ; nous l'avons seulement éprouvé. [. . .] Notre quête de la dimension temporelle ne sera donc ni harmonieuse ni linéaire. Elle cheminera dans une *polyphonie de chocs dramatiques*, au niveau du conscient comme de l'inconscient, entre des données, des 'temps' disparates, discontinus, dont le lié n'est pas évident. L'harmonie majestueuse ne prévaut pas ici.[9]

Glissant in fact extends this preference for a polyphony of dramatic shocks, for fragmentation, irruption, and non-linear narrative, to all the novels 'des Amériques'; but

[6] Louis Tremaine, 'The Absence of Itinerary in Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*', *Research in African Literatures* 10.1 (1979), 16-39 (p. 23).
[7] Glissant, p.198.
[8] Ibid., p. 199.
[9] Ibid. (my emphasis).

his implicit association is still, chiefly, with the legacy and influence of colonisation (we can note how he introduces the other Americas though caveats such as *même en ce qui concerne*). Glissant gestures to a purposefully fragmented form of narrative structure, elected as a poetic response to their experience of (historical) time:

> je tâcherai de dire autour de quelles données il me semble que l'ouvrage du romancier s'articule *volontiers* dans les Amériques. Une obsession essentielle, oui, que je résume ainsi : la crispation du temps. Je crois que la hantise du passé [. . .] est un des référents essentiels [. . .]. Ce qui 'se passe' en fait, c'est qu'il semble qu'il s'agisse de débrouiller une chronologie qui s'est embuée, quand elle n'a pas été oblitérée pour toutes sortes de raisons, *en particulier coloniales*. Le romancier américain [. . .] n'est pas du tout à la recherche d'un temps perdu, mais se trouve, se débat, dans un temps éperdu. Et, de Faulkner à Carpentier, on est en présence de sortes de fragments de durée [. . .]. Confronter le temps, c'est donc ici en nier la linéarité. Toute chronologie est trop immédiatement évidente, et dans l'œuvre du romancier américain il faut se battre contre le temps pour la reconstitution d'un passé, *même en ce qui concerne* les régions d'Amérique où la mémoire historique n'a pas été oblitérée. [. . .] [N]ous sommes les casseurs de pierre du temps. Nous ne le voyons pas s'étirer dans notre passé [. . .] mais faire irruption en nous par blocs, charroyés dans les zones d'absence où nous devons difficilement, douloureusement, tout recomposer[10]

[10] Ibid., pp. 254-5 (my emphasis).

My point of departure in this chapter is the argument that, although writers such as Kateb and Djebar reject an ordered chronology in their works in just such a manner as Glissant describes, the multiple voices and narrative threads are nonetheless tied together in a variety of different and identifiable ways (hence my chapter title, *Polyphony*). In short, I agree with Glissant that these are 'exploded' narratives – but this observation should be a *starting point* for an alternative structural analysis. In fact, Glissant's model implicitly concedes connection ('dont le lié n'est pas évident') – it just doesn't go on to consider how this less obvious linkage might operate: this is what I intend to do. But to identify connections and structure in such an exploded narrative, we shall require new terms, and alternative conceptions of structure: connection still exists, but its nature changes. Their narrative structure, though non-linear, does not *only* imply a chaos to match the confusion of colonialism (and its remembering), or the ironies and conflicts faced by a cross-cultural writer – though these and other themes do inflect it – but also creates new, non-linear forms of sequence and connection that are tied to and motivated by such content.

My intention is not to bring order to chaos – attempting narratologically to put Humpty Dumpty together again. In any case, as Adorno observes in relation to the great harmonic compositions of Beethoven's late period, the presence of structure and harmony does not necessarily imply a seamless whole, or a mechanical subjugation of content to Form and Order: his final works are 'not round, but furrowed, even ravaged. Devoid of sweetness, bitter and spiny, they do not surrender themselves to mere delectation. They lack all the harmony that the classicist aesthete is in the habit of demanding';[11] 'His late work still

[11] Theodore M. Adorno, 'Late Style in Beethoven' (1937), in *Essays on Music: Theodore M. Adorno* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 564-8 (p.564).

remains process, but not as development; rather as a catching fire between extremes, which no longer allow for any secure middle ground or harmony of spontaneity'.[12] Structure can also exist through the tension between component parts, as we shall see in Djebar's dovetailing of conflicting situations, or in the ironic contrasts we find in Kateb's revisitings of earlier episodes. My approach is not to distil the various narrative threads to be found in *Nedjma* or *L'Amour*, though this is a necessary first step for an analysis such as Marc Gontard's, in his seminal *Nedjma de Kateb Yacine: Essai sur la structure formelle du roman*[13] – and later reconsidered by Jacqueline Arnaud and Charles Bonn.[14] Rather, I am concerned by the mechanics of polyphonic organisation in such 'exploded' narratives: what formal features tie consecutive chapters together in the absence of continuity of content; what methods are used to fashion ties between (related) episodes displaced by the *récit*'s non-linear progression; and how structure is crafted in response to content. As Genette notes, there are in fact very few truly chronological stories, and anachrony is nothing new – Homer's *Iliad* begins *in medias res* and promptly 'revient une dizaine de jours en arrière pour en exposer la cause en quelque cent quarante vers rétrospectifs'[15] – but the degree of disturbance in *Nedjma*, *Season of Migration* or *L'Amour, la fantasia* is considerably greater than that in the majority of pre-Modernist novels. In fact, the manner of reading these works is at points closer to the association or motif based approach that we typically apply to poetry, or indeed music; given that *Nedjma* began life as a poem,[16] this should perhaps not surprise us. As with any

[12] Ibid., p. 567.
[13] Marc Gontard, *Nedjma de Kateb Yacine: Essai sur la structure formelle du roman* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985).
[14] See for example Bonn's summary of Gontard's structural mapping of the *récit*, together with Arnaud's attempted corrections, in Charles Bonn, *Kateb Yacine: Nedjma* [1990] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), p. 35.
[15] Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 79.
[16] Kateb Yacine, 'Nedjma ou le Poème ou le Couteau', *Mercure de France*, 1 Jan 1948, pp. 69-71.

structural(ist) analysis, I shall have to begin by defining my terms And to do this, I require a technical vocabulary: as my concern is polyphony, I have chosen to draw from, on the one hand, the language of music, and on the other, from Genette's narratological apparatus. I shall then draw on these lexical fields to describe the articulation of particular structural devices in these works – devices which I have grouped under the headings of *recapitulation form*, *mirrored scenes*, *irruptions*, *proleptic markers*, *sequence*, and *interference*.

Musical and literary polyphony

The term 'polyphony' is defined in music theory as 'Music that combines several voice-parts of individual design, in contrast to monophonic music, which consists of a single melody, or homophonic music, which combines several voice-parts of similar, rhythmically identical design'.[17] We should note that polyphony is defined not just by the presence of multiple voices (vocal or instrumental), but by the differences – harmonic or dissonant – between them: comparison and contrast of the various threads is an integral part of polyphony. A simple multi-voice work like 'frère Jacques,' for example, is not considered counterpoint (but rather a canon or round). The musicologist Deryck Cooke notes that polyphony is sometimes characterised as 'musical architecture'[18] – an analogy that 'holds good, of course, for all music that is primarily contrapuntal'.[19] He further contends that, in the polyphonic works of Bach and others ('large-scale sound

[17] *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, s.v. Polyphony.
[18] Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 7.
[19] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

constructors',[20] as he terms them), in contrast to the compositions of later periods, what we admire is the sheer construction, and the complex relations between parts, more than the thematic content:

> the experience provided by such [polyphonic] music is definitely akin to that provided by architecture – the enjoyment of the beauty is pure form. What attracts us is not so much the thematic materials as the satisfying way it is woven together; not so much, say, the fugue-subject, as the masterly working-out of it in *stretto*, to produce a sonorous climax[21]

Polyphonic music, then, can be considered 'spatially,' in the sense of evoking its shape through the simultaneous opposition and correspondence of parts; we can likewise investigate form in *Nedjma* or others not simply by linear sequence (*récit* order, chapter progression, etc. – though as we shall see, these remain meaningful), but also – indeed, principally – by the interplay of polyphonic strands. We can also study the connection between form and content. Although Baroque contrapuntal works are, for Cooke, the quintessence of studied form, later music, beyond the primarily contrapuntal period, offers a clearer connection between form and content, though the notion of an exact architectural shape is correspondingly weaker (indeed, Cooke's particular interest in *The Language of Music* is in uncovering the connection between emotion and music: how form and expression are largely inseparable).[22] Cooke's analogies between art-forms are

[20] Ibid., p. 7.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., p.217: 'Wherefore we should always remember that "form" means "form of expression" and "technique" means "technique of creating forms of expression". Except in "architectural" polyphonic

not restricted to music and architecture: we sometimes call a piece of sculpture a 'poem in stone':[23] and both poetry and music, he adds, can be 'dissected' structurally for the purposes of analysis[24] – though this does not imply reducing either to a mere sum of component parts:

> So far, the attempt to analyse the functioning of musical language has necessitated that most dubious procedure, the breaking down of an indivisible unity into its component parts, which have no genuine separate existence. There are, strictly speaking, no such things as 'the major third', 'quick tempo', 'loud volume', etc., considered apart from the innumerable contexts in which they occur. Every piece of music is a whole, in which the effects of the well-worn elements interpenetrate and condition one another from note to note, from bar to bar, from movement to movement, in an entirely novel way; in every context, each single element has newly merged its identity into a new overall expression. Our justification is that this method is the only possible one[25]

In order to consider structure, we are forced to employ an artificial separation of elements; but isolating an observable feature, whether at a macro or micronarrative level, does not preclude the possibility of alternative classifications. Such (necessary) caveats are to be found in structuralist literary criticism, as well: Barthes' *S/Z*, for example, sets out by noting that his five 'codes' present only one, possible model: 'Le hasard (mais est-

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works built out of inexpressive material, technique cannot be considered apart from the emotions it is used to express.'

[23] Ibid., p. 1.

[24] Ibid., p. 32.

[25] Ibid., p.113.

ce le hasard ?) veut que les trois premières lexies [. . .] nous livrent déjà les cinq grands codes qui vont maintenant rejoindre tous les signifiés du texte : sans qu'il soit besoin de forcer, jusqu'à la fin, pas d'autre code que l'un de ces cinq-là'.[26] A further caveat bears on my employment of the term 'polyphony': as I noted above, musical polyphony functions through the *simultaneous* opposition and correspondence of parts. Now, in literature, this is impossible on a literal level: while two notes can be sounded together, two words, in writing, cannot.[27] I shall later discuss, however, how the illusion of simultaneity *is* produced through a variety of polyphonic approaches to literature (for example, through mirrored scenes and fused metaphor). Secondly, I would argue that the connections implied through interweaving naturally urge us to read these elements together, much as a rapid alternation between colours would create the illusion of their mixing. And thirdly, though a note is perceived instantly, words and larger units are inherently provisional until their meanings are confirmed by context; extending this point, we could argue that once an image, theme, or motif is introduced on the page, it continues to 'sound' – much like a pedal note in music – until it is picked up later: the 'literary' mode of reading is predicated on awaiting such connections. We shall see how this can take form explicitly or covertly, when I consider proleptic markers.

If we can identify parallels between the term polyphony and the complex structuring of *L'Amour, Season* or *Nedjma*, it is also worth noting that the narrators in these works themselves frequently make remarks that are, effectively, metacomments on the novels' structure – one of *Nedjma*'s most well known being 'l'absence d'itinéraire abolit la

[26] Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 23.
[27] Truly simultaneous association is possible by, for example, writing 'RED' in green ink, but this is a special case.

notion du temps'[28] – and indeed, in Djebar's case, several of these are explicitly tied to music. In fact, we do not have to look further than the title, which is itself a cross-cultural play on words, referring both to the musical term *fantasia*, and to Algerian cavalry manoeuvre. But this term can be elucidated further, as it returns in the preface to Part 3:

> '*Quasi una fantasia…*'
> Ludwig van Beethoven
> opus 27
> sonates 1 et 2[29]

This reference comes from Beethoven's instructions for his Sonata no.14 – 'Sonata quasi una fantasia' – which includes the 'Moonlight Sonata' (opus 27, no.2). We can note two points here: firstly, the use of the term 'fantasia,' and secondly, that of 'sonate.' In musicology, 'fantasia' denotes a musical style characterised by an improvisatory feel and certain liberties of form. In Sonata 14's context, two of the five senses listed by Harvard particularly apply:

1) Character pieces of the romantic era. Here, 'fantasia' is one of the various titles used to indicate a dreamlike mood or some other fanciful whim.

[28] Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Seuil, 1956 [Preface: 1996]) p. 29. All subsequent references to *Nedjma* are to this edition.
[29] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 127. Henceforth referred to as *L'Amour*.

2) Sonatas in freer form, or of a special character; e.g., Beethoven's op. 27, nos. 1, 2, both entitled 'Sonata quasi una fantasia' and deviating in various respects from the conventional sonata form and style[30]

As Priscilla Ringrose notes,[31] Part 3 of *L'Amour* presents a particularly marked structural shift away from any earlier semblance of chronology: while Ringrose considers that the narrative threads that are counterpointed in Parts 1 and 2 each progress in a 'loosely chronological'[32] order, in Part 3 'chronological linearity is completely abandoned [. . .] [and the] distinction between autobiography and biography is blurred'.[33] It seems appropriate that Djebar should signal the beginning of a section in freer structure by a reference to *fantasia* style. I will later argue, in *Sequence*, that even this freer chapter structuring is tied together by a variety of alternative (and non-chronological) linking mechanisms: in short, by lexical connections and close thematic analogies.

I would argue, furthermore, that not simply the musical character of *fantasia*, but the evocation of the Sonata is suggestive in Djebar's work – and indeed, speaks equally to the mechanics of polyphonic construction in Salih and Kateb – on account of one key aspect of Sonata Form: *recapitulation*. Sonata Form (which, confusingly, only refers to the form of the first movement of a Sonata) has 'three sections – exposition, development, and recapitulation (also called statement, fantasia section, and restatement)';[34] these are,

[30] *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, s.v. Fantasia [numbering changed].
[31] Priscilla Ringrose, *Assia Djebar: In Dialogue with Feminisms*, Francopolyphonies 3 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 43.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, s.v. Sonata Form.

therefore, in ternary form (A-B-A) (we might note that in Part 3 of *L'Amour* the chapters are grouped into 'mouvements' of two sets of three chapters).[35] As I shall demonstrate, in each novel, we see the employment of a literary technique that I shall term recapitulation. I shall discuss two different forms of it, each of which is an aspect of traditional Sonata Form recapitulation:

i) recapitulation (extended analeptic *portée*)

ii) recapitulation with fusion (combination of earlier motifs in new ways)

The first form makes reference to how the Recapitulation in Sonata Form returns to themes introduced in the Exposition (and modified in the Development). This can be observed when the *portée*[36] of analeptic references markedly increases in the latter sections of a novel; as I shall investigate later when I consider *sequence*, the nature of connection between chapters tends to change towards the end, both in a less obvious link between chapters, and a concomitant increase in analepses with a long *portée*. Furthermore, in musical recapitulation, we do not only find a simple restating of earlier motifs; they are often returned to in a new light, recognisable but variously changed or combined. The second form of literary recapitulation, then, will be this fusion of earlier elements. (Form *ii* is, naturally, a variant of form *i*.)

[35] With one exception: the fifth and final *mouvement* has only two chapters.
[36] A Genettian term, referring to the 'range' (or *portée*) of an analeptic, or proleptic, reference: referring back a few days (short *portée*) or several years (long *portée*), for example.

Genette and recapitulation

I shall next discuss how recapitulations juxtapose, and sometimes combine, elements from much earlier in the *récit*; to help describe its mechanics, I shall use a related term from Genette: *portée*.

I intend to employ Genette's structuralist typology in this chapter to help explain how other structural devices work, rather than organising sections by Genette's own terms. As can be seen above, recapitulation is related to *portée*, but not the same: *portée* denotes simply the distance, long or short, between the time of an analepse (or prolepse) and the narrative present:

> Une anachronie peut se porter, dans le passé ou dans l'avenir, plus ou moins loin du moment 'présent,' c'est-à-dire du moment de l'histoire où le récit s'est interrompu pour lui faire place : nous appellerons *portée* de l'anachronie cette distance temporelle.[37]

My basic form of recapitulation (*i*) is largely based on this, with certain small exceptions: by 'analeptic *portée*,' I mean the distance within the *récit*, not the *histoire* (though this may often also be accompanied by a temporal analepse). It is possible – in the final chapter for example – to refer back to an incident narrated at the beginning of a novel, though this incident itself does not need to be temporally prior to the narrative present

[37] Genette, p.89.

(i.e. earlier in the *histoire*). Another term of Genette's that will be useful is his division into two of the concept of proleptic markers (or *prolepses*, which Genette also glosses as 'correspondances télescopiques':[38] these are words (whether characters, objects, or concepts) that will make sense, or attain a new significance, later in the *récit*. Genette's terms for these subtypes are *annonce* and *amorce*: the first is (evidently) announced in the text (e.g. 'on verra plus tard que…'), whereas *amorces* are not:

> On ne confondra pas ces annonces, par définition explicites, avec ce que l'on doit plutôt appeler des *amorces*, simples pierres d'attente sans anticipation, même allusive, qui ne trouveront leur signification que plus tard et qui relèvent de l'art tout classique de la 'préparation' (par exemple, faire apparaitre dès le début un personnage qui n'interviendra vraiment que beaucoup plus tard [. . .]), [. . .] ou encore, plus manifestement fonctionnelle, la description du talus de Montjouvain [. . .], qui prépare la situation de Marcel au cours de la scène de profanation. A la différence de l'annonce, l'amorce n'est donc en principe, à sa place dans le texte, qu'un 'germe insignifiant,' et même imperceptible, dont la valeur de germe ne sera reconnue que plus tard, et de façon rétrospective.[39]

With this definition of literary recapitulation in place, we can now turn to unveiling (and interrogating) the various structural mechanisms that, together, fashion the complex polyphony of these *discours éclatés*.

[38] Ibid., p.112.
[39] Ibid., pp.112-13.

Recapitulation (form I)

To begin this section, I shall consider the first form of recapitulation, which involves a simpler form of return, to one (or more) narrative threads without fusing them. We see this frequently, at the close of *Nedjma*, in a variety of analepses – some explicit, others implied. The simplest and most explicit form would be Lakhdar's escape from his cell, or the return to the dispersal scene, where Lakhdar, Mustapha, and Rachid set off at cardinal points; in Genettian terms, this would be termed 2R 1H,[40] or the second narrating (2R) of one event (1H). Nothing is *added* to these events (VI.b.xi and xii are copied verbatim from I.a.i and ix); there is no additional reflection or summary; but as Genette notes, saying the same thing two or three times, even in direct succession, does not mean no information is added: there is meaning even in the act of repetition,[41] and the formal 'circularity' or 'returns' of *Nedjma* have, indeed, been the centre of much critical attention (not least because Kateb described *Nedjma* as moving in curves).[42] We also encounter recapitulation without such repetition of content: we see it, in a more implicit form, in the fritter vendor's words in VI.b.vi: '– Vous reviendrez me voir, ça m'étonnerait qu'on vous garde.'[43] Since the *récit* has returned to a point in the *histoire* just before Lakhdar's fight with the foreman (and Mourad's murder of M. Ricard), we already know *why*; the vendor's remark returns our memory to it, and creates dramatic

[40] Ibid., p. 146. 'R' stands for 'récit,' 'H' for 'histoire.'
[41] Genette notes, for example, that 'rien ne m'empêche de dire ou d'écrire : "Pierre est venu hier soir, Pierre est venu hier soir, Pierre est venu hier soir." Ici encore, l'identité et donc la répétition sont des faits d'abstraction, aucune des occurrences n'est matériellement (phoniquement ou graphiquement) tout à fait identique aux autres, ni même idéalement (linguistiquement), du seul fait de leur co-présence et de leur succession qui diversifie ces trois énoncés en un premier, un suivant et un dernier.' pp. 145-6.
[42] Kateb Yacine, 'A propos de *Nedjma*. (Propos recueillis au cours d'une conférence faite aux étudiants)' (Alger, 1967) in *Nedjma : extraits* (Alger: Institut pédagogique national, 1971), pp. 125-8 (p. 125).
[43] *Nedjma*, VI.b.vi, p. 239.

irony. A notable point of Kateb's style is that the greatest or most politically significant events are often referred to anecdotally, by minor characters: there is something of a gesture against official or 'top-down' historiography, for instance, in the fact that the taking of Bône is merely mentioned in passing by the pepper-eaters: 'Je savais bien que Bône se laisserait évincer, dit le marchand.'[44]

More implicitly still, we also see recapitulation by theme: one of the final conversations in *Nedjma* (and the novel's last original material) is an anecdote unconnected to the main events or characters; it deals with the *Barbu* being followed by his love rival, and a *malheureux* attempting to win the affection of an unobtainable girl. On a thematic level, though, this does tie in to the main intrigue: we see a problematic male rivalry for a woman ('C'est ainsi quand on s'intéresse aux femmes…'),[45] and determination to have her – perhaps irrespective of her will (growing bold, the *malheureux*, who has been camping outside her window much as Lakhdar did with Nedjma, concludes the chapter: 'Elle finira bien par me voir, dit le malheureux, s'enhardissant subitement dans la paix obscure de la veillée').[46] *Nedjma* likewise begins with a short story of love rivalry, enforced marriage, and violence (for Suzy, the foreman's daughter); we could consider both tales as, respectively, proleptic and analeptic microcosms[47] of the main story. As well as thematic analepse, this final conversation also features incidental remarks that tie us back to the earlier meeting with the *Barbu* (in I.a.viii): for example, Rachid's remark

[44] Ibid., VI.a.ix., p. 230.
[45] Ibid., VI.b.x, p.242.
[46] Ibid., VI.b.x, p.243.
[47] Indeed, Rachid has to explain to the Scribe that he is speaking about Nedjma and not Suzy: '… Non, pas Suzy. Pas le genre de femme pour qui l'on croit que le crime fut commis, mais l'autre, l'inconnue ; le vieux bandit [i.e. Si Mokhtar] me l'avait présentée ; [. . .] Nedjma (pas Suzy, Nedjma) était sa fille.' *Nedjma*, IV.b.viii, p. 171.

about the knife, 'On ne sait jamais, siffle Rachid'[48] echoes their earlier exchange in I.a.xiii (and thereby evokes Rachid's knife fight in I.a.ix, and later stabbing of his love rival Mourad in prison, which will follow):

- Passe-moi le couteau, dit Rachid. On ne sait jamais…
- On ne sait jamais, dit le Barbu.[49]

.

Such explicit or implicit recapitulations are offered without interpretation or comment in *Nedjma*; we are left to make our own judgement, as Bernard Pingaud noted about *Nedjma*'s general approach: 'Le romancier ne fait que commencer le roman : c'est le lecteur qui l'achève. Le romancier propose et le lecteur dispose'.[50] Recapitulation creates a structural connection between beginning and end; formally, this may give the reader an aesthetic sense of structural completion, but we can see here that it does not imply that we have arrived at an answer or ultimate understanding. As elsewhere, *Nedjma*'s circular returns lead us to reflect on the story as a cycle or spiral. Perhaps, given the as-yet unsuccessful quest for national rebirth, this structure speaks by returning us to the beginning of a circle, rather than offering an answer, or way out (even if *Nedjma*'s opening and ending foreground the idea of escape, in Lakhdar's jailbreak). If we turn to *Season*, however, we can see how a subtle, implicit form of recapitulation can accompany a more definite sense of conclusion.

[48] Ibid., VI.b.x, p.242.
[49] Ibid., I.a.viii, p.29.
[50] Bernard Pingaud, 'Je, nous, ils', *Esprit*, July–August 1958, p. 96.

Recapitulation form II: fusion

What I shall term 'fusion' in the recapitulation section is where earlier narrative threads, or characters, are conflated in the latter stages of the *récit*. To begin this, let us turn to *Season*, whose narrator is haunted by the possibility of personal dissolution and incorporation with Mustafa. At various points, Meheimeed, who renarrates Mustafa's tale after his presumed death in the Nile, senses a danger of falling into Mustafa's place; Meheimeed also fears that he will not 'belong' to his community upon his return from London. The novel's final scene presents Meheimeed himself entering the Nile, again in full spate as it was with Mustafa, and attempting to swim across to the northern shore; if he drowns, he will have mirrored Mustafa's fate. The first chapter began with Meheimeed's reflections on the Nile, the village's relationship with it, and on his sense of local belonging (as I have discussed in *Roots*). In this first chapter, Meheimeed asserts (unconvincingly) that 'I am not a stone thrown into the water but seed grown in a field',[51] that he is 'continuous and integral';[52] but Mustafa, as I have noted, does not feel a sense of belonging – he describes himself as a rubber ball that 'you throw [. . .] in the water and it doesn't get wet,'[53] and hopes that Meheimeed's rootedness will save his children from 'this infection [. . .], the wanderlust.'[54] In the last chapter, having decided not to burn Mustafa's western books and letters, or his portrait of Meheimeed (which Meheimeed, tellingly, at first mistakes for a self-portrait), Meheimeed finally has an epiphany while swimming: floating halfway between south and north, he finally determines '[his]

[51] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1969), p. 5.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., p. 20.
[54] Ibid., p. 67.

relationship to the river',[55] and at this point chooses action and life. Although he asserts that it 'is not my concern whether or not life has meaning',[56] and we do not know where this will lead, we see significance in his symbolic break from Mustafa's itinerary: up to this point in the scene, his character has re-enacted Mustafa's actions – the two trajectories are, as it were, overlaid, the characters coalescing in various respects (both swimming in the Nile, choosing between life and death, pulled uncertainly between 'South' and 'North'). This temporary fusion of roles ends in separation when Meheimeed decides to break from Mustafa and follow his own path – 'I did not let him complete the story',[57] he notes. I believe *Season* is a novel about the perils (and yet the necessity) of *free will*, and also the role (or excuse) of tragic inevitability – and until this point, as Meheimeed admits, 'I would have died as I was born – without any volition of mine';[58] this final divergence from Mustafa's path, then, signals Meheimeed's first active choice. This choice is emphasised by a structural rupture, in the breaking of the aesthetic parallel. Two mirrored characters, placed at the juncture between North and South (implicitly, between cultures) finally choose divergent responses; Mustafa attempted to erase his cross-cultural past, and requests that his children be spared his wanderlust, but Meheimeed rejects these solutions: he chooses life and agency, a nuanced relationship between cultures, and will not tie down the newest generation. Despite the structural parallels, Meheimeed is not bound into recreating Mustafa's end; we see that characters are not required to conform to, or complete, an aesthetic form. The parallel with *Othello* is instructive here: Mustafa speaks of his deeds as though they were fated, an inevitable

[55] Ibid., p. 168.
[56] Ibid., pp. 168-9.
[57] Ibid., p. 166.
[58] Ibid., p. 168.

tragedy – an inevitability we might fairly expect in a tragic play – but Meheimeed discovers that action can change our course. A misreading of *Othello* could lead us to see its tragedy resulting from a clash of cultures; a truer reading of tragedy shows that there are any number of points where it could be averted. The tragedy in *Othello* and in *Season* results from the failure to intervene, and so *Season*'s denouement, and its formal rupture, mirror the possibility of agency, and the call to action.

We can observe an analogous phenomenon in *Nedjma*, in a form of narrative fusion that I shall call recapitulation by metaphor. Here, too, two characters are twinned – in this case, Rachid and Si Mokhtar – and again, the analepse has considerable *portée*; in this case, however, the fusion is not simply by a twinning of situation, role, or action.[59] Instead, at the end of Rachid's narrative arc (in the fondouk, at the lattermost part of his *histoire*), what creates the analepse is transference of metaphor. We see two examples of this: the first recalls Si Mokhtar, and the second, the hashish smokers of the fondouk. The first occurs in a chapter heavy with structural metacomment: its first remark is that 'Le vieux chanteur parlait déjà de tout autre chose';[60] the frame narrator refers to the snatches Rachid perceives – 'De son enfance, il n'avait jamais pu saisir que des bribes de plus en plus minces, disparates, intenses'[61] – a 'chapelet de bombes retardataires'.[62] The chapter concerns Rachid's early years, up to his thirtieth, and describes his education pessimistically, as a gradual limiting of possibilities:

[59] We do see a more traditional (form *i*) recapitulation here too, when the frame narrator effectively summarises the stages of Rachid's Part IV narrative, referring in the closing words of IV.b.xii to Rachid's father's murder, then Si Mokhtar's by the black man, and Nedjma's ultimate handover to the tribe: 'le père abattu et le nègre qui l'avait vengé, mais gardait Nedjma en otage.' (*Nedjma*, p.179).
[60] *Nedjma*, V.a.xi, p. 157.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

> l'école était plus triste, plus pauvre que le mur [à qui furent adressés ses monologues d'orphelin] [. . .] ; l'enfance était perdue. Le monde ne grandirait plus, réduit à une cruelle vision d'ensemble ; [. . .] le cerveau s'éteignait à la découverte de tant de refuges éboulés, [. . .] comme si les formes définitives du monde pesaient désormais sur sa tête en manière de cornes.[63]

It is in this light that we encounter a metaphorical analepse that fuses the 'Rachid of today' with Si Mokhtar:

> Rachid, l'adolescent, ne se souvenait pas de la première enfance ; il ressentait seulement comme une cicatrice la vive conscience d'antan ; le Rachid actuel ne lui semblait qu'une épaisse couche de lichen étouffant l'autre, le Rachid paradisiaque et frêle, perdu à la fleur de l'âge... Même à trente ans, nomade qu'il était, il ne croyait qu'à son ombre[64]

Si Mokhtar is not directly mentioned, but, especially for a character close enough for Rachid to consider him a father figure, the description of Rachid as a piece of lichen clearly recalls a metaphor heretofore applied to Si Mokhtar – who was, as we shall remember, '[l']arbre sec jamais sûr de se propager' 'déterrant ses mortes racines, en quête d'un lichen jusque-là étranger…', and whose lovers 'ne voulaient plus de son

[63] Ibid., p. 159.
[64] *Nedjma*, IV.a.xi, p.158.

ombre'.[65] Immediately after the passage transforming Rachid into lichen, as we see above, there is also a reference to his shadow. This, too, is a term so frequently attributed to both Si Mokhtar and Rachid as to become a virtual epithet for the pair (much as Lakhdar is the 'voyageur' or Mustapha the 'commissionnaire'): they are 'deux ombres coupables',[66] 'les deux ombres';[67] later, Si Mokhtar offers to cover Rachid and Nedjma with his shadow.[68] As if to emphasise the recapitulatory character of this passage, it is immediately followed by a structural metacomment: 'il ne croyait qu'à son ombre, et il lui semblait que l'excédent des années allait se résorber un jour, s'absorber dans le vide, endiguer son passé en crue, comme s'il avait conscience de décrire un cercle, sans quitter le point de départ [. . .], de sorte que le cercle n'était qu'une promenade à contre-cœur [. . .], démarche d'aveugle butant sur le fabuleux passé'.[69] Shortly after this, Rachid is described in terms that recall the fondouk inhabitants, whom he had earlier considered 'comme les chevaliers d'une cause fondée sur le renoncement à la carcasse humaine'[70] (and the following chapter begins by confirming this renunciation: 'Rachid ne quittait plus le fondouk, le balcon [. . .] il mourrait probablement au balcon, dans un nuage d'herbe interdite').[71] He is described in terms suggestive of a lost potential, and a death of earlier aspirations; his body, in turn, begins to resemble the decaying carcasses of the others: 'et les côtes se dessinaient sous la vieille chemise de soldat, comme si son corps de plus en plus sec devait mettre en relief le squelette, uniquement le squelette de

[65] Ibid., III.a.ix, p.92 (my emphasis).
[66] Ibid., III.b.viii, p. 107.
[67] Ibid., III.b.x, p. 116.
[68] Ibid., III.b.xii, p. 121.
[69] Ibid., IV.a.xi, p.158.
[70] Ibid., IV.a.ix, p. 152.
[71] Ibid., IV.a.xii, p. 159.

l'homme puissant qu'il eût été en d'autres circonstances…'[72] In both passages, Rachid takes on the metaphors applied to others; this fusion represents a central problematic in *Nedjma*, which is the question of regeneration and the future. Rachid, in the end, literally embodies the metaphors – bodies in lichen, bodies wasting away – previously applied to others. In each case, the characters referred to are neither named nor mentioned, but the evocation is clear. This passage, then, is not simply a personal reflection on the ruin of Rachid's aspirations and potential, but one that ties him in to an as-yet inescapable cycle of non-renewal in Algeria. Recapitulation by fusion here is a superstructure, tying together earlier narrative threads in the figure of Rachid, at the end of his own narrative arc: the sense of a structure based on cycles or returns is therefore evident through metaphorical analepse, as well as by the often noted repetitions and returns of *Nedjma's* chapter order. As I noted earlier, Rachid and Constantine's Rhummel – and by implication, perhaps Algeria itself – have been depicted as a body awaiting an infusion of new blood. The fact that Algeria has no firm *form* at the time of writing may prompt the use of such structural and metaphorical features: Rachid's skeletal form becomes a 'reincarnation' of those before him; the metaphorical fusion displaces the past with a present that, in fact, looks *no differen*t. It merges both past and present generations in a cycle of decay with, as yet, no clear way forward.

Djebar's *L'Amour la fantasia* is a work with a notably dovetailed structure. Reference between the various narrative threads is common, and is often author-explicit (the author-narrator, at various points, unambiguously refers to and reflects on previous sections). Towards the end, however, and especially from the 5th Movement (of Part 3) on, as with

[72] Ibid., p. 160.

Nedjma we see an increasing tendency to use recapitulation form: analepses with a very long *portée* become noticeably more frequent, and we also encounter more fusion of earlier threads. Movement 5 itself commences by the longest of (form *i*) recapitulations, revisiting the novel's opening image of a little Arab girl holding her father's hand (we shall return to this father figure motif later when it, too, becomes a form *ii* recapitulation in the novel's final chapter, *Air de Nay*). Let us consider one such recapitulation in the same 5th Movement of Part 3; it develops gradually from the first form of recapitulation to the second, at first alluding to the fusion and finally performing it. The two main threads concerned, introduced in Parts 1 and 2,[73] concern the cloistering and marriage of young girls, and the French fumigations of tribes in the Dahra mountains. As the chapter title ('La tunique de Nessus') suggests,[74] it centres on a potentially dangerous gift, in this case the French language – it was this gift that removed Djebar from the harem. The passing references to lovers' tiffs – though this time with the French language – is likely to recall, for example, her 'querelle banale d'amoureux'[75] of Part 4, while her reference to her being '"donnée"'[76] in marriage to it at a young age is linked, more explicitly, to the *trois jeunes filles cloîtrées* of Part 1: she has the 'conscience vague d'avoir fait trop tôt un mariage forcé, un peu comme les fillettes de ma ville "promises" dès l'enfance'.[77] Continuing these allusions, she speaks of royal princesses being traded in war:

[73] In Part 1, the 'Trois jeunes filles cloîtrées', and 'Femmes, enfants, bœufs couchés dans les grottes' chapters; in Part 2, 'La Mariée nue de Mazouna'.
[74] The Tunic of Nessus, a garment steeped in blood (that of a centaur), was what killed Hercules. We might read in this a suggestion of the bloody heritage of the French language.
[75] *L'Amour*, p. 129.
[76] Ibid., p. 239.
[77] Ibid.

> Mais les princesses royales à marier passent également de l'autre côté de la frontière, souvent malgré elles, à la suite des traités qui terminent les guerres[78]

This at once maintains a connection with the *trois jeunes filles* (whom the postman deems 'des princesses'[79] and 'ces reines de village')[80] and establishes one with Badra, a princess from the Dahra mountains, whose father consents to marry to the Aga of Ouarsenis after the latter's implicit threat of military action. Djebar's reflections then shift to the women of modern Algeria, who are increasingly leaving the harem (naturally, the author counts among them):

> Le corps de mes sœurs commence, depuis cinquante ans, à surgir par taches isolées, hors de plusieurs siècles de *cantonnement* ; il tâtonne, il s'aveugle de *lumière* avant d'oser avancer. Un *silence* s'installe autour des premiers mots écrits, et quelques rires épars se conservent au-delà des *gémissements*.[81]

The analepse here is twofold, and simultaneous: it evidently alludes to female cloistering (*cantonnement* meaning confinement),[82] and hence to the *trois jeunes filles cloîtrées*, but there is also a clear reference to the few survivors of the Dahra mountain fumigations (narrated in 'Femmes, enfants, bœufs couchés dans les grottes'). If we turn briefly to this

[78] Ibid., p. 240.
[79] Ibid., p. 21.
[80] Ibid. p. 22.
[81] Ibid., p. 240 (my emphasis).
[82] It means restriction to a place, but also has another, military sense: that of stationing (troops). We could consider the fighters and families in the Dahra caves to be *cantonnés*.

chapter, we can see how. The handful of survivors of Pélissier's fumigation are pictured stumbling out of the cave, only to die on reaching the sunlight:

> Dans l'éclat de l'aube, une silhouette titubante, homme ou femme, réussit à sortir, malgré les dernières flammèches. Elle fait quelques pas, hésite, puis s'affaisse, pour mourir au soleil.[83]

Given the context invoked, the groans (*gémissements*) likewise recall those encountered in the fumigation scene: as a Spanish observer notes, 'Quelle plume saurait rendre ce tableau ? [. . .] Entendre les sourds gémissements des hommes, des femmes, des enfants et des animaux'.[84] (Indeed, Djebar then renders the allusion explicit at the chapter end, while adding another element in her reference to another set of prisoners, Saint Arnaud's hostages: 'Avant d'entendre ma propre voix, je perçois les râles, les gémissements des emmurés du Dahra, des prisonniers de Sainte-Marguerite ; ils assurent l'orchestration nécessaire.')[85] We can also note that *cantonnement* is less specific than *cloîtrement* (or *dans un cloître*), and so is applicable for both situations. It is similarly hard not to see a connection between the 'silence [qui] s'installe' and the silence that is insistently associated with the morning after – for example, the 'fumée et comme un religieux silence [qui] entourent les abords des grottes',[86] the 'cadavres [. . .] [qui] dorment dans un silence qui les dénude',[87] or the 'siècle de silence [qui] les a simplement congelés.'[88] In

[83] *L'Amour*, p.85.
[84] Ibid., p. 84.
[85] Ibid., p. 243.
[86] Ibid., p. 85.
[87] Ibid., p. 88.
[88] Ibid., p. 89.

this combined metaphor, we evidently have recapitulation by fusion. But what should we make of it? I suggest that, on the one hand, Djebar is offering a particularly ringing attack on cloistering: it is a sombre comparison – cloistering is, after all, fused in an image with incarceration and death – but such strength of imagery is not new for her (elsewhere, those fully veiled are 'ensevelies à la verticale';[89] a cloistered girl's body is 'incarcéré').[90] On the other hand, by fusing together threads from both sides of her dovetailed structure (war and love/autobiography, respectively), she is in effect crystallising (though not *solving*) her own cross-cultural conflict, finally fusing the two narrative strands that, by her own admission, represent the twin pulls of French and Algerian identity, as her ensuing structural metacomment confirms:

> Pour ma part, [. . .] [mon écriture], tel un oscillographe, va des images de guerre – conquête ou libération, mais toujours d'hier – à la formulation d'un amour contradictoire, équivoque.[91]

L'Amour's contrapuntal chapter structure not only allows her to pair and associate autobiographical and historical subjects, but also, through recapitulatory fusion, creates a political *palimpsest*, in the proper sense: we read images simultaneously, one through the other, and their very confluence creates a charged socio-political statement. As with recapitulation in music, the final fusion of threads offers a form by which they can hold together and interact; it doesn't mean one becomes, or is subsumed by, the other, or that they are harmoniously combined: tension and dissonance can remain – are, indeed, part

[89] Ibid., p.131.
[90] Ibid., p. 207.
[91] Ibid., p. 242.

of polyphony. It is a strategy, a solution that doesn't (dis)*solve* the two, but finds a working relationship (which is more than the sum of its parts). Their very combination creates a statement, a new form: and in Djebar's case, it is the polyphonic fusions of her cross-culturality.

Mirrored scenes

If recapitulation signals an analepse of considerable *portée* – and sometimes the fusion of several preceding threads – located towards the end of the *récit*, what I shall term *mirrorings* are scenes (at any point) where an earlier scene is revisited, explicitly or implicitly, leaving the reader to note the disparities or parallels between the two. Evidently, these are both forms of analepse, but this kind is more than a (potentially brief) allusion (as was, for example, Rachid's transferred metaphor); it is a sustained effect of comparison and contrast, and involves the recreation of an earlier scene, or one clearly analogous to it. We might think, for example, of Jean and Hosna's bedroom scenes in *Season*, which finish in an implicitly mirrored image: each wife lies dead with a knife through the heart. There is no *explicit* analepse (no linking comment or allusion), but the final images are clearly twinned. I shall discuss three scenes from *Nedjma* – two where the parallel is not explicitly stated, one where it is – and one in *L'Amour* where it develops and is finally identified by the narrator through an explicit analepse. Such scenes can, I believe, create the closest thing to literary simultaneity in a polyphonic work.

A simple example of scenic mirroring in *Nedjma* is when we revisit the courtyard (and home) of Mustapha's family in Part VI. It is first described in V.viii, when Mustapha is of school age, and in V.ix, in a flashback to one of his first memories, Chapter V.viii notes, for example, the sound of his father's cane ('sa canne [fait] un bruit que Mère m'apprend à reconstituer, la nuit'),[92] or Mustapha's teaching his mother to read by the fig tree struggling for life ('le figuier [. . .] a failli mourir, dans les émanations de l'eau moisie (y a pas de fontaine chez nous [. . .])').[93] In Chapter viii, Mustapha's father is trying to spare his infant son from the poverty his family finds itself in:

> Les premiers souvenirs de Mustapha se rapportent à une cour dont les dalles disjointes retiennent toutes sortes de végétations [. . .] [les voisins] ne savent pas que Ouarda mange du pain sec (elle allaite Mustapha) [. . .] ; [Maître Gharib] espère [. . .] préserver son fils des marques de la misère trop connue… [. . .] ; le 1er janvier 1937, [. . .] la mère est ravie [. . .] ; l'oukil a fait blanchir la maison et installer l'électricité.[94]

When the scene is returned to in VI.iv, it begins similarly; the lapse in time is not announced till later: we can't at first tell if this is an analepse or simply a change in location (the previous chapter concerns the Sétif revolt, but, as with V.viii-ix, we cannot assume chronological progression). The changes in the scene, however, confirm the passing of time – and more importantly, show an impoverished version of the previous courtyard and household:

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[92] *Nedjma*, V.viii, p. 201.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., pp. 201-3.

> Notre cour est déserte. Personne à ma rencontre. Mère a laissé périr le rosier. [. . .] Pourquoi n'entends-je pas la canne de mon père ? [. . .] Dans son lit, mon père retient ses gémissements. [. . .] [M]a plus petite sœur, qui n'a pas toutes ses dents, chantonne :
>
> Mon frère est en prison,
> Ma mère s'affole,
> Et mon père s'est couché.[95]

The scene is now defined in terms of *absence*: we recognise the connection with the earlier descriptions by what is no longer there. The changes here are not simply physical, either: they imply a change in attitude. The earlier scenes, before May 8, depict determination (and hope) in the face of poverty. After May 8, the features that Mustapha identified with at home have disappeared or deteriorated: the plants have died, his father's familiar cane (for better or worse) cannot be heard, his household is grief-stricken; and his mother, driven to madness, no longer plays or speaks with him. We return to this same scene to witness the impoverishing effects of time, and especially the pivotal impact of May 8; it is now a bleak mirroring of the previous, with Sétif serving as the structural point of symmetry.

May 8 also serves as the pivot-point around which two scenes centring on Mustapha's schooldays are reflected. The riots and reprisals of Sétif effectively signal the end of

[95] Ibid., p. 226.

Mustapha's school arc in *Nedjma*; the earlier scenes, which depict Algerians and French people working and playing together, are reflected back at us immediately after the riots. The most extensive mirroring occurs in the schoolbus scene; in the first (in V.v), Mustapha, at school, is fondly considering Mlle Dubac, his teacher; in the second (in VI.ii), he is fleeing the reprisals and generalised violence that follow the Sétif uprising. In the earlier scene, Mustapha wants to impress Mlle Dubac, who sees him as an 'Elève à encourager';[96] he also reflects on the cultural and economic differences between French and Arab people:

> Moi je suis arabe. [. . .] Y a les paroles qui changent. Et les habits. Et les maisons. Et les places dans l'autocar. Quand je serai grand, je monterai devant. Avec la maîtresse.[97]

The return to this scene in VI.ii is signalled by a brief, explicit analepse: 'Le rêve d'enfance est réalisé : Mustapha est à côté du chauffeur'.[98] Mlle Dubac, of course, is not by his side: indeed, Mustapha has just thrown away his school tie to avoid being taken for a European – a gesture that fairly symbolises his severance from the school (and French) world. This separation from the French system is not necessarily a rejection of France, but chosen out of necessity:

> Un paysan tranche d'un coup de sabre l'épaule d'un étudiant sans coiffure qu'il a pris pour un Européen.

[96] Ibid., V.v, p. 194.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid., VI.ii, p. 218.

Mustapha jette sa cravate.[99]

The figure by his side this time is in fact a Muslim policeman. This would previously have been a figure of state authority, but even his position has been revised: we have just witnessed one striking down the French mayor ('Le maire français est abattu par un policier').[100] And when the smiling policeman offers Mustapha what would have been a childish pleasure (sitting by the window), 'Mustapha est ravi'; but in fact, it is only to avoid shots from outside.[101] Passing details now carry a grim signification. The bus is half empty, for example – but now, such a detail implies only a few were able to make it inside. Each aspect has been transfigured by the outbreak of violence, and as the scene so clearly recalls the situation in V.ii, we naturally compare the earlier promise, and cultural cooperation, with the chaotic polarisation of society that has ensued.

A similar, implicit mirroring of scenes occurs when Mustapha returns to the hill on which he (at the time, in the role of *le général Mustapha*)[102] played war games with other French children, including Monique (his crush). His return to the 'talus où venait d'habitude s'asseoir Monique'[103] serves, on the one hand, to remind us of the earlier scene, and on the other, emphasises the enforced division of these children into opposing camps: again, our second scene represents an impoverishment of the previous state of affairs. When a narrator closely ties separate episodes together, we are more likely to compare them, or indeed, look for cause and consequence. I contend that such scenic

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., V.x, p. 207.
[103] Ibid., VI.iii, p. 219.

mirroring implies that the violence and social division of the second scene is to be read as the – or at least, a potential – consequence of certain colonists' racist attitudes, which are expressed discreetly in the earlier scene, and returned to in full force in the latter. Let us briefly compare the two scenes to make this clearer.

VI.iii's introduction, part of Mustapha's journal, returns to the hill where he once played; on it are Monique's parents ('F.' and his wife, 'Mme F.'), 'N.' (the *garde champêtre*, and his wife), 'R.' (another classmate), and other colonists. Their conversation develops from observation of the corpses that now strew it, to an increasingly violent (indeed, potentially genocidal) conclusion:

> *F.* : Qu'est-ce qu'ils peuvent puer ! [. . .]
>
> *F.* : Cette fois, ils ont compris.
>
> *N.* : Tu crois ? Moi je te dis qu'ils recommenceront. On n'a pas su les prendre.
>
> *Mme N.* : Mon Dieu, si la France ne s'en occupe pas, ce n'est pas nous qui pourrons nous défendre !
>
> *F.* : La France est pourrie. Qu'on nous arme, et qu'on nous laisse faire. Pas besoin de loi ici. Ils ne connaissent que la force. Il leur faut un Hitler.
>
> *Mme F.*, caressant R. : Et dire qu'ils vont à l'école avec toi, mon petit ![104]

What had once been play has become reality: war games have given way to war. The earlier cooperation, of course, has disappeared – in play, the sides were not divided along racial lines. Ironically, the first scene was predicated on the idea of reconciliation:

[104] Ibid., pp. 219-20.

Mustapha's father had taken him to the house of Albert, the French boy he has been fighting with. The children are left to play in the garden; only through their conversation do we learn that Albert's father doesn't normally allow Arabs there[105] (which is why they leave to play with Lakhdar on the hill). We now see a schoolmate's father calling for a Hitler. The revisited scene transforms a playground into a theatre of war; the mirror effect leads us to read the two scenes together. We see, in the first, politely concealed racism among the colonists, and in the second, the thoughts and actions that this may lead to. It is worth noting that the mirrored scene returns to the same location and similar theme, but with the older generation; given that the first scene offered us a picture of Franco-Arab cooperation among the young, we are left again considering what other potential there could have been. *Nedjma* creates such structural connections not only to present the horror of Sétif and its aftermath as an horrific corollary of earlier racial tensions, but also as an implicit reminder that other, positive, cross-cultural possibilities existed before they were extinguished on May 8.

For a final example of mirrored scenes, let us turn to Djebar. As I have noted above, Djebar provides personal reasons for offering a structural counterpoint of love and war. This same cross-cultural concern pervades two scenes in particular: the first is Badra's marriage, and its mirror, Part 2 ch.III, is Djebar's own wedding in France. As I shall discuss in *sequence*, we are conditioned to look for theme and word-level links between Djebar's chapters; Badra's and Djebar's marriage are narrated in adjacent chapters, so we already anticipate a thematic link when III commences by speaking of *noces*. In fact, the scene develops a continued, and increasingly explicit parallel with the details of Badra's

[105] ' – *Pas de voyous, pas d'Arabes dans le jardin*, dit Papa', ibid., p. 207.

(forced) marriage. In closely mirroring a marriage in Algeria and one in France, we have in effect a cross-cultural counterpoint. The author-narrator notes that marriage is a 'parcours de symboles';[106] again, it is generally the *absence* of those present previously that characterises the mirrored scene. Djebar's marriage stands out in contrast to the opulence of the previous chapter – this time, the traditional elements are stripped away: 'Ces épousailles se dépouillaient sans relâche : de la stridence des voix féminines, du brouhaha de la foule emmitouflée, de l'odeur des victuailles en excès'[107] (in the previous chapter, we saw the enforced handover of Badra's guests' jewellery described as an 'opération de *dépouillement*').[108] The male relatives, as with Badra, are still asked to grant permission to marry – but this time it is sent remotely, by telegram (Djebar's family, including her father, are mostly in Algeria). Where Badra was surrounded by fanfare, and literally weighed down with jewels, Djebar and her mother can only put together, 'dans les Grands Magasins, un semblant de trousseau'.[109] Badra's wet nurse (the closest she has to a mother figure) is pictured weeping after Bou Maza's troops intervene to stop the wedding ('Sa nourrice, qui suivait, pleurait : n'y aurait-il jamais de noces pour la jeune fille ?...');[110] Djebar's mother, by contrast, 'n'avait pas à pleurer'.[111] If we can see in these a clear echo of the preceding scene, it remains implicit; finally, however, when evoking the cry on deflowering, the narrator confirms the connection, through two

[106] *L'Amour*, p. 122.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., p. 113 (my emphasis).
[109] Ibid., p. 117.
[110] Ibid., p. 114.
[111] Ibid., p. 121.

explicit analepses (to the celebratory 'fantasia des cavaliers berbères'[112] before the wedding, and to Bou Maza's caparisoned horseriders).[113] Here too, she evokes absence:

> Un cri sans la fantasia qui, dans toutes les noces, même en l'absence de chevaux caparaçonnés et de cavaliers rutilants, aurait pu s'envoler.[114]

Her reflections finish with an anaphoric list of what *wasn't* there: 'Il n'y a pas eu les yeux des voyeuses [. . .]. Il n'y a pas eu la danse de la mégère parée du drap maculé [. . .]. Il n'y a pas eu le sang exposé les jours suivants.'[115] In sum, we have a counterpoint that establishes a back and forth between two countries (and cultures); whether or not Djebar prefers a modern wedding or the traditional rituals is a moot point, but we cannot help but read the two scenes together. As its potential allusions to the previous scene develop, through an increasingly evident visual and thematic counterpoint, we come to interpret each detail in the light of the previous scene – we are, in effect, conditioned into performing a 'simultaneous' reading, maintaining at each step the memory of the previous wedding, anticipating at any point a confluence of the two. This is, then, a form of cross-cultural polyphony, conflating scenes from two cultures – only to emphasise, however, the discrepancy (and at points, a (conflicted) longing for the traditional). This longing for what is absent is confirmed in her naming them 'noces parisiennes, envahies de la nostalgie du sol natal'[116] (nostalgia's etymology denotes homecoming and pain);[117]

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[112] Ibid., p. 103.
[113] They disguised themselves in the scarlet robes of the defeated Spahis, allies of the Aga of Ouarsenis.
[114] *L'Amour*, p. 122.
[115] Ibid., p. 124.
[116] Ibid., p. 123.
[117] 'ancient Greek *νόστος* return home (see NOSTOS *n.*) + *-αλγία* -ALGIA (forming nouns denoting types of pain)'. *OED*, s.v. nostalgia.

her newfound desire to refer to her husband 'à la manière traditionnelle' – as *him* ('lui')[118] – is a concrete example of the cross-cultural balance that Djebar is trying to strike, and which is reflected through the (impoverished) mirror that this scene presents.

Irruptions

Genette, reading Proust, identifies the beginnings of Modernist style in the bending, or perhaps breaking, of the rules of classical omniscient narration: the *double focalisation*, or 'polymodalité,' of *Combray*'s Montjouvain scene, for example, presents a 'concurrence enfin de focalisations théoriquement incompatibles':[119] in a blending of perspectives, we see more than we 'ought' to be able to. What I shall term *irruption* in narrative is a structural effect whereby the narrative *voice* (in the Genettian sense) is in some sense interrupted, disturbed, or hijacked by another. This effect can either be comprehended within the existing narrative *voice* scheme, without breaking any 'rules' (such as when, as we saw in *Opacity*, Mustafa Sa'eed's voice irrupts from the darkness into Meheimeed's narrative while at Hosna's house: overcome by her perfume, Meheimeed is forced into an unexpected narrative detour, by an associative link to one of Mustafa's memories – but a detour that is 'intended' by the author and voiced, throughout, by Meheimeed); or alternatively, we can encounter irruption that also appears to break the existing *voice* scheme. Either way, these are forms of polyphony in that they introduce other narrative strands, voices, or characteristic manners of perceiving, to that of the current narrator. This is, then, a more 'chaotic' form of polyphony, as it does not

[118] *L'Amour*, p. 124.
[119] Genette, pp. 223-4.

involve the orderly handover of narrative from one speaker to the next; rather, it 'irrupts' into it, much as history, for Glissant, '[fait] irruption en nous par blocs'.[120] Let us consider a couple of examples from *Nedjma*: the first fits within the existing *voice* scheme; the second appears to break the 'rules.'

The first example is, similarly to that in *Season* (though in reverse), an unannounced irruption of the narrative present during the narration of a memory. It occurs in IV.a.x, during an *analepse complétif* to Rachid's schooldays (before this, the narrator was considering Rachid and others in the fondouk). Mme Clément, his schoolteacher, is first identified in an *annonce* in IV.a.vii ('l'institutrice, Mme Clément, que [Rachid] ne voulait pas croire mariée…');[121] in chapter ix, Rachid's last remark, in the hubbub of conversation in the fondouk ('– Moi, coupa Rachid, ce qui me revient, c'est les bagarres du temps que j'étais gosse'),[122] prepares the ground for the (unannounced) analepse that inaugurates chapter x: '"A l'école de mon quartier, Mme Clément, directrice, frappa Mouloud d'un coup de tringle"'.[123] The chapter finishes, as we might have imagined, with one of the schoolboy brawls Rachid alluded to in chapter ix. Mid-chapter, however, the fondouk irrupts, unannounced by the narrator: there is no break in narrative voice, and no closing of the speechmarks that commence the analepse. Furthermore, its ambiguous opening words incline us to read the irruption as a continuation of Rachid's school anecdote:

[120] Glissant, p. 255.
[121] *Nedjma*, IV.a.vii, p.148.
[122] Ibid., IV.a.ix, p.153.
[123] Ibid., IV.a.x, p.154.

Chérif, cousin de Bozambo, sortit son livre de grammaire :

général *généraux*

amical *amicaux*

– Rachid, au tableau ! dit Mme Clément. Mouloud, prends tes affaires !...

Rachid n'entendait plus sa voix ; il nageait dans le calme profond de la mémoire, gouailleur, indifférent. Les paroles s'échappaient en feux d'artifice [. . .], mais il ne les entendait pas jusqu'au bout, parlant vite, [. . .] poursuiv[ant] l'une sur l'autre des rêveries chaotiques [. . .], sans répondre aux regards, aux sourires, au silence indigné du boxeur, – [. . .] bien qu'il n'entendît pas toujours sa propre voix :

- Bozambo avait un frère [. . .][124]

The irruptions's first words, 'Rachid n'entendait plus sa voix', could refer either to a schoolboy not listening to his teacher, or to Rachid momentarily being pulled back to the narrative present: the proleptic status of his reverie (itself basically a structural or stylistic metacomment) finally becomes clear when it mentions the *boxeur* (who we know is in the fondouk). We can also note that the 'sa voix' that commences, and closes, the irruption is ambiguous the first time (we might assume it is Mme Clément's voice, but the meaning is latterly revised by 'il n'entendît *pas toujours* sa *propre* voix.'). Until the

[124] Ibid., 154-5.

arrival of the *boxeur*, it is quite possible to mistake the details for those of a schoolboy's daydreams. This brief irruption of the narrative present is subtle, but does not break the continuity of narrative *voice*: it mirrors the chaotic interplay of memories alluded to in the prolepse, but does so with the existing narrative framework.

My second example is more challenging to *Nedjma*'s perceived narrative modes: it appears to undermine the notion of an objective frame narrator. Ostensibly, *Nedjma* has several narrators (Lakhdar, Mustapha, Si Mokhtar, and others), plus an extradiegetic – and selectively omniscient – frame narrator (Gontard argues that Kateb offers such an *éclatement* of points of view for reasons of narratorial objectivity: a variety of (subjective) characters' perspectives are offered on events, separate from that of the (largely objective) narrator – 'Kateb Yacine opère la synthèse de ces deux conceptions,[125] en choisissant, pour sauvegarder la fiction objective du récit, de faire éclater le point de vue';[126] we never find out, for example, what passes between Rachid and Nedjma during their first day together, because 'le monologue de Rachid, "blanchi" à cet endroit, reste muet sur cette scène malgré son importance. Or, le narrateur refuse, pour la compléter, de quitter son rôle "objectif" [. . .]. On songe encore à la page blanche qui occupe le centre du *Voyeur*').[127] In the first chapters of VI.b, in a rapid counterpoint of episodes, we cut back and forth between Lakhdar and Mourad, whose respective threads are related to us by the frame narrator. As if to underline the frame narrator's role as observer,

[125] i.e. the 'objectivité quasi scientifique' of Balzacian realism versus 'une subjectivité de plus en plus poussée, le point de vue se trouvant déplacé de l'auteur vers le personnage principal du roman.' Marc Gontard, *Nedjma de Kateb Yacine: Essai sur la structure formelle du roman* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), p. 53.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

details that only Lakhdar would know are not narrated when the narrator is focussing on Mourad (and vice versa); only occasionally do we encounter what Lakhdar thinks. In VI.b.i, a chapter focussing (externally) on Lakhdar, we see that 'Mourad et Mustapha n'osaient commenter la désertion de Lakhdar, depuis le coup de sonnette ; [. . .]. Mourad sortit silencieusement.');[128] the narrator makes us wait until VI.b.iv's brief switch of *voice*, and to a full focalisation on Lakhdar (rather than the frame narrator), to see what Lakhdar thought of Mourad's silence:

> '*je le croyais sorti pour acheter du vin. Il est donc revenu ; mais pourquoi Mourad est-il parti ? Par jalousie, parce que je n'étais pas retourné au salon, après le coup de sonnette…*'[129]

It appears that the frame narrator, at times, is willing to offer psychological insight (providing characters' thoughts and reflections), and then pulls back to an external position (i.e., in a brief movement between external and internal focalisation). This gives the impression of an occasional omniscience employed at the frame narrator's choosing: the frame narrator remains in control. Such moments are not what I would term irruption: the narrative *voice* is unchanged, consistent, despite the temporary switch to internal focalisation. These temporary switches to internal focalisation are also clearly signalled: either by a phrase ('Lakhdar pensa…'), or by an identifiable switch in *voice* (a shift to 'je' rather than 'il'; this is often underlined by a switch to italics) – in short, the frame narrator flags up that we are entering their consciousness. Ostensibly, the frame

[128] *Nedjma*, VI.b.i, p.234.
[129] Ibid., VI.b.iv, p. 235.

narrator is the only non-character narrator; s/he is an external, extradiegetic eye, occupying the spaces where no other character is narrating. S/he is not endowed with an individual personality or bias – and even if this *were* the case, it would be his or her own, separate to that of the diegetic characters. However, this separation is momentarily troubled by an irruption in this dovetailed sequence. Though it appears that the frame narrator is relaying Mourad and Lakhdar's respective threads in counterpoint, occasionally focalising them internally in their respective chapters only, we in fact see an irruption of Lakhdar's personal idiom – his personal choice of metaphor – in a section prior to his own use of this metaphor. In a section that is neither internally focalising – nor voicing – Lakhdar, the frame narrator describes Nedjma whirling away, swept by the wind:

> *Enfermés Nedjma et Mourad enfermés*, sifflait le vent en légères bourrasques, foudroyant la lumière électrique dans l'atmosphère en gésine, fourvoyant ses odorantes immensités, butant contre les volets, dispersant la forêt en pluvieuse résine et la mer en tourbillons décapités, en morsures dans la mémoire. Lakhdar posa la clé sur un livre :
>
> 'Le catéchisme de l'amour.' Le vent avait rasé le salon, proscrit toute vision, et le tourbillonnement du sang ne permettait à aucune idée de se fixer, comme si la ville, à la faveur de l'orage, était délivrée des feuilles mortes, comme si Nedjma elle-même tournoyait quelque part, brusquement balayée[130]

[130] Ibid., VI.b.iii, pp. 234-5, emphasis mine (underlined); italics in the original.

Nedjma, of course, is going nowhere: as the frame narrator notes, Lakhdar has locked the door (trapping Nedjma and Mustapha together inside; and given the external focalisation, we shall not find out what, if anything, happens there). There may be a suggestion of internal focalisation of Lakhdar during the brief use of italics; after this, however, it is ostensibly the frame narrator's reflection on the wind and Nedjma – the flurries of wind singing of their *enfermement* together. (*Nedjma* does not use free indirect style, as Gontard notes; but even if it did, it would still have to introduce the metaphor (or, manner of perception) first, to then recall it in the narrator's own words – but we cannot recall it here as Lakhdar has not mentioned it yet). When we return to Lakhdar in the next chapter, we see his thoughts directly; Lakhdar is now voiced directly, and focalised internally:

> Lakhdar marcha, la clé en main, à l'écoute du vent et de la haine. Il chantait. '*Quand je les ai enfermés, Mustapha n'existait pas, il était resté dans l'ombre comme l'arme secrète de la réalité ; mais, rompant les amarres, je savais qu'un vent ami rendrait le naufrage inéluctable. Ce vent était Mustapha et le naufrage me rapprochait de l'amante autant qu'il m'en éloignait ; c'est une femme perpétuellement en fuite* [. . .].' [Lakhdar] [. . .] remit la clé dans la serrure, tourna et sortit.[131]

As the frame narrator notes, Lakhdar is listening to the wind; we see that his reflections turn on Nedjma and Mustapha, and that the wind outside inflects his idiom. Again, Nedjma is described as disappearing in flight; again, a metaphor is inflected by the wind

[131] Ibid., VI.b.iv, pp. 235-6, emphasis mine (underlined); italics in the original.

(applied this time to Mustapha). The two chapters have applied a particular metaphor to the two characters that Lakhdar was ruminating on. This is highly unusual in *Nedjma*: Lakhdar has 'irrupted' into the frame narrator, imparting his own metaphor to him/her. A frame narrator not 'inhabiting' a character should have no access to their state of mind, but here, not only the content (Lakhdar's jealous reflections), but the particular mode of *perception* (construing both characters through wind metaphors) end up in the frame narrator's own discourse. That is to say, we have a breakdown between intra and extradiegetic layers. This is not simply a rather dry question of narratological classification: in a novel that centres on characters inescapably drawn into intergenerational cycles of events, and whose narrative mode is that of passing the tale from one locator to the next (much as the hashish pipe is passed in Rachid's fondouk), the frame narrator is ostensibly the only character who maintains a fixed impartiality, and diegetic exteriority. This is, I believe, abandoned here. Much like the scribe who follows Rachid intending only to report his tale, but who finally succumbs to the pipe and scores out his only written page ('N'écris pas. Écoute mon histoire',[132] Rachid orders), the frame narrator, too, has lost his position as a pure observer: Lakhdar and the others pull him/her *into their frame*. They irrupt even into his, sacrosanct, narrative level, stamping it with their influence; this, then, returns some measure of power to the characters – the frame narrator has lost his position as an author-god.

[132] Ibid., IV.b.xii, p. 179.

Proleptic markers (amorces)

This section, which I shall call 'proleptic markers,' considers features that are inherently contrapuntal, as they are woven through separate chapters: they are a secondary structure, arising (unexplained, unannounced) in one, only to be picked up, and illuminated, later on. If we follow Genette's definition of *amorces* as 'simples pierres d'attente sans anticipation, même allusive, qui ne trouveront leur signification que plus tard',[133] we are basically dealing with initially invisible structures: unlike his explicit form (the *annonce*), they cannot be detected. However, Genette's 'même allusive' precision is problematic; it creates a third category that doesn't quite fit in either the explicit realm of the *annonce* or the entirely undetectable *amorce*. I propose instead to consider 'amorces' in the spirit of Genette, but including the potential for a very dim, unidentifiable allusion. The defining characteristics of the *amorce* here are that it arises in an unannounced fashion, *could* exist independently (that is, never be returned to, and so not become an *amorce* – typically, this would imply that it makes some local sense on its first usage), but may nevertheless be, or have the feel of, an allusion. In Djebar, for example, we encounter *amorces* whose later meaning is entirely concealed, but which might nonetheless stand out as an unusual word, or, indeed, for *not* being elaborated further at first. Let us turn to *L'Amour* to see how such *pierres d'attente* are used to fashion Djebar's polyphony.

Two notable *amorces* in *L'Amour* function not only in the manner described by Genette, but also work with other structural features to tie together separate narrative threads at a thematic and structural focal point. In my chapter on *Silence and Screams*, I noted that I

[133] Genette, p. 112.

would return to the polyphonic and structural mechanics of the cry. Let us consider now, then, how a cry ties together chapters, and how the *amorce* contributes to this structural effect. The first major cry to be narrated in *L'Amour* (there are four in total)[134] is the author-narrator's own; it occurs at the end of a love affair (I have already analysed its local development in *Screams*). As I have noted, its description of expelling old memories – figured as a strangled corpse trapped inside of her – establishes a grim (analeptic) connection with those murdered in Pélissier's caves (in *Femmes, enfants bœufs* [. . .]); I also noted that when she cries 'comme pour vomir ou chanter quelque opéra funèbre',[135] the expression *opéra funèbre* is a 'proleptic evocation' of her maternal grandmother's cry during the trance ritual in *Transes* (Pt III Mvt 2). Indeed, the connection is unmistakable given the ritual's inauguration by a blind friend intoning 'une litanie funèbre'.[136] What I didn't note, however, is that this prolepsis is an *amorce*. When the term *opéra funèbre* is employed, we have no idea of what else (if anything) it refers to; indeed, it makes sense in the local context. Its full significance becomes apparent only when it is reactivated in *Transes*. The author-narrator's cry ties together narrative threads from before and later in the *récit* – in this focal point, the *rappel* and *amorce* establish explicit as well as hidden ties between chapters. We can say, then, that this cry is a structural focal point around which Djebar's polyphony silently arranges itself.

[134] Four cries are described at length: *L'Amour*, p. 131, p. 140, pp. 164-5, and p.217-19. There are of course others, less substantially narrated: e.g. p. 144, p. 176, p. 245.
[135] Ibid., p. 131.
[136] Ibid., p.163.

A further example would be Djebar's use of *lionne* (lioness). This occurs first, as an *amorce*, in a fleeting, somewhat hermetic reference to a lioness at the end of a passage that details another cry (Chérifa's at the death of her brother) – a cry that, again, is pictured as tying different people and experiences together:

> *Elle a entonné un long premier cri, la fillette. [. . .] la voix prend du corps dans l'espace, quelle voix ? Celle de la mère que les soldats ont torturée sans qu'elle gémisse, des sœurs trop jeunes [. . .], la voix des vieilles du douar qui, bouches béantes [. . .] font face à l'horreur du glas qui approche ? [. . .] Le sang qui fuse a fait reculer [. . .] les maquisards derrière. Ils savent quoi accompagner désormais : le hululement rythmé des morts non ensevelis qui reviennent, l'appel des lionnes disparues, que nul chasseur n'a atteintes… Le thrène de l'informe révolte dessine son arabesque dans l'azur.*[137]

We might consider the final sentence to be a structural metacomment: since the word *lionne* will serve as a marker that we later use to tie together several threads concerning strong, rebellious women, the 'arabesques' launched by this threnody of revolt seem to mirror these distant, unpredictable narrative projections. It comes up again, for example, when Chérifa is arguing fiercely with her French captors; when a *goumier* taunts her, her reply picks up the earlier *amorce*:

> – [. . .]Et les fellagha, tes frères, qu'est-ce qu'ils sont, sinon des rats cachés dans des trous !

[137] Ibid., p.140.

Devant cette insulte, je ne pus me contenir :

– Approche donc si tu veux ! Puisque tu nous traites de rats, on va voir si nous sommes des rats ou des lions ![138]

It is picked up a further two chapters later, in the opening words of *Transes*, describing Djebar's maternal grandmother as a lioness: 'Ma grand-mère maternelle dresse en moi son souvenir de halètement sombre, son impuissance de lionne.'[139] Her grandmother, as we have seen in *Silence and Screams*, is conducting her own form of female revolt, albeit a contained and codified one. The designation *lionne* comes to signify this and other female rebellions: the signifier *lionne*, initially more or less empty, is filled out only retrospectively, its meaning enriched. We can conclude, then, that whether with *lionne* or an *opéra funèbre*, these *amorces* and their later activation create an effect much like Kateb's delayed action time-bombs: their effect is not initially evident, but they are, in part, the mechanics of Djebar's polyphonic structuring.

A related effect forms, in part, the underpinnings of *Nedjma*'s polyphony. Here, too, successive chapters whose relationship is not necessarily apparent are revealed, in retrospect, to have turned on a particular focal point, much as the proleptic markers above highlight the ties that bind polyphonic strands together. In this case, however, the organising principle is present, yet initially invisible, only to be revealed, in stages, afterwards. Certain chapters, we discover in retrospect, orientate themselves around the character of Nedjma: she functions as a silent presence, the point of articulation for the

[138] Ibid., p.156.
[139] Ibid., p.164.

other characters' narrative threads; this lends credence to Maurice Nadeau's view of Nedjma as a centre about which the other characters rotate.[140] We can find this if we look, for example, at 2.viii-ix, chapters where the frame narrator focalises Lakhdar and Mustapha respectively. After Lakhdar's arrest in 2.ii, each chapter (externally) focalises him until 2.ix, where the focalisation switches to Mustapha. The chapter link to 2.ix, unlike those previous, is not apparent: 2.viii finishes with an image of a 'un vieux papier dans sa poche. Beauséjour.'[141] that, it turns out, functions as a visual 'cut' to mark the end of Lakhdar's narrative thread. 2.ix begins by throwing us: 'L'apparition s'étire, en vacillant';[142] we cannot identify the context, and this is not helped when Mustapha is simply referred to as 'le commissionnaire'.[143] There appears to be no thematic or word-level link between these chapters. However, much as 2.viii glimpsed a symbol of Nedjma (though we do not yet know what 'Beauséjour,' Lakhdar's destination, refers to), 2.ix presents an increasingly strong connection with her. The link, it turns out, is that each chapter is charting its respective character's journey towards Nedjma: though it is not made obvious (indeed, it is deliberately obscured), she is the departure point for Mustapha's arc and the endpoint for Lakhdar's. The step by step revelation of Nedjma in 2.ix is common to much character description in *Nedjma*; it relies on a technique that I shall call 'progressive revelation.' This entails bringing a character (or scene) gradually into focus, beginning from a point where s/he is unidentifiable. In 2.ix, Nedjma is revealed in stages; the first stages are *amorces*, in that we identify their referent after the

[140] *France-Observateur*, Paris, 16 August 1956.
[141] *Nedjma*, II.viii, p. 59.
[142] Ibid., II.ix, p. 59.
[143] Ibid.

fact, only when the narrator returns to the term.[144] The first mention of Nedjma is completely unidentifiable: 'L'apparition s'étire, en vacillant'; it is then identified as female: ('le commissionnaire craint-il de s'envoler pour atterrir auprès d'elle ?')[145] – and the narrator underlines that 'Ni lui ni elle ne savent qui ils sont'.[146] We then encounter three references to an unidentified woman and villa – 'Mustapha [. . .] verra encore la villa, encore la terrasse et la femme aux cheveux fauves'.[147] Halfway through, Mustapha himself is properly identified – 'le commissionnaire Mustapha'[148] – and the link between the veiled woman and Beauséjour is likewise confirmed: 'se jurant de ne plus suivre des cagoulardes de Beauséjour'.[149] We then learn that villas are often named after women: '"*Toutes ces villas, tous ces palais ratés qui portent des noms de femmes…*"';[150] after this, we are presented with, 'Surmontant un patio de maison hantée [. . .], la villa Nedjma'.[151] This is probably one such villa (named after 'Nedjma'): her name has not appeared yet in *Nedjma*, and so its first revelation is made here indirectly, purely by inference. What follows is a long landscape tableau describing savage, untamed nature, ending in a brief, internal focalisation: '"*Pays de mendiants et de viveurs, patrie des envahisseurs de tout acabit,* pense Mustapha, *pays de cagoulardes et de femmes fatales…*"':[152] and then Nedjma is identified, while the earlier *amorces* are finally attributed to her (indeed, we did not know for sure whether Villa Nedjma referred to a woman at all): 'Étoffe et chair

[144] Though these do not turn on a single (later to be repeated) word, they nevertheless match, for example, the various passing references to Albertine (before her proper introduction) that Genette presents as examples of the *amorce* (see Genette, p. 113).
[145] *Nedjma*, II.ix, p. 59.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid., p. 60.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., p. 61.

fraîchement lavées, Nedjma est nue dans sa robe ; elle secoue son écrasante chevelure fauve'.[153]

Such progressive revelation is also used across chapters in *L'Amour* – again, to present a subject that is to be approached with caution, and again, its mechanics are those of the *amorce*. The first reference to caves and putrefaction, in Part 1's *Biffure*, is one such *amorce*, as we have yet to learn of the fumigations: the narrator mentions that … '*il me faut* [. . .] *plonger ma face dans l'ombre, scruter la voûte de rocailles ou de craie* [. . .]. [. . .] [*Q*]*uelle odeur de putréfaction s'en échappe ? Je tâtonne, [. . .] mes oreilles ouvertes en huître*s'.[154] Then in Part 2, ch.I, while the narrator is considering how to 'Dévoiler et simultanément tenir secret ce qui doit le rester, tant que n'intervient pas la fulgurance de la révélation',[155] she notes that 'Le mot est torche';[156] shortly after this, she speaks of exhuming buried cries – 'exhumer des cris, ceux d'hier comme ceux du siècle dernier'[157] (in this, there is certainly allusion to *something* painful in the past); and finally, the chapter that follows relates the fumigations in detail. These references to caves, putrefaction, torchlit exploration, and the 'burying' of cries – though increasingly suggestive – all occur before the event itself. It is, then, revealed progressively; we witness the event having already encountered the key elements, though we could not know what they were preparing for – and the result of this technique is that the final horror is emphasised: we now fully recognise the hesitant steps that have led up to its

[153] Ibid.
[154] *L'Amour*, p. 58.
[155] Ibid., p. 75.
[156] Ibid. We should note the connotation of light or shining in *fulgurance*, and its association with truth or revelation, given the connection of the two in this torch metaphor: a torch reveals, but only with an intermittent, flickering light.
[157] Ibid., p. 76.

revelation, and sense, therefore, that it must have been a difficult topic to touch upon. In this example, then, progressive revelation mirrors the narrator's psychological preparation – the mental steps she must take before fully confronting (and narrating) the traumatic event; as a poetic strategy, it responds to Djebar's search for a sensitive and appropriate manner of narrating such horror. When we later see Pélissier literally taking up a torch to examine the victims,[158] it becomes clear that the author-narrator is inhabiting his position through reading his vivid written account; but until this revelation, it is the reader who likewise traces features before discovering what they represent.

Sequence (i)

I shall turn lastly to the most traditional sense of narrative structure, which is sequence. In asserting that the novels I am considering are largely non-linear, polyphonic compositions, I have, from the first, defined their *récit*s as non-chronological, and have, so far, considered the mechanics of polyphonic connections across different chapters – in many cases, medium or long-distance connections. Sequence – the linear movement from one chapter to the next – has an important role to play, however, even in non-linear narratives. Vladimir Propp, constructing his *Morphology of the Folktale*, concerned himself with what Genette (naturally) terms *ordre*, or the ordering of events in the *récit*; much like Genette, he arrives at a sequential formula or 'scheme'[159] (e.g. $\gamma^1\ \beta^1\ \delta^1\ A^1\ B^4\ C^1\ I^6\ K^1$ – the superscript identifies variant types). Neither he nor Genette, however, study the actual mechanism of transition, or transformation, between these steps (or episodic

[158] Ibid., p. 92.
[159] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, London: University of Texas Press, 1975), p.99.

moves (*xod*), as Propp called them).[160] Propp gestures to this as a potential research area, beyond the (considerable) scope of his sequential study:

> ….the entire story of fairy tales ought to be examined as a *chain* of variants. [. . .] Tales could be arranged so that a picture of the gradual transition from one theme to another would turn out to be quite clear. Of course, certain jumps and gaps would result here and there.[161]

In short, they both analyse the *order* of elements linked in the narrative chain, but not how they link. I shall briefly examine some linking methods, under the general headings of *word link* and *theme link*; as we shall see, they are identifiable and sometimes significant. They can also be significant in their, at times notable, *absence*, and I shall consider this aspect under the heading of *interference*.

A word link, quite simply, is a word used at the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next; it is the minimal requirement to create a semantic link between chapters. It can be a thematically significant word, but not necessarily: in either case, it creates a sense of connection (one that is, perhaps, even more necessary in the absence of chronological or thematic continuity – that is, if the author does not want the *entirely* exploded discourse 'des 'temps' disparates, discontinus, dont le lié n'est pas évident',[162] that Glissant gestures to). It is common in *L'Amour*, and is often used in combination with a theme link that typically becomes clear afterwards. As I noted above (in relation to Part 2, ch.

[160] Ibid., pp.92-3.
[161] Ibid., p. 114.
[162] Glissant, p.199.

III), the first word link – *noces* – is thematically significant; it recalls the 'noce de Mazouna'[163] of the previous page (and chapter): it is both a word and theme link, connecting the chapters by subject. There are also other local ties, which link the chapters purely semantically; they concern ephemera: *La mariée nue de Mazouna* finishes by referring to a bookseller recently installed in Algeria ('Le libraire Bérard');[164] the next page announces the *noces* will take place in a *libraire*'s apartment.[165] The same page refers to Djebar's mother's long tresses ('une lourde tresse de cheveux noirs balançant dans le dos');[166] it is not long after we have read of Badra's ('elle ôta [. . .] le bonnet brodé d'or [. . .] – libérée, son épaisse chevelure auburn ruissela dans son dos.').[167] Perhaps there is something of a gesture against grand narratives in the act of linking chapters by such passing details; connections are forged by a network of small ties. Djebar clearly intends us to identify theme links between chapters – indeed, such connections are at times made explicit by the narrator. In Part 1, (which is subtitled *L'Amour s'écrit*) for example, we see a chapter counterpoint of French and Algerian parties writing correspondence (in Pt. 1 ch.III, the journalist J. T. Merle reports on the invasion; in the next chapter, Djebar's father writes openly to his wife; and in the following chapter, 1.iv, Hajj Ahmed Effendi writes as Algiers' fall approaches). The narrator then reflects on this *graphorrhée épistolaire*, overtly associating the chapters on cloistered girls' correspondence with those that are based on war correspondence: 'Une telle démangeaison de l'écriture me rappelle la graphorrhée épistolaire des jeunes filles

[163] *L'Amour*, p. 116.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., p.117.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid., p.114.

enfermées de mon enfance'.[168] Whether in sequence or in counterpoint, we are expected to read for such connections.

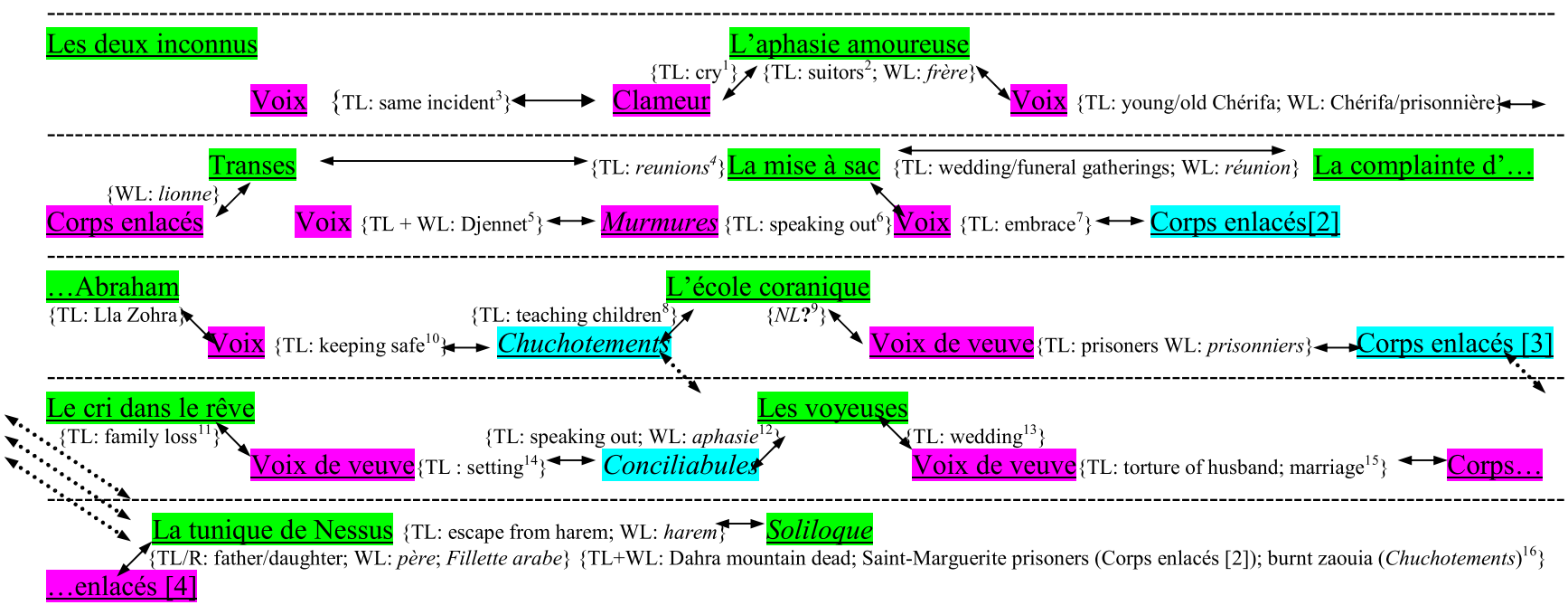
To show how sequence operates on a larger scale, let us consider Part 3 of *L'Amour* from the perspective of word and theme links: not only to study the mechanics of chapter sequence, but also to see how the occasional absence of such links can, in itself, signify. I shall borrow a sequence model from Propp, rather than Genette, as Genette's schemes in *Ordre* – for example, of the form 'A2 [B1] C2 [D1 (E2) F1 (G2) H1] I2'[169] – are less graphically suggestive, and hence less suited to conveying the ideas of interconnection and counterpoint. Propp's model creates one long line of events (appearing, left to right, in the order of the *récit*); new 'threads' are shown in a parallel line underneath, as in the short example from Propp below (in which each 'episode' is simply numbered).

> 3. An episode may [. . .] be interrupted in its turn, and in this case fairly complicated schemes may result.
>
> I. _____ . . . . . _____ . . . . . .
>
> II. _____ . . . . . _____
>
> III. _____[170]

[168] Ibid., p. 56.
[169] Genette, p.83. The alphabetical progression implies the order they appear in the narration (in the *récit*): B comes after A. The numbers refer to time of the events (*histoire*): 2 took place after 1. The system is not very elegant (the letters are unnecessary and could be removed – or, as with Propp, represented graphically).
[170] Propp, p. 93.

Propp's system lets us see in immediate, visual terms the interweaving of narrative threads. There is no reason why it could not be used in a longer, or more fragmented, tale, such as *L'Amour*. As the whole narrative will not fit on one page (ideally, we would use one long line onscreen), I introduce line breaks (the line below continues the one above). Though not necessary, I give each thread one colour, to aid scansion. Propp has been criticised for only identifying segments – sequential or alternating – but not how one *transitions* into the next,[171] so I extend Propp's original model by showing how *word* and *theme* links connect segments (sequential or otherwise); I denote these links with labelled arrows, and footnote a brief description. Propp's model will already identify the shape of Djebar's interwoven segments; and word and theme links reveal that these fragmented segments, even when read *sequentially*, are usually interconnected. The merit of this model is its economy (we can represent a book in 1-2 pages), and its graphical clarity; of course, we could expand analysis of all these links. I shall first give an overview and then explain some word/theme links in detail.

[171] Sturrock, for example, speaks of the 'logic of transformations which Propp never grasped'. John Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 110.



Legend:
NL: no link TL: theme link WL: word link
Green level: personal/autobiographical Purple level: historical
Blue = still historical, but with some difference (in period or in voice: C19 rather than C20 history, for example; or a combination of historical account and reflections by the author-narrator).

Legend: [earlier chapter's WL/TL] ←→ [following chapter's WL/TL] ←→ = 'links with' ⋰⋱ = recapitulation link (the two noted here connect with 'La tunique de Nessus' chapter; the third link is from Part 1's first chapter ('Fillette [. . .]'))

[1] Chérifa's cry ←→Grandmother's ancestral cry
[2] Djebar and a suitor ←→ Chérifa's suitors; WL *frère* (recalls Djebar's brother)
[3] Same incident related by a new narrator
[4] *réunions*, i.e. family gatherings
[5] Djennet mentioned ←→ Djennet focalised
[6] Woman not daring to speak of abuse←→Woman speaking out about abuse

[7] Chapter commences with Djebar embracing the narrator of the previous chapter.
[8] Old woman teaching bright-eyed children stories←→Djebar as a child, learning; teaching children Quran
[9] See (my) discussion on pp. 286-8 ('*l'école coranique*'/prisoners)
[10] See discussion on p. 286 ('dans son salut')
[11] Loss of Djebar's grandmother←→Mother lost four of her family in the war
[12] 'Swallowing' rape ←→ speaking out. *Conciliabules*' last word is *aphasie*; Les voyeuses's word link is 'couper la parole'. (See discussion on pp. 290-1.)
[13] Wedding←→ Poor woman trying to marry off her children (see discussion on p. 288-9).
[14] *Conciliabules* continues the depiction/theme of post-Independence poverty.
[15] French torturing husband ←→French torturing and killing husband and one other man. Also: Marrying off children←→Macabre 'wedding' audience (see discussion on p. 289)
[16] Recapitulation (form *i*) (here TL + WL) to beginning (Part 1): father holding daughter's hand. Other TL/WL to: Dahra mountain dead; Saint-Marguerite prisoners (←→Corps enlacés [2]); the zaouia burnt by Saint-Arnaud, identified as Djebar's tribe's (←→*Chuchotements*). (See discussion on pp. 250-255.)

As we can see, theme links predominate in Part 3[172] – often tying together sequential, yet ostensibly unrelated, chapters – until the final two chapters, which, appropriately, shift towards recapitulation. There are also some word links; and it is actually rare for there to be no sequential connection of any kind. The exceptions, with no word or no (or little) apparent theme link, are in fact interesting for this very reason. For example, sometimes theme links work by contrast rather than similarity: *Voix* finishes by noting that 'Pourtant, Dieu nous a gardés toujours dans son salut !'[173] (i.e., God has kept them safe from the French troops); the next chapter, set in a much earlier time period, begins with an image of a *zaouia* that some French troops have set fire to – in visual terms, this is an abrupt scenic 'cut' to the kind of violence Lla Zohra fears: '*En avril 1842, la zaouia des Berkani est brûlée ; femmes et enfants errent sur les neiges des pentes montagneuses – cette année-là, l'hiver fut rigoureux. Les cadavres nourriront les chacals. Les Français repartent*'.[174] In *Opacity*, I considered different strategies of linguistic and structural opacity, and mentioned that I would return to them here; Glissant, as I noted, contends that a linear narrative structure is unsuited to conveying the 'chaos de la mémoire.'[175] What we see in these absences of explicit connection is, at times, an implicit association with the thematic arcs that come immediately before or after them: as theme links are so common here, we become conditioned into looking for them – their absence, rather than their continuity, is what becomes notable. If we study some of these, we shall see why there might be a need for narrative opacity, as they concern ideas that could be dangerous to state directly. The omission of any word or theme link before the series of chapters on

[172] (We could reasonably suggest that identifiable theme links render word links less necessary.)
[173] *L'Amour*, p. 198.
[174] Ibid., p. 199.
[175] Glissant, p. 200n.

a prison theme, for example, makes us query whether there is really no link between *l'école coranique* and the chapters concerning prisoners (those in a Cherchel prison, and then Saint Arnaud's hostages). Typically, the theme (and word) link is established in the first paragraph; in *Voix de veuve*, we initially find nothing of the sort. A little later, however, the prison theme starts, and establishes an implicit thematic link with the narrator's criticisms of Islamic female cloistering in *l'école coranique*: we recall that men are described as wanting to entirely 'incarcerate' girls' bodies ('[le] corps que le regard des voisins, des cousins, prétend rendre sourd et aveugle, puisqu'ils ne peuvent plus tout à fait l'incarcérer'),[176] and that Djebar escaped the 'prison de [s]es semblables'[177] by attending the French school. Though the thematic link is hard to deny, there is no author-explicit connection; *Corps enlacés*, by contrast, is clearly introduced as another 'prison' chapter (it begins 'L'été 1845 commence quand les prisonniers [. . .]').[178] It also ends with the expression 'tribu soumise'[179] – referring to the Algerian tribes quelled by the French – while the previous chapter (*Voix de veuve*) relates a Cherchel prison break – that is, a refusal to submit to French imprisonment. If we were to read for a closer theme link between this question of submitting, and the Islamic requirement for girls to submit to cloistering, there is a potentially incendiary aspect in concluding the chapter arc with the word *soumise*: it is well known that this is the literal meaning of the word Islam.[180] Djebar as a writer negotiates her relationship with Islam and the need for individual freedoms and female emancipation (indeed, in *La complainte d'Abraham*, she gestured

[176] *L'Amour*, p. 203.
[177] Ibid., p. 208.
[178] Ibid., p. 214.
[179] Ibid., p. 216.
[180] *Islam* is the infinitive of *aslama*, which is the fourth form of *salima*, and means to submit or resign oneself. *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, Tome IV: Iran-Kha (Paris, Leiden: Maisonneuve et Larose/ E.J. Brill, 1978), s.v. Islam, p. 179.

her awareness of the 'les risques du blasphème').[181] In creating an implied thematic connection through polyphonic composition, it is the narrative structure itself that leads us towards this sort of thematic connection; by a certain – perhaps prudent – structural opacity, the narrator leaves it to us to make the link.

There are other examples of when the polyphonic structuring of *L'Amour* highlights the particular (cross) cultural position of the writer. The explicit connection between *Corps enlacés* [4][182] and *Les voyeuses*, for example: there is a clear theme link between the two chapters in the figure of the *voyeuse* – a hooded figure with an eyelet that allows a woman to observe a scene unseen. In *Les voyeuses* (much like in *L'aphasie amoureuse*, where she refrains from adding her voice to the 'cri ancestral'[183] at a similar family gathering) the author-narrator expresses a feeling of distance from her traditional culture: she looks on at these hooded wedding onlookers with a studied curiosity; we assume she would never occupy this role, which she deems a 'triste privilège'[184] of the outspoken women not formally invited to the bridal viewing. In *Corps enlacés* [4], however, she reinterprets the traditional role, positioning herself as a modern type of *voyeuse* (and indeed, one who speaks out). As we know, it is the fact that Djebar is educated ('Elle lit!',[185] as her mother stiffly declares) and is a writer that puts her in a different position to the women depicted in *Les voyeuses*. Indeed, she notes that it is writing that brings her to her origins ('écrire m'a ramenée [. . .] à ma seule origine');[186] this is how Djebar

[181] *L'Amour*, p. 194.
[182] Ibid., pp. 234-7 (this is the 4th *Corps enlacés* chapter; numbering follows that of my theme link diagram).
[183] Ibid., p. 144.
[184] Ibid., p. 230.
[185] Ibid., p. 203.
[186] Ibid., p. 229.

expresses her relationship to her 'home' culture. Drawing on the wedding and torture themes that also tie these chapters (*Les voyeuses* shows guests viewing the bride's finery; *Voix de veuve* considers a mother whose husband is tortured to death, and concludes with her plan to marry off their youngest son),[187] we see in *Corps enlacés* a torture scene in which the only observers appear to be the wedding dresses strewn on trees by the soldiers: 'Les captifs deviennent vite méconnaissables. Un silence, une distraction s'empare des soldats, qui avaient été, dans un premier temps, attirés par le spectacle. Les hardes, pendues aux branches, semblent soudain seules spectatrices du supplice qui s'étire au soleil…'[188] The other onlooker, of course, is the author-narrator; as an extradiegetic presence, her diegetic separation itself functions as an ancestral veil, rendering her an unseen *voyeuse* as she reads a soldier's account of these events:

> Parmi les légionnaires, l'un écrit les jours d'El Aroub et les revit. Quelquefois même il pleure, 'mais sans larme, n'en ayant plus depuis longtemps.'
>
> Je le lis à mon tour, [. . .] comme si je me retrouvais enveloppée du voile ancestral ; seul mon œil libre allant et venant sur les pages, où ne s'inscrit pas seulement ce que le témoin voit, ni ce qu'il écoute.[189]

The role may be similar, as is the theme, but the context is now a grim fusion of the bridal and torture themes. Djebar keeps faith here with her local traditions not by joining them, but by offering a cross-cultural reinterpretation of Islamic culture and her position as a writer: she occupies a new role as historian and writer, and asserts its validity, but

[187] Ibid., p. 233.
[188] Ibid., p. 235.
[189] Ibid.

connects this role to her Islamic heritage. It is in this reappropriation of the *voyeuse* role that Djebar negotiates the distance between cultures; and it is the polyphonic interplay between chapters that communicates it.

A final type of sequential linking, effectively a form of theme link, is when one chapter 'answers' the previous, or provides a clear example, but in a different narrative thread. It will appear that the subject matter has changed (to a new character or situation), but there will be, in fact, a logical relationship between the two. We see this first in the connection between *La mise à sac* and the *Voix* chapter that follows. Although both belong to different threads of the counterpoint in this section (*La mise à sac* is the autobiographical section – here it describes a family 'mourning' ritual by Djebar's grandmother, and others, for a nephew who has been arrested for his role in the resistance; *Voix*, as with all the *Voix* chapters, relates war survivors' memories, in this case Lla Zohra's), *Voix* provides an answer (perhaps a retort) to the problem encountered in *La mise à sac*. The keening grandmother criticises her sister,'[qui] avait exposé son chagrin avec un excès d'emphase';[190] for them, the important thing is a shared 'solidarité et la soumission féminines':[191] 'L'essentiel, pour l'aïeule, était de se maintenir à la hauteur du rôle que heur ou malheur vous imposait.'[192] The author-narrator questions this:

> Comment une femme pourrait parler haut, même en langue arabe, autrement que dans l'attente du grand âge ? Comment dire 'je,' puisque ce serait dédaigner les formules-couvertures qui maintiennent le trajet individuel dans la résignation

[190] Ibid., p. 177.
[191] Ibid., p. 176.
[192] Ibid., p. 177.

> collective ?... Comment entreprendre de regarder son enfance, même si elle se déroule différente ? [. . .] Ne parler que de la conformité, pourrait me tancer ma grand-mère[193]

The chapter that follows gives an answer: it presents Lla Zohra, an equally old woman, describing in detail a long list of misfortunes from her days helping the resistance; indeed, she asks herself 'Quelles épreuves raconter et lesquelles laisser à l'oubli ?...'[194] The difference here is that Zohra is willing to become a social outcast: she is ostracised by her neighbours, labelled the 'la folle';[195] people shut their doors on her, as they don't want trouble. But she provides an outspoken example of an alternative, within the same culture, to this self-silencing. We see a similar effect again when a young woman, who has been raped, encounters social pressure not to speak of it directly – instead, the memory is buried: 'La jeune femme [. . .] éparpille du sable brûlant sur toute parole : le viol, non dit, ne sera pas violé. Avalé.'[196] The chapter that follows (*Les voyeuses*), however, begins by sketching the character of 'la femme qui crie': again, this is someone who does speak out – 'celle dont la voix querellait la couvée, s'entendait [. . .] jusque dans la rue, celle dont la plainte contre le sort ne s'abîmait ni dans la prière, ni dans le murmure des diseuses, mais s'élevait nue, [. . .] franchissant les murs'[197] – although, as in the keening ritual, such a person risks social exclusion: 'la femme qui crie' is considered the most socially damning insult. The counterpoint we find in *L'Amour*, then, holds up counterexamples to widely held social (and political) conventions, offering alternative

[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid., p. 181.
[195] Ibid., p. 184.
[196] Ibid., p. 226.
[197] Ibid., p. 228.

forms of resistance that go against social orthodoxy. Such a structural counterpoint allows the narrator to provide rapid contrasts of the two, underlining socio-political divergence and alternative forms of resistance among women, even within Algeria.

Sequence (ii): interference

So far, I have largely been concerned with forms of connection, whether polyphonic or sequential. This could give the impression that polyphony and sequence alone account for structure. Similarly, the succession of abrupt shocks that Glissant speaks of, leaving no identifiable link between sections of a narrative, could be taken for a lack of structure. In fact, though, the lack of connection, and the creation of confusion, are quite common structural *techniques* in *Nedjma*, *Season* (which is, indeed, characterised by memorial irruption), and *L'Amour*. I have named this technique 'interference' as an analogy with transmission of material on, for example, the radio: after a radio or television retunes (after the attendant white noise), we cannot tell at first if we are continuing with the same channel. The same confusion can be created in narrative by momentarily 'throwing' the reader by leaving out any local links to the previous thread; often, this technique is used to signal the start of a new narrative arc, without the need to announce it. In *L'Amour*, for example, we are initially confused when *Voix*[198] begins simply with an unidentified voice, apparently mid conversation. It transpires that we have switched locutors – the lack of initial identification serves as a signal for the narrative break. In *Nedjma*, new characters (and narrative threads) are not always announced: often, they are just suddenly *there*. The transition from Lakhdar's childhood arc to Mustapha's is signalled by an (at

[198] Ibid., pp. 166-170.

first) unidentifiable reference, *in medias res*, to the 'fils de l'oukil' (i.e. Mustapha): 'Lakhdar [. . .] couche sur les marches de l'église. Il apprend à fumer au fils de l'oukil.'[199] Similarly, *Nedjma*'s first Arabic word, *Ad'dahma*, is used to begin chapter IV.a.viii; until here, we have had a fairly simple chronological arc detailing Si Mokhtar and Rachid's journeys in the Nadhor with Nedjma (we have just witnessed Nedjma's departure with the old black man). If we look at the chapter transition, we can see that it is initially impossible to identify the new context:

> Keblout a dit de ne protéger que ses filles. Quant aux mâles vagabonds, dit l'ancêtre Keblout, qu'ils vivent en sauvages, par monts et par vaux, eux qui n'ont pas défendu leur terre…
>
> VIII
>
> 'L'Écrasante,'[200] annonçait l'homme dressé à la portière, et qui n'avait pas dormi de la nuit ; Rachid ne se leva pas.[201]

At first, we are confused by this abrupt switch, the new and unidentified interlocutor, the unknown location (the passage will go on to sketch a tableau of Constantine). At the same time, the word *écrasante*, especially as it follows an arc concerning Nedjma, is something of a recapitulation: a new section, after a Nedjma arc, is marked by an adjective used in the first words that describe Nedjma (in II.a.ix): 'Étoffe et chair

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[199] *Nedjma*, p.191.
[200] Kateb's footnote offers the Arabic word: 'L'Écrasante : *Ad'dahma*, adjectif par lequel l'imagination populaire désigne Constantine.'
[201] *Nedjma*, IV.a.vii-viii, p. 142.

fraîchement lavées, Nedjma [. . .] secoue son écrasante chevelure fauve'.[202] A sudden, dramatic increase in analeptic *portée* here serves to unsettle our sense of chronology or sequence; this confusing switch functions as structural marker, a kind of section cut. Such abrupt switches are common in *Nedjma*: Nedjma's abduction, for example, is not narrated – IV.a.iii begins with her, quite abruptly, in Si Mokhtar and Rachid's possession. Again, let us look at the chapter transition:

> son descendant Rachid qui lisait à présent sa propre histoire dans l'œil jaune et noir de Keblout, dans une cellule de déserteur, en la double nuit du crépuscule et de la prison.
>
> III
>
> J'étais avec l'oncle Mokhtar et sa fille [. . .] : sa tête enfouie dans les genoux de mon vieux camarade[203]

The two chapters that precede this are, as Genette would term them, a *paralipse*: Nedjma's abduction is ostensibly taking place during this reflection – either this, or these two chapters are simply a detour before resumption of the abduction thread. I believe that a *paralipse* better describes this section, however: although we are presented with a sudden change (Nedjma suddenly in their possession) with no forewarning, the apparent detour mirrors the mental states of Si Mokhtar and Rachid during the abduction, in that

[202] Ibid., II.a.ix, p. 61.
[203] Ibid., IV.a.iii, pp. 126-7.

the two episodes reflect the reasons with which they justify it. Nedjma, as Si Mokhtar later admits, was abducted to save her from an incestuous marriage, and in an attempt to reinvigorate the lifeblood of the Keblout tribe by returning her to the Nadhor (in the final chapters of III.b., Si Mokhtar teaches Rachid the history of the tribe). In short, they abduct her for reasons of tribal honour. The brief detour (IV.a.i-ii) relates two anecdotes: in the first, two young virgins of the now leaderless Keblout tribe die, as if 'sacrifiées pour le repos de Keblout'[204] – the first killed by an eagle, the second in her attempt to kill it for revenge. The second anecdote is a fearsome vision of Keblout himself – 'l'ancêtre au visage de bête féroce'[205] – who appears in a dream while Rachid is in prison (as a deserter). Both chapters concern the honour and responsibility due to the tribe. To clarify this initial confusion, the narrator offers an *analepse complétive* soon afterwards – 'le rapt n'avait guère fait scandale…'[206] – and then elaborates on it in 4.a.iv: 'Nedjma, première victime du rapt exécuté par Si Mokhtar avec mon aide';[207] but this illumination comes after we have already inferred their mental justification of the *rapt*. We can say, then, that although such interference is a feature of *Nedjma*'s structure, and contributes to its non-linear style, it serves to mark the beginnings of new narrative arcs (in this case, the Nedjma/Nadhor arc): there are subtle, psychological, structures underpinning the abrupt shocks of *Nedjma*'s narrative sequence.

[204] Ibid., IV.a.i, p.126.
[205] Ibid., IV.a.ii, p.126.
[206] Ibid., IV.a.iii, p. 127.
[207] Ibid., IV.a.iv, p. 132.

Conclusion

The variety of structural techniques that contribute to the polyphonic effect of these works at once support Glissant's idea of an exploded structure, and at the same time present new ways of understanding a *discours éclaté*. Though we can compare their non-linear chronology with a similar aesthetic tendency in Modernism, there is a specifically cross-cultural character to its mechanism and motivation. The abrupt shocks that Glissant speaks of are all too evident in each, but they nevertheless serve a variety of structural purposes: as we have seen, a disordered chronology and non-linear progression do not in themselves preclude the possibility of a complex and discernible network of correspondences: there is indeed no 'harmonie majestueuse' but rather the kind of 'ténébreuse et profonde unité' that Baudelaire gestures to in their confluence of echoes and mirrorings. Kateb himself explained why he first tried, and then eschewed, a chronological approach in composing *Nedjma*:

> 'Je suppose que, [voulant raconter] ma vie, [j'en] fasse un récit linéaire, classique, réaliste. C'est comme ça que j'ai commencé ; j'ai travaillé comme ça pendant des années et ça a donné des tronçons ; mais je sentais que je n'arrivais pas au cœur de ce que j'avais à dire. Ça restait des tronçons.
>
> Par la suite, c'est vraiment en travaillant et aussi en lisant des écrivains modernes, que je me suis rendu compte que cette façon linéaire d'écrire ne pouvait pas servir à dégager ce qu'il y a de propre à mon œuvre ; elle ne pouvait pas me faire toucher le fond de ce que j'avais à dire. J'ai commencé tout à fait

> dans les ténèbres, instinctivement, [. . .] ; j'ai commencé à me rendre compte que mon œuvre décrivait des courbes [. . .] ; puisque je m'aperçois que ma pensée tourne sur elle-même, laissons-la tourner. [. . .]
>
> Je me souviens d'un moment en 1953 [. . .]. J'allais reprendre ce manuscrit qui était composé d'innombrables tronçons… J'ai essayé toutes les combinaisons possibles. [. . .]
>
> J'ai facilité la tâche au lecteur. *Nedjma* commence par un morceau assez réaliste – un morceau où il est question de travailleurs sur un chantier. Le récit n'est pas trop difficile à suivre ; c'est par la suite que ça se complique.[208]

I quote extensively from this interview to underline several key points: Kateb's non-linear approach was, as Glissant contended, an elected strategy, based on Kateb's personal circumstances and experience; it was influenced by Modernism;[209] the combination of sections (*tronçons*) was decided 'instinctively' – which is to say that it followed a certain logic, but not a readily defined one; the reader is given an active role, in the task of making sense of the exploded structure. It therefore makes sense that we should find a kind of instinctive or associative logic in *Nedjma*'s structure; and as we have seen in analysing theme and recapitulation links (whether in Kateb or Djebar) there is a meaningful interplay between the polyphonic strands. *Nedjma*'s structure is, in sum, a fundamentally *human* one: it is, in other words, deeply subjective, reflecting human memory and association (both that of the narrators and ultimately that of Kateb choosing

[208] Kateb Yacine, 'A propos de *Nedjma*', p. 125.
[209] We see from Gontard's *Nedjma de Kateb Yacine* how important an influence Faulkner was on Kateb's structural approach.

an order for his narrative fragments one night in Paris);[210] it may not offer the linear progression that often suits a history book, but – as the narrator in *Le Polygone Etoilé* attests – 'La mémoire n'a pas de succession chronologique'.[211] In linking narrative structure to the (sometimes chaotic) structural and associative nature of human memory, we should not be surprised when we encounter a narrative that reproduces Glissant's 'polyphonie de chocs dramatiques, au niveau du conscient comme de l'inconscient.'[212] Indeed, we have seen an associative and psychological character in the mechanics of irruption and interference, much as recapitulation reflects memory's capacity for summary and synthesis (or fusion). Where we encounter progressive revelation, as we saw in *Opacity*, we are intended to synthesise a series of (at times distant) fragments; and we also find that this is a structural approach matched to subjects that are not easily approached directly. Or again, as we saw in *L'Amour*, implied thematic continuity can point to a connection between chapters that is not stated explicitly, leaving the reader to identify a connection that may be sensitive to state directly. We have a variety of polyphonic forms, then, that are matched to content. Such structures do at first cause confusion, as understanding the whole is not, as Kateb notes, an easy task: but this does not mean that we should interpret such works as simply having an exploded – let alone no – structure. In learning to read mirrored scenes, we create a form of literary simultaneity, reading incidents together despite their textual distance; in recapitulation, we have at once a traditional form of fusion that could be traced back to the earliest works of musical polyphony, and yet the bold, recapitulatory fusion of separate narrative threads (or characters) carries a particularly Modernist charge. Even when we consider these works

[210] Kateb Yacine, 'A propos de *Nedjma*', p. 125.
[211] *Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 176.
[212] *Le Discours antillais*, p. 199.

sequentially, we discern a network of correspondences between chapters, and links between ostensibly opposing subjects. But this is to be expected in a cross-cultural poetics: in Salih, Djebar and Kateb, the relationship between two or even more cultures is often the very motor of their polyphony. This polyphony is neither fully oppositional, nor an uncomplicated synthesis: Kateb's counterpoint makes us *reflect* (in a very literal sense) the promise of cultural cooperation against the chaotic polarisation that followed Sétif; Salih's mirrored scenes tie North and South together in a shared, tragic image, while Djebar's counterpoint brings together images of love and war in an uneasy (but deeply personal) *va-et-vient* – as Djebar herself states, her polyphony is a structural response to the 'cost' of self revelation:

> Dans le roman, le besoin de mémoire est d'ordre intrinsèquement personnel. J'aime bien que vous songiez à Proust, car Proust a mis en valeur *son* temps perdu. De la part du romancier s'exerce une réappropriation de sa propre histoire, en se confrontant à des mots et à la structure d'un roman pour ressusciter le perdu. [. . .] Sur le 19ème siècle, j'avais besoin d'ouvrir quelques fenêtres, choisies arbitrairement et non comme l'aurait fait un historien, mais j'avais besoin aussi d'évoquer mon enfance, ma famille, [. . .] le jour où ma grand-mère est morte, des détails qui ne sont qu'à moi. J'ai entrelacé les deux, car cela me coûtait de parler de moi. [. . .] La difficulté était dans la liaison de la grande histoire à repréciser, avec la petite histoire restituée à la bonne distance.[213]

[213] Smati Thoria, 'Création, liberté : Entretien avec Assia Djebar' (*Algérie Actuel* 1276: 29 March – 4 April 1990), p. 37.

I stated early on that I would return to *L'Amour*'s longest recapitulation, to the father holding the hand of his *fillette arabe*, to show how this form *i* recapitulation is then fused. Perhaps now is an appropriate time, as it shows how a fusion of characters expresses this *liaison difficile*, communicating the troubled relationship between the two principal narrative threads, and between Djebar's two cultures. The two figures are Eugène Fromentin, a French painter working in the Algerian Sahel of the 1850s, and Djebar's father. Fromentin is famous for his studies of the Algerian people and landscape – he was an early ethnographer – but he also hears soldiers' stories of the horrors of war (a French lieutenant tells him of Algerian prostitutes, 'deux Naylettes fort jolies',[214] murdered for their jewellery); and in *Air de Nay*,[215] he is depicted by Djebar as studying and then tossing aside the severed hand of an 'Algérienne anonyme.'[216] Djebar attempts to let it write: '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."'[217] The ambiguous fusion occurs when she describes Fromentin as a second father figure, a second silhouette to her father's 'silhouette haute et droite dans son costume européen':[218] 'J'interviens pour saluer le peintre qui, au long de mon vagabondage, m'a accompagnée en seconde silhouette paternelle. Eugène Fromentin me tend une main inattendue'.[219] The novel begins with her Algerian father offering her his hand, and ends with a French artist providing her with a severed one – but one that she uses to write. Her own father, by offering her the French language, saves and severs her from the harem; and Fromentin, like Djebar, is an artist

[214] *L'Amour*, p. 188.
[215] The title itself begins the recapitulations.
[216] *L'Amour*, p. 255.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid., p. 11.
[219] Ibid., p. 255.

who depicts Algeria and its people. The two father figures are fused, but this confluence is neither oppositional nor harmonious; the grim allusion is inescapably troubling. Each figure represents, however, an important aspect of Djebar's identity, and it is their metaphorical fusion that communicates this. Such recapitulatory fusion (much like *Nedjma*'s or *Season*'s final, circular return) does offer an aesthetic sense of structural completion, just as recapitulation announces the conclusion of a sonata. There is, however, no *resolution* here: the final pairing of French and Algerian father figures does not provide a *Tierce de Picardie* (an unexpected, last-minute resolution from the minor) – for the pedal note that holds throughout *L'Amour, la fantasia*'s counterpoint is the cry of Algeria's women, and we hear it from all sides:

> j'attends, je pressens l'instant immanquable où le coup de sabot à la face renversera toute femme dressée libre, toute vie surgissant au soleil pour danser ! Oui, malgré le tumulte des miens alentour, j'entends déjà, avant même qu'il s'élève [. . .], j'entends le cri de la mort dans la fantasia.[220]

[220] Ibid., p. 256.

Conclusion

The 'cross-cultural' component of my thesis is twofold: it involves not simply a crossing of cultures, but of poetics – models from Glissant and Genette may be my theoretical base, but my aim was to see if, and how, their poetics would speak to those which we find in Kateb, Djebar, Salih, and indeed Dib. A reciprocal interplay ensued, and in both thematic and structural terms, we can see how the cross-cultural concerns and attendant poetic strategies of the *Discours antillais* illuminate analysis of these writers. Let us return to some key points.

By opening with *Roots*, I start with one founding observation, which is the cross-cultural heritage of my chosen writers. In their works, we find a sustained questioning of roots and origins, and various gestures towards the kind of culturally relational identity that Glissant posits as an ideal; the idea of entanglement is strongly recalled in, for example, *Season*'s confluence and fluidity of identity, or the blending of ancestral streams in *Nedjma*. The prevalent topoi of roots, streams and bloodlines, however, suggest that the move towards a 'rhizomatic' conception of identity is not achieved in these works – nor, however, are these tropes employed in a stereotypically nationalistic way, whether in works written around, or considerably after, national independence. There is an undeniable element of nostalgia, genealogical loss, and an associated search for origins, expressed in narration and evoked through metaphor: tradition, race and ancestry are commingled with the idea of the (in cases, nascent) nation, and are indeed valued – but they are ultimately figured as *insufficient*, and unrealistic, bases for its future.

As well as the question of national and communitarian identity that we find in Glissant, the particular writing position of these authors leads to a more personal reflection on their ties to their homeland and people; at this personal level, too, the poetics of roots ties one novel to the other. *Season*'s prolonged critique of 'fixing' a culture or identity, and of glossing over undercurrents of resistance and change, is indeed an argument against being too strongly 'rooted' in such conceptions; but the opposite extreme is also criticised, and exemplified, in Mustafa's 'performance,' and homogenisation, of his and other cultures – he, too, suffers a crisis of origins and authenticity. These narratives gesture to the ongoing need to register roots and origins (and in this sense they differ from Glissant's (future) ideal, at least in their North African contexts), while not relying on them to the exclusion of change or further cultural graftings; the 'root' is not the regressive idea that Glissant suggests, but is a stepping stone; ultimately, the Glissantian 'entanglement' of cultures speaks clearly in their poetics, but origins must be registered as *part* of this entanglement[1] – a relational solution that brings them close to Glissant. For these writers, the combined poetics of roots and hybridity responds to the difficulty, the necessity, and the viability of cross-culturality at a national, and personal, level.

In *The Function of Landscape*, nation and community enter a particularly close poetic relationship with the landscape – as Glissant suggests, they are poetically conflated, as if indissociable elements. Again we find implicitly nationalistic metaphor in the 'organicity' of the state, but this is a response that speaks directly to Glissant's poetics of landscape, in which threatened communities respond to the external, and existential,

[1] Indeed, Glissant also perceives value in roots; but tracing a connection to them seems even *harder* in the context of the Caribbean slave trade, given its definitive uprooting and displacement.

threat of (for example) the coloniser. And in their response, as Glissant notes, the individual and community are tied together with their native land through the pathetic fallacy. The authors of my corpus are all drawn to this poetic strategy, in response to threats to the safety or independence of the people. It allows them to figure resistance, in, for example, the 'imprinting' of historical memory in the physical landscape (in *L'Amour*), or in the circulatory network of *QSM* that at once evokes the blood of colonial oppression and the solidarity of the menaced community. Such images bring land and people together to the point of conflation; but this gesture, as Glissant notes, is one of self defence: it is not the ethnocentric nationalistic metaphor of 'rivers of blood' (it is not racially exclusionary, nor does it present a racist position towards other nations or ethnic groups), but a poetics that offers emotive testament to communities in a troubled relationship with their land – one that occurs even without the literal transplantation of peoples that constitutes *arrachement* in Glissant's *Discours*. On an individual level, we also see this poetics employed by author-narrators in an uneasy relationship with their homeland – Djebar's alienation from modern Algeria sees the *femme-patrie* change into a ghoul. The figuration of land, or nation, as a human body allows writers to figure an object that, while suggesting the complexity of the state through its multiple organs, offers a form which we can relate to, feel for, or indeed criticise. It is not always oppositional, as it also allows the cross-cultural relationship to be figured as a 'marriage' of bodies – this is, however, often used with irony, undermining its use in colonial rhetoric; or the image combines desire and sexual violence, pairing the attraction of the other culture with the violence of the colonial encounter. The physicality of the pathetic fallacy, body and mind, is also apt for communicating the physical and mental aspects of

trauma. As my final section on *Itineraries* demonstrates through an alternative mode of analysis, the physical movement (or lack of) through the land and cityscapes of these narratives is not incidental – rather, it becomes another vehicle of expression; this is a new critical tool, but one that speaks meaningfully to the thematics of these works. The poetics of landscape fashions a very literal body-politic: one that can articulate the cry of a community deprived of a voice.

Silence and screams draws on an aspect of Glissant's poetics that is also closely related (though not exclusively) to the colonial. A relationship between expression and its inhibition can arise in varying circumstances; in this North African context, we see colonial, patriarchal, religious, and other forms of restrictions on speech figured as silences and screams. This is indeed a departure from Glissant's original setting of the slave trade, but the analogous, oppressive contexts I consider are, nonetheless, answered with poetic strategies that employ a similar logic to Glissant's. In my examples, resistance often takes form as a cry; oppression is frequently aligned with silence, petrification, or other constrictive images – though it is Nedjma's general *silence*, we might note, that works against the reader's temptation to turn her into a mouthpiece for Algeria or its revolution. These works' narrators, faced with oppression and horror, *consider* reticence or silence – and at points question their entire writing project – but they seldom employ literal silences (an exception is Hajila's disappearance from *Ombre sultane*, which mirrors the stifling constriction of Islamic cloistering – we might well speak of a *univers muet* of the harem in Djebar's works). Rather, they find poetical figures for this reticence, allowing silence to 'speak.' Djebar considers that the writer's

role is sometimes simply to act as a witness to 'blessures';[2] her reluctance to re-narrate past horrors recalls Adorno's caution, but she finally transmutes her silence into a cry (writing itself, for Djebar, becomes a cry). The myriad evocations of screams and cries in these works reflect the idea of concentrated meaning, and finally freed expression, that Glissant attributes to the scream, and they do often carry a resistant or protesting force; the cry is frequently aligned, as in Glissant, with the tipping point between oppression and freedom – however, as we see in certain failed, or contained, revolts in *QSM* and *L'Amour*, the movement towards freedom can also turn backwards. Silence and screams can also serve as coping strategies: paralipse creates a silence to avoid confronting the horror of murder in *Season*, while *QSM* and *L'Amour* depict communal, protesting cries that offer only a regularised palliative to an inescapable situation. Djebar's ability to cry more freely and cathartically than her cloistered relatives is at once a sign of expressive freedom, and a reminder of the painful cultural *arrachement* that made this possible for her: again, these works manifest, in addition to Glissant's focus on the community, a more individual engagement with these tropes. *L'Amour* and *QSM* seem to point to degrees of freedom in the cry: the more violent and explosive the description, the more it is associated with a genuine release, and freedom; this corresponds to Glissant's assertion that a scream only truly takes voice when *exiting* the 'univers muet de la servitude'. As a poetic strategy, the very immateriality of these tropes seems matched to the internal, intangible dimension of trauma, and the deeper workings of oppression and control. The

[2] 'Est-ce que ce n'est pas là le rôle de l'écrivain, aujourd'hui encore ?
Le rôle de l'écrivain peut-être est simplement de témoigner quelquefois de blessures…' Lise Gauvin, *L'Ecrivain francophone à la croisée des langues: entretiens* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), p. 32.

scream, and indeed silence, communicate without 'offering' the subject of narration; in this sense, they align closely with the character of opacity.

Opacity is an example of how Glissant's theory bridges cross-cultural and (post)colonial concerns: in its emphasis on registering and respecting difference, it provides a model for cross-culturality that respects particularity and avoids the risk of 'universalism,' while its indirect artistic approach to structures, and experience, of trauma and oppression is clearly (if not exclusively) based on the experience, and memory, of colonialism. Glissant's aesthetic principle here is that narrative should engage with these structures, but not always reveal them in a direct manner (in this, Glissant's aesthetic also finds an echo in Modernism). My analysis of opacity registers this link (between the cross-cultural and postcolonial), extends his principles into concrete examples (in a North African context), and examines opacity's political edge: we find that an opaque or hermetic style of representation can *in itself* mirror the socio-political problems that it alludes to – for example, the structural opacity that mirrors, via *paralipse*, the seeming impossibility for Yamna to voice openly her oppositions to arranged marriage, in Dib's *Un Eté africain*. We should note that a realist narrative is not inherently 'transparent' either: as Yamna's paralipse demonstrates, opacity can operate even in an ostensibly 'clear' narrative. In establishing a politicised opacity that stages the incommensurability of France's 'civilising mission' with the violence that underwrote it (viz. *Nedjma*'s alexandrines evoking executions), or through the employment of opaque and resistant imagery to evoke the chaos of colonial occupation, Kateb and Dib offer forms of literary opacity that at once engage with the broader movement of Modernism, and yet offer a

more concrete link between aesthetic form and specific structures of oppression: this reflects Glissant's grounding of opacity in the chaos of lived experience. The appearance of *cultural* 'transparency' can also be misleading, and Salih's work cautions us against this, interrogating the notion of an unchanging, univocal, or idealised, 'home'; this is not just a caution against cultural nostalgia, as the novel's tragedy illustrates. In *Roots*, we found no clear origin to rely on, or return to – it remained an illusory (and insufficient) ideal; with opacity, too, it is not a question of *rejecting* any specificity, or received understanding, of a culture, any more than we need reject roots: registering opacity requires an openness to change, as matters may not conform to, may indeed resist, our understood model (and to assume or act otherwise can entail dangerous consequences). Although this chapter takes issue with Glissant's critique of realism, it concludes that Glissantian opacity, and its aesthetic justification, provide a model and logic that resonate identifiably with my corpus – its linguistic aspect (the tension, or dissonance, of medium and message) is mirrored by a structural opacity that strategically employs the same type of tension. Both thematic and structural opacity are appropriate (and attractive) narrative approaches to traumatic or oppressive subjects, and can also, through *bienheureuse opacité*, prove psychologically and politically strategic.

My final chapter takes Glissant's cross-cultural poetics as a starting point for a deeper analysis of structure. We see that the fragmented, or exploded, narrative structural approach Glissant advocates, again when narrating experiences of oppression or trauma, manifests itself strongly in the writing of Djebar, Kateb and Salih. What I add is, firstly, a typology of this fragmentation: they may not have an easily understandable structure,

but Djebar's complex polyphony differs from Kateb's, and so on. Furthermore, the relations between the various fragments in fact display a cross-cultural element, in Kateb, Salih and Djebar. For example, we have actual cross-cultural polyphony in *Nedjma*: it is a counterpoint of French and native elements, but this is not conceived of in terms of an oscillation between opposites; rather, its structure mirrors their relationship developing and separating, and underlines the (lost) potential for a more cooperative relationship between cultures. At the same time, spiral forms and cyclical returns speak to the theme of failed, yet repeated, attempts at national renewal; in *Nedjma*, Algeria is locked in a cycle that, despite the Sétif revolt, has not yet shifted into national revolution (*QSM*'s denouement, by contrast, glimpses at a way out, in its definitive shift to the Underground). *Season*'s mirrored characters create a cross-cultural counterpoint that holds up, and overlaps, the situation of women in London and the Sudan; and the creation, and breaking, of the mirror between its male protagonists reflects their ultimately divergent responses to cross-culturality. *L'Amour*'s counterpoint formally evokes the question of Djebar's cross-cultural identity: not *solving* it, but highlighting points of tension and connection; its final gesture, which mirrors her ultimate combination (if not reconciliation) of cultural elements, is the recapitulatory fusion of distant, culturally separate, narrative threads (and father figures). And though I argue for a connection between fragments that Glissant does not note, I believe this permits new techniques that indeed follow a Glissantian logic: in *L'Amour*, for example, Proppian and theme-link analysis not only reveal the contrapuntal form of the highly fragmented Part 3, but identify semantic and thematic continuities that present an alternative, discreet form of connection between consecutive (and ostensibly discontinuous) chapters: and as this type of connection is only implicit, it

follows Glissant's idea of approaching 'difficult' matters indirectly – theme-link analysis demonstrates that some of Djebar's most politically incendiary associations are gestured at through structure alone. Though my chapter title, *Polyphony*, suggests a complex interplay between narrative threads, this far from denies Glissant's thesis of fragmentation: this chapter demonstrates, and allows us to now critically articulate, the kind of *discours éclaté* that is at the heart of Glissant's cross-cultural poetics.

There is a danger in academic writing of always focussing on what we want to find, prove, or argue, but I have tried throughout to reason from the observable mechanics of the text. For this reason, not every finding will fit any one thesis. The degree of parallel, however, with the features of Glissant's cross-cultural poetics is striking – not simply in the similarity of technique, but in its correlation with either the same, or similar, social pressures and identitarian concerns in my example context. I propose that the thematic topoi and structural forms that Glissant identifies are transferrable to other contexts precisely owing to their basis in observable social, political, and cultural conditions. This is not to deny the particularity of the Caribbean, but to assert that artists may indeed be inclined towards certain poetic strategies when faced with a particular subject of narration. The logical corollary of this is indeed that we could work backwards, first identifying analogous contexts and then analysing them with these strategies in mind. The matrix of cross-culturality and traumatic elements I have observed in Glissant's theories ties it closely to the postcolonial field – indeed, offers a more specific focus when the two overlap – but it is not an exact fit; the idea of *relation* is broader, and a positive concept, especially for the cross-cultural writer. If we are to take this approach further, it would

eventually necessitate expanding the borders of postcolonial studies. Or rather, creating a field of cross-cultural poetic study that traverses nation, period and genre; it would be arbitrary to set the limits of the cross-cultural at the postcolonial, even if it helps us to define much of what we study in this field. I do not believe that this would be to assimilate the postcolonial field to, for example, postmodernism; cross-culturality, an inherent element of postcolonial literary studies, appears to offer bridges both within and across its current borders.

In 'uprooting' Glissant's cross-cultural poetics to a North African context, I have located a (different) set of culturally and geographically specific concerns that speak to the, again specific, concerns Glissant addresses in the Caribbean; colonialism is a key, shared factor in each. As I have noted, Glissant pairs a poetics with a defined socio-cultural base: it is, however, this *relation between* socio-cultural stimuli and poetic form that at once makes Glissant's discourse *Caribbean*, and by the same token makes it sufficiently flexible to transfer to other, analogous contexts. The underpinning logic by which Glissant connects context and poetics is in fact the key discovery of the *Discours*; it is, thereby, at once tied to its origin *and* outward-looking. Glissant, discerning *how* to link such stimuli to artistic strategies, in effect opens the door to a wider application of his poetics: in short, the implicit points of contact Glissant registers between his base and poetics are actually slightly more *basic* – and more fundamental – psychological elements than those of his original context,[3] and can therefore, more easily, find echoes beyond the Caribbean.

[3] Let us take example where Glissant makes his linking explicit: living landscapes, or the pathetic fallacy. Here the specific situation of a geographically transplanted community, facing slavery and colonial rule, is

My work represents a turn towards poetics, but my thesis is that this is *not* a turn away from the social, political or psychological concerns of the text. Rather, a deeper reading of structure and poetic effect is necessary if we are to understand why, and *how*, these writers engage with such issues. Indeed, my analysis shows that form is not incidental, or even simply to be experienced or enjoyed *qua* form (as Cooke suggests we experience Bach's musical architecture): it is, on the contrary, *communicative*, forming part of the message. We have seen that these author-narrators, and indeed the authors themselves, confess to having sought an aesthetic form that will enable them to communicate the issues at hand; since this is such a conscious part of their art, it merits careful attention. In short, if we want to engage with the issues and politics of these texts, we must engage equally with poetics, or risk losing the message itself. As Glissant notes, and as we have seen, particular contexts do not lend themselves easily to direct representation; and as we have seen, in Djebar, for example, a careful analysis of structure reveals demonstrable, even incendiary, political connections – we risk losing this sort of point if we ignore their poetics. Furthermore, if we are to keep pace with the inventive poetic experimentation of these works, and articulate how their medium and message are interlinked, we must develop an effective critical vocabulary to describe it. Having identified many such terms, I have also shown that particular tropes and structural approaches – in response to particular issues – tie these authors together; indeed, across borders and periods. Poetic

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then (psychologically) interpreted in fundamental terms: *existential menace* (the risk of effacement), and the desire to defend oneself and the community (the defensive response to an outside threat; self- and group defence and validation). These latter terms are more flexible; they are the psychological and existential corollaries of the (more) specific socio-political circumstances of displacement and colonial rule. The choice of aesthetic strategy is, in turn, based on these intermediate psychological criteria: criteria which can encompass more situations than *just* geographical displacement and colonial rule.

form creates connections between writers even though their personal views can, of course, differ: understanding that *Nedjma*, *Season* and *L'Amour* all figure questions of national belonging with arborescent metaphor and living landscapes allows us to discern a like interest in origins, and a shared, complex interrogation of their role in their nation's future; but the important thing is that, even if they *were* to reach very different conclusions on this, the issue itself has inclined them towards a particular poetic response. This is, as I have argued, why Glissant is useful, in his nuanced linking of the two. Glissant's *La Lézarde* opens with a question originally posed by Robert Delavignette (a Frenchman who wrote broadly on colonisation and independence): *Quel est ce pays?*[4] Glissant adds an answer – or rather, an approach:

> '*Quel est ce pays ?' demanda-t-il.*
> *Et il lui fut répondu : 'Pèse d'abord*
> *chaque mot, connais chaque douleur.'*[5]

As these writers have done just this, weighing up their words so carefully, we owe it to them to register the presence, and significance, of their poetics. It is precisely not art *for* art: their art *matters*.

[4] 'Quel est ce pays?' is the title of the first chapter of Robert Delavignette's novel *Les Paysans noirs* : *récit soudanais en douze mois*, 2nd edn [1931] (Paris: Stock, 1947).
[5] Edouard Glissant, *La Lézarde* (Paris: Seuil, 1958), p. 7.

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