



*Je voudrais bien voir la France...*  
*Je voudrais bien voir la France. Quand je serai grand, je*  
*je me...*

# Our Civilizing Mission

**The Lessons of Colonial Education**

**NICHOLAS HARRISON**

# Contemporary French and Francophone Cultures

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NICHOLAS HARRISON

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The Lessons of Colonial Education

LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PRESS

First published 2019 by  
Liverpool University Press  
4 Cambridge Street  
Liverpool  
L69 7ZU

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication data  
A British Library CIP record is available

ISBN 978-1-78694-176-3 cased  
epdf ISBN 978-1-78694-968-4

Typeset in Sabon by Carnegie Book Production, Lancaster

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– Qu'est-ce que vous parlez bien le français !

Mes parents recevaient le compliment sans broncher ni sourire et se bornaient à hocher du chef. Une fois que les garçons avaient tourné le dos, ils nous prenaient à témoin :

– Pourtant, nous sommes aussi français qu'eux, soupirait mon père.

– Plus français, renchérisait ma mère avec violence. Elle ajoutait en guise d'explication : Nous sommes plus instruits.

'You speak excellent French, you know.'

My parents bore the compliment without turning a hair or smiling, merely a nod of the head. Once the garçon had gone, they turned to us as witnesses. 'Yet we're as French as they are,' my father sighed.

'Even more so,' my mother continued vehemently: 'We're more educated'.

Maryse Condé (b. 1937, Guadeloupe)  
*Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer: souvenirs  
de mon enfance* (1999)<sup>1</sup>

1 Maryse Condé, *Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer: souvenirs de mon enfance* (1999), 13; *Tales from the Heart: True Stories from My Childhood*, trans. Richard Philcox (London: Soho Press, 2001), 4–5.

[L']éducation est le moyen le plus efficace dont dispose une société pour former ses membres à son image. Certes, la famille prend d'abord l'enfant tout entier, l'enveloppe de toutes parts et le façonne à sa manière. Mais qu'on songe à la révolution qui s'accomplit en lui, lorsqu'il va pour la première fois à l'école ou au lycée. Il change de manière d'être et, presque, de nature. À partir de ce moment, il y a en lui une véritable dualité. Lorsqu'il revient chez lui, ses parents sentent qu'il leur appartient de moins en moins.

Education is the most powerful instrument a society possesses for fashioning its members in its own image. Certainly, the family takes the child in its entirety first of all, envelops him wholly and forms him in its own way. But if we think of the revolutions which take place in him when he goes to school for the first time, we realize that his way of being and even almost his very nature change. From this moment onwards he contains within himself a veritable duality. When he goes home, his parents feel that he belongs to them less and less.

Maurice Halbwachs (b. 1877, France), Introduction to  
Émile Durkheim *L'Évolution pédagogique en France*  
(1st edition 1938; 2nd edition 1969)<sup>2</sup>

2 Halbwachs, Introduction to Émile Durkheim, *L'Évolution pédagogique en France* ([1938] Paris: PUF, 1969, 2nd edition), 2; *Selected Writings on Education, Volume 2, The Evolution of Educational Thought*, trans. Peter Collins ([1977] (London: Routledge, 2006), xii.

Toute culture est originellement coloniale.

All culture is at origin colonial.

Jacques Derrida (b. 1930, Algeria)  
*Le Monolinguisme de l'autre, ou la prothèse d'origine* (1996)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), 68; *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prothesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 39.



# Acknowledgements

Towards the end of this book I talk a little about some of the particular experiences and preoccupations that led me to write it, but perhaps the first explanation is that I, like most academics, have spent most of my life so far in educational institutions – as a schoolchild, then a student, and eventually as a teacher and researcher (and writer of email). Part of the attraction of this project was the opportunity to reflect on my own experiences of education, and on the climate or culture around ‘humanities’ teaching today in universities such as mine, a climate that can be difficult at times. In what follows, however, such points of comparison are only occasionally explicit; and it is self-evident that the experiences of colonial education that are at the heart of the book involved conflicts and forms of hostility incomparably more difficult than anything I have ever had to face or am likely to face. I am in no doubt that I have been fortunate to have the education that I have had, and to do the job that I do.

Taking that long view, I have a good number of people to thank for helping me get to the point where I could write this book, starting with my parents (especially my mother, but my late father too), and my teachers at school and university. I was lucky enough to spend the first part of my career at Cambridge, then at UCL. For the last dozen years or so I have worked in the French department at King’s College London, where I have a remarkable group of colleagues, and I am grateful to all those, past and present, who have helped foster this sort of academic work. I should mention in particular, for conversations that have helped shaped the book, Emily Butterworth, Patrick French, Simon Gaunt, Russell Goulbourne, Jo Malt, Siobhàn McIlvanney, Craig Moyes and Sanja Perovic. I have also drawn on the support of many other colleagues in and around the department, including Emma Bielecki, Jane Elderton,

Stathis Kouvelakis, Stephanie Mannion, Francesco Manzini, Ros Murray, Soizick Solman and Jim Wolfreys.

The Leverhulme Trust granted me a Research Fellowship to work on this project in 2015, an opportunity that arrived at a perfect moment and that I greatly appreciated. Some of my colleagues may have thought it ironic that I was taking time off to write about teaching, but, so far as I know, no-one complained. My thanks go not only to the Leverhulme Trust but to all who worked around my absence, especially Gillian Ni Cheallaigh, who took over several of my classes that year, and to Celia Britton, Pat Corcoran and Emma Wilson, who supported my application for the fellowship. I have also benefited from research leave from King's, including a year spent in Los Angeles after a stint as head of department. Much of that time was taken up with other research projects, but my progress was helped by the excellent libraries at UCLA and by opportunities to dip into the lively intellectual communities at UCLA, USC and the Huntington. For the welcome they offered, my thanks go to Liz DeLoughrey, Olivia Harrison, Steve Hindle, Edwin Hill, Peggy Kamuf, Françoise Lionnet, Natania Meeker, Panivong Norindr and Dominic Thomas. Special thanks also to all those who were involved that year in Friends Western cooperative school in Pasadena, especially Patti Wagonhurst and Gilden Tunador, and anyone who ever called me 'coach'.

I have tried out quite a lot of the material in seminars and conferences, and am indebted to the institutions and organizations that have hosted me during the years I was working on this project, including, besides those already mentioned, the universities of Durham, Glasgow, Kent, Leeds, Liverpool, Notre Dame, Nottingham, Oxford, Paris III, Sousse and York; SOAS; the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies; the ENS, INRP and IUFM in Lyon; Indiana University Bloomington; HKU, NYU and the Maison française in New York and Oxford. I am also indebted to the editors of *Paragraph*, who heard a very early version of some of the material on Edward Said; working with that group – to which I was first introduced by Chris Johnson, who is greatly missed – was a pleasure and a privilege.

Thank you to all those who have invited me to talk, offered encouragement, helped me with specific queries and led me to new insights. That includes some excellent students on our BA, MA and PhD programmes. I can't name everyone and I am afraid I'll forget some important people, but they include Danielle Allen, Pascale Barthélémy, Cécile Bishop, Sandra Blachon (at the Bibliothèque universitaire Ramon

Llull), Elleke Boehmer, Clémence Cardon-Quint, Patrick Crowley, Julia Douthwaite, Romuald Fonkoua, Charles Forsdick, Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, Harry Gamble, Jane Hiddleston, Isabel Hollis, Jim House, Ann Jefferson, Jean Khalifa, Diana Knight, Katelyn Knox, Jenny Kosniowski, Karima Laachir, Nadra Lajri, Jeremy Lane, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, Ankhi Mukherjee, Dave Murphy, Francesca Orsini, Rym Ouarts, Oana Panaité, Alison Rice, Laura Robson, Zoë Roth, Max Silverman, Helen Small, Eli Park Sorensen and Michael Syrotinski.

None of the material in this book has been previously published in its present form, but I would also like to thank the editors of essay collections in which earlier versions of some of the material first appeared – Jean Bessière, editor of *Littératures francophones et politiques* (Karthala, 2009); Gilles Boyer, Pascal Clerc and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, editors of *L'École aux colonies, les colonies à l'école* (ENS éditions, 2013); Ziad Elmarsafy, David Attwell and Anna Bernard, editors of *Orientalism, 30 years on* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Ranjan Ghosh, editor of *Edward Said and the Literary, Social and Political World* (Routledge, 2009). I am grateful for those opportunities, and for editorial feedback. For a couple of other opportunities that have fed in more obliquely, I would also like to thank Jarad Zimble, Ben Etherington and Rachel Bower, editors of a special issue of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* on 'Crafts of World Literature' in 2014; and Chris Prendergast, editor of *A History of Modern French Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

Anthony Cond at Liverpool University Press started encouraging me to write this book quite some time ago (before he knew it was this book), and his enthusiasm was infectious. Chloé Johnson, who has been my editor for the last couple of years, has showed great patience in waiting for the thing to materialize and allowing me to write more than I intended. I am grateful to both of them and to all those who have read my writing; besides those already mentioned I must thank in particular Adam Sutcliffe, who may still find Chapter 2's approach to history-writing undisciplined, but who certainly helped me improve it; Richard Mason, who read several chapters, chatted about ideas with me and translated some of the quotations; and the four people who have read complete versions prior to this one. Lia Brozgal offered many astute remarks and significant encouragement; and the two anonymous readers for Liverpool both read very attentively, from what seemed to me quite different angles, helping me considerably through their

numerous well-informed and thoughtful comments. Finally, and above all, I want to thank Elizabeth Eger, whose intellectual and emotional engagement with my work was inspiring, and helped give me confidence I had something to say.

I would like to dedicate the book to Lizzie, Emily and James.

## Note on translations and citations

Throughout this book I quote French-language texts in the original then provide a translation. I make an exception if the French is so close to the English as to make translation unnecessary, or if I am repeating a quotation used earlier, in which case I quote only the English on the second occasion. I give a reference to a published translation where one is available, but have adapted published translations without indicating that I have done so. The transliteration of names and words from Arabic and other languages has not been standardized; I have adopted commonly used transliterations when using a name such as Abdelkader or a word such as Quranic, but when quoting have replicated the variations found in publications of different eras.

I give page numbers in the body of my text whenever it is clear enough which text is being cited. Where necessary to avoid confusion, I preface the page number for a published English translation with the letter E. This hybrid system of referencing means that although a few of the footnotes contain only a page reference and bibliographical information (information that appears again in the bibliography), most offer additional information, discussion or references.



# Introduction

## Our Civilizing Mission

Half a century ago George Steiner wrote an essay about a sense of crisis in the humanities. Its title, ‘To Civilize our Gentlemen’, conjured up Victorian educational values that seem even more antiquated now than they did when the essay was published.<sup>1</sup> Eminent Victorian educationists such as Matthew Arnold talked ‘without embarrassment’ about ‘civilizing the nation’, as Helen Small notes in her 2013 book *The Value of the Humanities*.<sup>2</sup> To most people working in education today their attitudes, not least towards ‘civilization’, surely feel quite distant. The

1 George Steiner, ‘To Civilize our Gentlemen’ [1965], in *Language and Silence: Essays 1958–1966* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 75–88. See also, for another classic discussion of the foundations of the discipline of modern (French) literary studies, Antoine Compagnon, *La Troisième République des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

2 Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 70. Small quotes a letter of 1862 by Arnold: ‘the State has an interest in the primary school as a *civilizing agent*, even prior to its interest in it as an *instructing agent*’ (72, Arnold’s emphasis; Letter to Mary Penrose Arnold, 5 March 1862, in *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, 6 vols (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1996–2001), vol. II, 125). Arnold, Small notes (70), wrote against ‘the instrumentalist tendencies of political economists in the government’ but also came to think that ‘opposing usefulness to non-usefulness obscures and distorts much of what a sound argument about educational values ought to be concerned with – including breadth of knowledge, recognition of individual aptitudes, the “free play of the mind”, and what, without embarrassment, he called “civilizing the nation”’. For more on Arnold and colonialism see Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), and Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989).

French notion of the ‘mission civilisatrice’, evoked in the title of my book, is likely to appear even more remote, and worse: a complacent mix of religiosity and ethnocentricity, embroiled in a shameful colonial history where the malignant rhetoric of the white man’s burden served as the pretext for violent conquest.<sup>3</sup>

According to Steiner’s essay, the study of English literature as an academic discipline in universities rested historically on three sets of ideas. First were particular notions of national identity, and particular forms of nationalism, which developed and came to the fore in the high colonial era. Second were assumptions about the foundational value, and the ready accessibility to the educated, of classical languages and cultures, which were further assumed to underpin the superiority of ‘Western’ culture over other cultures. Finally, and relatedly, there was a deep faith in the humanizing capacities of Western high culture.

As Steiner suggested, by the mid-1960s all three of these elements had been challenged quite fundamentally, above all in the wake of the traumas and inhumanities of colonialism, the Second World War, and decolonization. Many of the challenges had come, and continued to come in the years after Steiner wrote his essay, from politically radical sources, including feminism and anti-colonialism, whose basic tenets I and many other academics in the humanities now accept without hesitation; and they had an effect on the shape of the humanities, including the way literature is taught, what literature is taught, and what is taught alongside or instead of literature.<sup>4</sup> If the cultural shift described

3 The phrase ‘white man’s burden’ comes from Rudyard Kipling’s poem of 1899 ‘The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands’. For a recent critique of the notion of civilization see David Cannadine, *The Undivided Past: History Beyond Our Differences* (London: Allen Lane, 2013); he concludes: ‘it is a word, a concept, a category [...] we would be much better off without’ (257). The classic critique of the notion of the ‘civilizing mission’ is Alice L. Conklin’s *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), which shows how it allowed the French to ignore ‘the fundamental contradiction between democracy and the forcible acquisition of an empire’ (2).

4 In the Conclusion I will come back to issues around the selection of literary texts for teaching. I will not, however, go much further with discussions about the idea of the ‘humanities’ as such; I am using this term mainly as an academic label under which various subjects are grouped. My arguments in this book, like Steiner’s in his essay, have literature and literary study at their centre, and at some points I will talk quite specifically about literature, but I hope readers might consider



by Steiner implied a certain loss of cultural and intellectual confidence, that loss of confidence seems salutary in the context of a history of imperialism, patriarchy, eurocentricity, and other salient characteristics of ‘Western’ cultures.

It is clear, then, why some critics may view a sense of ‘crisis’ in the humanities as necessary, healthy and even constitutive of work in that field.<sup>5</sup> But it is clear too that being in crisis, or having a sense of crisis, is not always productive (especially when it is fed not only by positive intellectual energies of the sort I have just mentioned but also by some deeply negative material and political pressures).<sup>6</sup> One of the questions

how far certain arguments extend into other subject areas, such as film or (at a further remove) music. On the idea of the humanities, see Small 57 and *passim*; and Michael Wood’s definition and discussion in Barbara Cassin, *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood, trans. Steven Rendall, Christian Hubert, Jeffrey Mehlman, Nathanael Stein and Michael Syrotinski (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 120–21. For further discussion of literature and the humanities see, for instance, Marjorie Perloff, ‘Crisis in the Humanities? Reconfiguring Literary Study for the Twenty-first Century’, in *Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), Chapter 1; Samuel Weber, ‘Ambivalence: The Humanities and the Study of Literature’, in *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 132–52; and Peggy Kamuf, *The Division of Literature, or The University in Deconstruction* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Other prominent discussions of the nature and role of the humanities, especially in the US, include Michael Bérubé, *Rhetorical Occasions: Essays on Humans and the Humanities* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011) and Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

5 For example, John T. Hamilton concludes his review of *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) by saying that Thomas Pfau’s book has the potential to ‘assist the present predicament of the humanities, not by resolving all crises, but rather by ensuring that the crises are maintained in all their vitality’ (*Comparative Literature* 68:1 (March 2016), 96–99: 98).

6 Paul Jay in *The Humanities ‘Crisis’ and the Future of Literary Studies* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2014) suggests that ‘crisis’ is the wrong word for productive forms of scepticism and self-questioning and argues – and I think he has a point – that the (enduring) rhetoric of crisis is itself debilitating. He also offers a strong defence of the teaching of literature. Christopher Breu, in a review of Jay’s book (*College Literature* 42:2 (Spring 2015), 348–51: 349), emphasizes that the real threat

behind this book is where all of that has left us with regard to the teaching of the humanities. My perception is that, for some time now, certain forms of self-doubt have pushed many critic-teachers – notably, for the purposes of this book, those in or influenced by the field of postcolonial studies, though certainly not only them – towards paradoxical and self-contradictory positions, particularly in relation to education.<sup>7</sup>

to the culture of the humanities is neoliberalism, and lists the damaging effects, in the US and beyond, of ‘for-profit education institutions, textbook companies and their lobbies, careerist higher administrators, outside efficiency consultants, educational think tanks and NGOs, or state and federal politicians who are thoroughly convinced by neoliberal solutions’, including ‘things like the growth of non-tenure-track labor, the wholesale destruction of shared governance, the war of attrition on tenure, and the disproportionate growth of upper administration’. All of that is part of the context for my own work, and undeniably of central importance to the sense of crisis in the humanities today, but I will not address those issues explicitly in this book. Incidentally, although I agree with Breu’s analysis of neoliberalism, I think he is unfair to suggest that Jay presents the problems afflicting the humanities as ‘*merely* a product of the rhetoric of crisis’ (349, my italics).

7 I would see some of the work of Pierre Bourdieu as another important example of this sort of conflicted attitude; and the book he co-authored with Jean-Claude Passeron in 1970, *La Reproduction: éléments pour une théorie du système de l’enseignement*, was influential among a significant group of academics for its articulation of a negative view of education, and perhaps especially French/literature lessons, as ‘une violence symbolique en tant qu’imposition, par un pouvoir arbitraire, d’un arbitraire culturel’ (19, ‘symbolic violence, in that it means the imposition of something culturally arbitrary by an arbitrary power’, 5). I will not say much about Bourdieu in this book; Leon Sachs in the Introduction to *The Pedagogical Imagination: The Republican Legacy in 21st Century French Literature and Film* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014) gives a useful sense of Bourdieu’s influence on post-1960s thought on education; see also Gilbert D. Chaitin, ‘Education and Political Identity: The Universalist Controversy’, in Ralph Albanese and M. Martin Guiney (eds), *French Education: Fifty Years Later*, special issue of *Yale French Studies* (113, July 2008), 77–93; and Clémence Cardon-Quint, ‘L’Enseignement du français à l’épreuve de la démocratisation (1959–2001)’, in Alan R. Sadovnik and Susan F. Semel (eds), *Education and Inequality: Historical and Sociological Approaches to Schooling and Social Stratification*, a special issue of *Paedagogica historica* 46:1–2 (February–April 2010), 133–48. Cardon-Quint places Bourdieu’s work in the context of anxieties (and guilt) about the failure of schools to correct social inequality, and also emphasizes the influence of Renée Balibar, *Les Français fictifs: le rapport des styles littéraires au français national* (Paris: Hachette, 1974). In their engaging introduction to *French Education*, Albanese and Guiney write about the teaching

The work of Edward Said is a particularly important example for this book. His memoir, *Out of Place*, reflecting back on almost his whole life and career, is one of several works to reveal internal tensions around education. In the Preface Said remarks: ‘The basic split in my life was the one between Arabic, my native language, and English, the language of my education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher’ (xv). Schools, he continues, had a powerful hold on him when he was young, and ‘their hold persists’ (xvi). For the most part, Said’s portrait of his childhood education, which was spread across schools in Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon and the United States, is bitterly negative. Looking back on his time at Gezira Preparatory School (GPS), he recalls: ‘Very little of what surrounded me at the school – lessons, teachers, students, atmosphere – was sustaining or helpful to me’ (45). He was force-fed material that was alien and nationalistic: ‘Our lessons and books were mystifyingly English: we read about meadows, castles, and Kings John, Alfred, and Canute with the reverence that our teachers kept reminding us that they deserved’ (39). ‘GPS gave me my first experience of an organized system set up as a colonial business by the British’, he explains: ‘The atmosphere was one of unquestioning assent framed with hateful servility by teachers and students alike. The school was not interesting as a place of learning but it gave me my first extended contact with colonial authority’ (42).

Things initially seemed better when he moved to the Cairo School for American Children, but he was quickly disillusioned, inserted into a classroom ‘ruled by the first great martinet and sadist of my life, a Miss Clark, whose single-minded persecution of me crippled my already uncertain sense of self’ (83). Next was a stint at St George’s School, Jerusalem, where he felt more at home but where the lessons, except in maths, ‘made no mark’: ‘it combined indifferent teaching, a volatile atmosphere, and, as I look back on it fifty years later, a general sense of purposeless routine trying to maintain itself as the country’s identity was undergoing irrevocable change’ (109). And it was more of the same at Victoria College, Cairo, the would-be ‘Eton of the Middle East’ (180), which he entered in the autumn of 1949, aged 13. Again the curriculum – indeed, the whole ethos – was apparently designed to serve and to glorify a moribund colonialism. The students, he writes, ‘were seen as paying

of French in France: ‘this particular discipline has been suffering from a chronic, perhaps endemic state of “crisis” ever since education gradually came under the purview of the state (a process that was essentially complete by 1880)’ (5).

members of some putative colonial elite that was being schooled in the ways of a British imperialism that had already expired, though we did not fully know it' (185–86). Said again brings individual teachers briefly into focus, but very rarely in a positive light: chemistry classes were given by 'a semimoron middle-aged man whose name I have forgotten' (191); his English teacher, whose name he does remember, and mentions, was 'blustering, weak, and incompetent' (206); and more generally the teachers, mostly 'cruel, impersonal, and authoritarian Englishmen', were 'variously comic and/or maimed' (183). It is no wonder that the young Edward, who was embarrassed by his ill-fitting, aspirational English name, felt out of place and uninspired. What is more, although the memoir reserves special opprobrium for the 'hated British' (198) and even for one teacher's 'bad British teeth and ungenerous lips' (38), things scarcely improved when he moved on to higher levels of education in the US. 'Although it was in the traditional picture-book sense a beautiful, leafy, hilly, and perfectly maintained New England site,' he writes of Mount Hermon School, Massachusetts, 'I found it altogether alienating and desolate'. The main building, he adds, 'could have been a factory' (225–26). In due course Princeton and Harvard also proved parochial and lacklustre. True, along the way he had some uplifting encounters with particular books and teachers, but those positive memories are limited. In *Out of Place* as a whole his acrimony with regard to his formative experiences of education is overwhelming.

On one level, at least hypothetically, this might seem surprising. After all, Said certainly ended up 'well educated' by standards that are quite widely accepted by people such as himself; his schools drew him into intellectual worlds in which he prospered; and education became his vocation, leading to an exceptionally successful and rewarding career as a literary critic, intellectual and university teacher. On another level, nonetheless, Said's combination of causticity and disengagement is exactly what today's 'postcolonial' reader might expect. The historical circumstances in which Edward Said was educated seem in many respects to belong to a vanished world, and much of what endures appears discreditable. Consequently it is unsurprising if his memories of colonial education are painful, if his early encounters with colonial mentalities, especially in their cultural and educational manifestations, had at least as much influence on him as any of the formal teaching he received, and if he found his lessons dull, alienating and doctrinaire.

All of this affected not only his 'sense of self', of course, but also his critical work – and from there, at least a couple of generations of

students, writers and readers. His books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) have been among the most important of the last 40 years for academic literary criticism and were instrumental in launching postcolonial studies as a field. When *Orientalism* appeared, Said positioned it against ‘an implicit consensus [...] building up for the past decade in which the study of literature is considered to be profoundly, even constitutively nonpolitical’, and he lamented literary critics’ tendency to apply their techniques only to strictly literary objects.<sup>8</sup> *Orientalism* helped shatter any such consensus. Said encouraged critics to look sceptically at educational tradition, especially because of its entanglement with colonialism and nationalism, and to treat with suspicion canonical literary texts and conventional methods of teaching them. Although his own tastes remained famously and controversially high-cultural, he encouraged attention to non-literary texts such as works of colonial-era philology and geography, and to literary authors from beyond Europe and outside the canon. Today, a considerable proportion of academic critics in ‘English’ departments investigate the ideological currents coursing through literary texts or work on objects outside the traditional bounds of literature. And critics of colonial education, or critics of colonialism whose attention is occasionally caught by colonial education – a good number of them still also teachers of literature – tend to follow Said in emphasizing not only that schools worked in complicity with colonialism and were violently hostile to the cultures and mother tongues of colonial pupils but also that some of the blinkered and damaging attitudes that shaped colonial education have persisted into the present.

One way of describing *Our Civilizing Mission* is as an attempt to cast light on some current critical anxieties about the historical and conceptual foundations of ‘humanities’ education, especially when it comes to teaching literature. My book’s title is meant to evoke anxieties of that order, not to imply that ‘we’ have simply inherited pedagogical frameworks from colonialism, still less that we should embrace any such inheritance; and who ‘we’ might be in all this is one of the issues I want to raise in readers’ minds. As I have already suggested, few of us

8 Edward W. Said, ‘Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community’ [1982], in *Reflections on Exile, and other Literary and Cultural Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 118–47: 132. References will be given in the text to *Orientalism* ([1978] London: Penguin, 2003), and *Culture and Imperialism* ([1993] London: Vintage, 1994).

who work in education today would describe our work as ‘civilizing’ our students, or believe that British, French or European culture is synonymous with ‘civilization’; and very few of us believe our work is a ‘mission’ (though we may still think it is a vocation) or wish to be associated with colonialism. At the same time, many of us are aware that our work has been influenced by a particular history in which European nationalism and colonialism have played a substantial role; we are aware that there are troubling continuities, as well as differences, between our work and that of teachers in the past, in schools and universities; and, whether or not we have any particular interest in colonialism, we may have quite fundamental doubts about what we might consider the ‘colonial’ impulse of humanities education, by which I mean its tendency to inculcate specific values and norms. To a significant extent that normative tendency may be inevitable; and, if that is the case, we need to decide if we can still justify it, whatever our special areas of interest. So while the book is in some senses grounded in postcolonial studies, I am also working on the assumption that for many twenty-first-century readers in a wider sphere, something like my epigraph from Halbwachs – where he asserts that education allows society to fashion children in its own image, and, taking them away from their parents, installs within them a ‘veritable duality’ – may have taken on an air of ‘coloniality’. I see the project, then, in the context of broader misgivings which, as Steiner’s essay made clear, predate postcolonial studies and go beyond it; and I hope that readers will make their own connections between, on the one hand, the quite specific and unambiguously colonial material that is my primary focus and, on the other hand, other educational histories and representations, and their own experiences of education.

Another of my epigraphs, ‘Toute culture est originairement coloniale’ (‘All culture is at origin colonial’), pushes the sort of comparison I am encouraging as far as it can go, to the point where ‘comparison’ is no longer the right word. Derrida’s assertion raises the possibility that colonial education has a perverse exemplarity, an idea that was another of the underpinnings of my project. His remark is based partly on the etymological and conceptual links between agriculture and culture, the cultivation of the land and of the mind, and he argues that ‘le « colonialisme » et la « colonisation » ne sont que des reliefs, traumatisme sur traumatisme, surenchère de violence, emportement jaloux d’une *colonialité* essentielle [...] de la *culture*’ (47, his italics; “‘colonialism’ and ‘colonization’ are only the most prominent manifestation – one trauma after another, an excess of violence or jealous rage

– of an essential *coloniality in culture*, 24). He also touches on a more specific argument about the foundational role of ‘language politics’ in the institution of any culture, not least through schools (45, E23–24). I think it is clear in general, and will be clear in this book, that colonial education is an example and an aspect of colonialism; one of the hunches behind the book is that we can learn something by treating it also as an example – a challenging and uncomfortable example – of education.

I had already decided to call my book *Our Civilizing Mission* when I came across Dinah Birch’s *Our Victorian Education*, whose similar title promises an exposition of what from the past has carried into, or laid the foundations for, current educational practices.<sup>9</sup> The Victorians, Birch argues, made the modern world, for better and worse; and one could say the same thing about colonialism. But what matters more for my project (and is essential to Birch’s too) is how we may be inclined to imagine and perhaps fear that inheritance today. My book does not, then, turn to colonial history in order to offer a genealogy of modern education. Nor, I should state clearly, is its purpose to rehabilitate colonial education, or the so-called *mission civilisatrice*, or colonialism, though it will suggest that colonial schools did not function solely or simply as cogs in the colonial machine. Here too there are prospective points of comparison with Birch’s work: her book is critical of many aspects of Victorian culture, and of much Victorian educational thinking, including that of Arnold; but she also asserts: ‘The Victorians, for all their quarrels, affirmed the creative force of education again and again’ (ix). They understood, she says, that education ‘was more than a matter of social or economic advantage, or even the transmission of knowledge. It could change lives at the deepest level’. And she goes on: ‘John Ruskin puts it simply: “You do not educate a man by telling him what he knew not, but by making him what he was not”. Every thinking adult has some experience of education, and we know Ruskin was right’ (viii). These are powerful ideas, at once appealing and provocative (again, part of the provocation lies in the use of ‘we’), that I hope my book can embrace in its own way. Yet the project of making a boy what he was not, or a girl what she was not, is liable to sound particularly sinister and archaic if associated with colonial education. If I have turned to colonial history as a kind of testing ground for thinking about education, then, it is in part precisely because it intensifies whatever may now seem offputting about assumptions and assertions such as Ruskin’s.

9 Dinah Birch, *Our Victorian Education* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

My book centres on a generation of Algerian writers, most but not all from Muslim backgrounds, who were educated under French colonialism and who in that way were intensely exposed to, and influenced by, colonial France's 'civilizing mission'. They were among the very rare 'colonized' children<sup>10</sup> to go beyond primary school, and were atypical of the 'national' culture with which, as 'francophone' or 'postcolonial' or even 'world literature' writers, they have tended to be identified by teachers and critics. They were lucky from some points of view, but their good fortune came at a cost. They tended to be unusually gifted, especially in their command of French, which was often linked to a love of the canonical French literature they were obliged to study. Like Said, they moved between their native tongue and a colonial language, and their writing – novels, autobiographies, memoirs, essays, letters and diaries – attests acutely to the suffering inflicted by colonial attitudes and practices, to the defects and inconsistencies of colonial education, and to the often distressing mismatch between the world of the colonial school and the pupils' home cultures. Politically, most of them were anti-colonial. Yet many in due course became teachers of French, helping to disseminate the initially alien language and literary tradition to which schooling had exposed them – a tradition they eventually entered and extended as 'francophone' authors. This raises the question of what, if anything, they gained, or felt they gained, from their education, and how far this whole process and experience can be viewed simply as a matter of colonial domination and assimilation.

The first two chapters provide different routes into this material. Chapter 1 will extend my discussion of Said, whose work I will continue to treat as paradigmatic in its equivocal relationship to literary education and humanities education more widely: deep commitment in some respects, mixed with profound scepticism in other respects about its foundations and purposes. I take it to deserve that paradigmatic status partly because his influence has been very extensive (at the start of Chapter 1 I will cite just a couple of examples

<sup>10</sup> 'Colonized children' is an awkward turn of phrase; as an alternative I will sometimes use 'native', often in inverted commas, as a direct or indirect translation of the colonial category of the 'indigène'. All the available terms – including 'Algerian' and 'Muslim', already used above – have their problems. They sometimes appear in quotation marks when I feel the need to emphasize again that the label is inadequate, but most of the time I will assume that it will be clear from the context when I am using 'Muslim' primarily as a colonial category.



of reflections on education openly inspired by him), partly because of the inherent richness of his work; and I hope that my discussions of Said's writing will demonstrate my respect for it, even when I am critical of it. But treating Said's work as 'paradigmatic' is above all a way, irrespective of questions of influence, of inviting readers to consider what in Said's attitudes and assumptions regarding colonial education, and the work of education today, chimes with their own attitudes, or with attitudes they find around them, which may also mingle commitment and doubt.

Chapter 2 looks into educational history in colonial Algeria, the context from which most of the writers and texts at the centre of this book emerged. Yet rather than trying to establish which educational policies and attitudes predominated at a given historical moment, in a particular section of the population, I want to highlight the startling diversity of policies, attitudes and practices that were possible, and had at least some socio-cultural weight, under that particular colonial regime.<sup>11</sup> One of Birch's foundational points in *Our Victorian Education* is that our sense of the historical momentousness of the Victorians' opinions and practices should not disguise the fact that they disagreed greatly among themselves, not least over education. As we shall see, the same sort of point goes for colonists and colonial education. In some respects, then, my approach will be deliberately disorientating, and I will sometimes allow myself to jump between historical moments and between different levels of education from primary to tertiary if I think that doing so will help bring home how complex and fraught the debates about colonial education's aims could be, or how idiosyncratic the relationship of the colonial regime and ethos to the work of education – which in turn helps explain the wide range of attitudes and relationships to colonial education among the colonized. Beyond that, the aim is again to encourage readers to examine their own assumptions about colonial education and its legacies, to make their own cross-cultural and

11 To the limited extent that I am encouraging readers to extrapolate about 'colonial education' from this example, rather than to make links and associations in a looser way, I think what matters is that the French colonial regime in Algeria, with its diverse educational institutions and its debates over education, is a significant example of colonialism. How far it was *typical* is something I do not attempt to assess. Antoine Léon addresses this issue in *Colonisation, enseignement et éducation: étude historique et comparative* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), 11–12, 247–48 and *passim*.

transhistorical comparisons, and to think about what may connect us with certain writers and teachers from the past.

In the book's central chapters I look in more detail at some of those writers and teachers, dwelling on memories and traces of colonial education in their work, focusing on the texts' accounts of, variously, the experience of being a teacher in a colonial school at a time of extreme crisis, namely the Algerian war of independence (Chapter 3); the general culture of colonial schools, notably in relation to secularism and gender, in Chapter 4; and pupils' experiences of school, especially in learning French and studying French literature (Chapter 5). Only in the Conclusion, where Said will make another appearance, will I return explicitly to some of the wider issues raised in this Introduction; but, throughout, I shall be working on the assumption, and will be trying to show, that 'defences' of the humanities – perhaps too defensive a word – may be found within literary texts, and in people's relationships to those texts, in reading, writing and teaching.<sup>12</sup> I believe that the work of the teachers and authors whose lives and texts I explore in the central chapters has the capacity to illuminate situations well beyond colonial Algeria, especially with regard to education. Certainly, I myself have found opportunities through their writing to think again about the nature of, and justifications for, the work of critics and teachers, and I hope I can draw others into similar modes of reflection about education in languages and literatures; about the relations between languages, literatures, ways of thinking and national cultures; and about the things that studying literature can do for a student. In many ways, of course, the gap is large between colonial schools and the sort of university in which I teach. But texts and ideas can resonate across disparate contexts, and disparate contexts can have surprising similarities or points of contact. It struck me a few years ago that teaching as I do at a university in a cosmopolitan, postcolonial city, I, rather like French teachers in colonial Algeria, oblige students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds

12 Small at the very start of *The Value of the Humanities* remarks: 'The humanities might ideally find justification simply in our doing them. The act of justification has seemed to many humanities scholars to beg more than one question: that the value of their subject area is in question, and that the value is capable of being expressed in the mode of justification' (1). My book as a whole will offer relatively little by way of explicit 'justifications', but I think Small is right to argue that just 'doing them' is not always enough, and her book offers its own sustained justification of the humanities, especially humanities research.

to read texts, mainly 'foreign', that they would probably never otherwise read. One of the questions on which I hope ultimately to cast light is whether that sort of education remains worthwhile; what the reasons might be to remain involved in it and to believe, on some crucial level, that reading and studying these texts is educational. Historically tainted though it may be, the aim of teachers in the humanities is surely still to draw students deeply into cultural and intellectual worlds with which they may be unfamiliar, and to change the way they think.



## CHAPTER ONE

# Lessons from Said

[T]oday's intellectual is most likely to be a closeted literature professor, with a secure income, and no interest in dealing with the world outside the classroom.

Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 1996

I've stuck pretty carefully to the notion that the classroom is sacrosanct to a certain degree.

Edward Said, in an interview of 1997<sup>1</sup>

In the Preface to *Out of Place* Edward Said implied that he had been surprised when, looking back at what he had written, he realized how prominently his school years featured in the book. For reasons I touched on in the Introduction, his reaction may itself be surprising to some readers: many people think of their time at school as formative, and in Said's case it led to a life-long commitment to education. Yet the perplexity he felt over education's place in his memoir seems consistent with the uneasy status of education in his most influential critical works, where it receives little explicit attention – however deeply implicated and present it may be in other ways – and where the attention it does receive is frequently, and sometimes ferociously, antipathetic.

1 Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1996), 70–71; 'I've Always Learnt during the Class', interview with Damayanti Datta (*The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 1997), reprinted in Gauri Viswanathan (ed.), *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 280–83: 280–81.

Much of the antipathy is grounded, of course, in Said's understanding of colonial education's place in colonialism. In his view, to borrow a summary from two of the many people working in his wake,

education was a central site for the exercise of colonial power, both in the metropolitan centre where it was through education that the legitimizing discourses of the colonial adventures were justified, and in the colonial societies, where education provided the structuring mechanisms of asymmetrical relations of power. [...] It was in and through educational institutions that students came to first accept as natural and inevitable the links between colonial power and knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

What is more, Said understood the complicity between education and imperialism to extend into the present, long after the major European empires started to crumble. In 'Orientalism Now' (the last chapter of the original text of 1978), he wrote:

there is no Arab educational institution capable of challenging places like Oxford, Harvard, or UCLA in the study of the Arab world, much less in any non-Oriental subject matter. The predictable result of all this is that Oriental students (and Oriental professors) still want to come and sit at the feet of American Orientalists, and later to repeat to their local audiences the clichés I have been characterizing as Orientalist dogmas. (323–24)

This 'system of reproduction', as Said described it, meant that in 'Western' universities (at least up to the 1970s, and at least as far as the study of the Arab world was concerned), European, American and 'Oriental' students were brainwashed into accepting clichés and racialized hierarchy. What passed for knowledge was no more than pseudo-knowledge.

Such accounts of colonial and postcolonial education raise various questions. Some of those questions concern colonial education as such. The next chapter will try to complicate – though not to dismiss – the view that 'education was a central site for the exercise of colonial power' in colonial societies; and at various points throughout the book I will suggest that it is simplistic to assert that 'through educational institutions [...] students came to [...] accept as natural and inevitable the links between colonial power and knowledge'. Other questions concern the

2 Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard, 'Introduction', *Edward Said and the Cultural Politics of Education*, special issue of *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 27:3 (September 2006), 293–82: 294.

afterlives of colonial attitudes and power structures in education. How far beyond ‘Oriental subject matter’ might Said’s critique extend? How far, and on what basis, can or should ‘Harvard’, or the sort of knowledge or mindset it is taken to represent, be challenged in other areas of the humanities, or in areas beyond the humanities? What does ‘challenge’ mean here, and what is implied about the general relationship between geopolitical power, education and knowledge, or pseudo-knowledge? What factors made it possible for Said, but impossible for other people, to ‘challenge’ Harvard in Oriental or Middle Eastern studies?

I will not attempt to answer all those questions, and should make it clear that I have no interest in contesting Said’s specific arguments about 1970s Orientalism in the US. The issue I hope to raise by quoting and questioning Said’s assertions is how far, when Said and other critics of colonial education state or assume that colonial mentalities persist into the present, in educational institutions and elsewhere, their criticisms of colonial and postcolonial education leach out into a wider scepticism about education’s aims and effects. Or perhaps that way of putting it implies too clear a view of causality; perhaps their criticisms of colonial education provide a means of expressing a wider scepticism that was already there. Either way, Said and others end up expressing doubts about education that are also a form of self-doubt. The momentum of their arguments risks carrying them beyond any specific colonial target to a point where their own involvement in education may start to appear self-contradictory and hard to justify.

For reasons I explained in the Introduction, Said’s work will serve as this book’s principal example of that tendency, and will be explored in this chapter through that lens. I will focus first on his promotion of the work of the ‘intellectual’ as a possible path to political legitimacy for the literature professor, then on *Orientalism*’s sometimes faltering approach to literature – an issue I will address primarily, in this chapter, as a question of critical methodology, but that will eventually lead back to the topic of education, at the close of this chapter and more fully in the Conclusion. Before my detailed discussion of Said, however, I want to offer just a little more support for my claim that Saidian self-doubt around education is paradigmatic, by examining the conclusion of Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, a book I admire, and that is cited approvingly in *Culture and Imperialism*.

Viswanathan offers a fine analysis of British/Indian colonial education, and she too is especially interested in the teaching of literature. After

first studying in India she was a student of Said's, and went on to become Class of 1933 Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, teaching in the department of English and Comparative Literature, as did Said for most of his career. *Masks of Conquest* is a good example for my purposes partly, of course, because it is about colonial education, and because it is a book that offers many compelling arguments, enunciated from a position of considerable academic authority. When Viswanathan discusses the place of 'local' languages in British colonial education, for example (a divisive issue in the Algerian case too), she argues that 'both the Anglicist and the Orientalist factions were equally complicit with the project of domination'; and in terms of the 'balance sheet', so to speak, of colonial education in India, this may well be correct. (In relation to the Algerian case, as I have indicated, I am not attempting that sort of assessment.) More generally, her book's argument is that English as a discipline 'came into its own in an age of colonialism', and was tied to 'the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects'.<sup>3</sup> Again, I would not want to disagree. What concerns me are the implications and resonances of Viswanathan's arguments for literature teachers such as herself at the moment she was writing, and today. She addresses that issue on the final page of her book:

I am not advocating that today's students must close their English books without further ado because those works were instrumental in holding others in subjugation or, if that is too extreme, that at least Shakespeare and Milton must be dropped from the English curriculum because their texts were used at one time to supply religious values that could be introduced into the British control of India in no other way.

What I am suggesting, however, is that we can no longer afford to regard the uses to which literary works were put in the service of British imperialism as extraneous to the way these texts are to be read. The involvement of colonialism with literary culture is too deep, too pervasive for the disciplinary development of English literary pedagogy to be studied with Britain as its only or primary focus. (169)

Those remarks are also quite compelling, it seems to me, and I would speculate that many academic readers would accept them without much hesitation, but if they did – if you do – that may be symptomatic of the sort of self-doubt on which I want to cast light. I would argue that the comments are marked by some of the same strains and silences, and

3 Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, 176, 2. See also Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 42, 101, 109.



perhaps inconsistencies, around education – including the author’s own role as a teacher of English/literature – that I believe I can discern in some of Said’s writing, and that will resurface in a different form in the ‘francophone’ corpus discussed later. The first long sentence in the quotation could be seen as a form of apophasis, the rhetorical device where you broach a subject by stating that you won’t mention it; and the slightly awkward syntax around ‘at least’ may reinforce the sense that the denial (‘I am not advocating’) betrays a contrary impulse. More importantly, Viswanathan’s next, would-be conclusive remarks leave hanging a crucial question about what she *is* advocating. Her book has shown convincingly by this juncture that ‘the disciplinary development of English literary pedagogy’ should not be studied ‘with Britain as its only or primary focus’ and that colonialism is a vital part of the historical story. But the historical study of the discipline’s development is not the same thing as studying literature. Students of Shakespeare and Milton do not necessarily study ‘the disciplinary development of English literary pedagogy’; and I imagine Viswanathan would agree that not all of them, or their teachers, need do so. This is not just about allowing a variety of approaches and interests, from teachers and students; it is more fundamentally about the persistence and renewal of the discipline, in teaching and criticism, as a practice and as something other than a subbranch of history. That discipline or practice involves a commitment to reading literary texts themselves. Viswanathan’s phrasing hesitates between the idea that her focus is the uses to which texts were put and the idea that the *works* ‘were instrumental in holding others in subjugation’; but unless we think these books are so inherently toxic that they should now be closed, the uses to which they were put in the past do not necessarily tell us how to approach them now, or what they might mean to us now, or do for us now. In other words, Viswanathan’s conclusion about ‘disciplinary development’ does not really offer any conclusion about ‘the way these texts are to be read’; it raises doubts about whether it is worth reading and studying them at all, and leaves those doubts unresolved.

### Academics and intellectuals

In Said’s writing one frequently finds the assumption, and sometimes the argument, that academic professionals, especially in the humanities, are particularly well positioned to become ‘intellectuals’. In *Representations*

of *the Intellectual* he remarks: ‘To accuse all intellectuals of being sellouts just because they earn their living working in a university or for a newspaper is a coarse and finally meaningless charge’ (69). In refuting the accusation he also reinforces the association between academics and intellectuals: his phrasing presumes that for the most part intellectuals do indeed work for universities or newspapers, or both, and legitimately so. Intellectuals, he says elsewhere in that book, ‘are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television’ (12–13).

Although there is some variance in Said’s use of the term ‘intellectual’, which occasionally is very broad or even negative, the intellectual depicted by Said is commonly a heroic figure, characterized ‘as exile and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power’.<sup>4</sup> Yet if this is a prospective model for university professors in the humanities, it is not one that many seem to fit easily. Perhaps this is partly a matter of academic personality types, partly a matter of socio-political and economic circumstances that limit their opportunities to find platforms outside the university. But the possible explanation that concerns me here is that there is no simple alignment of

4 Said, *Representations*, xvi. At one point in *Representations* (68) Said writes negatively about ‘the increased number of twentieth-century men and women who belong to a general group called intellectuals or the intelligentsia – the managers, professors, journalists, computer or government experts, lobbyists, pundits, syndicated columnists, consultants who are paid for their opinions’. The target of this scepticism is not well defined: the term ‘intellectuals’ does not necessarily apply to computer experts, lobbyists or managers as such, and the notion and weight of ‘opinion’ is quite different in these varied spheres. For discussions of Said’s conception of the intellectual see Saree Makdisi, ‘Edward Said and the Style of the Public Intellectual’, in Ned Curthoys and Debjani Ganguly (eds), *Edward Said: The Legacy of a Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007), 21–35; Anna Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging: Nation, Narration and Israel/Palestine* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), Chapter 2, which examines the relationship between the personal and the political in Said’s *Out of Place*, notably in relation to his emergence from what he called ‘the unpolitical years of my education, the assumption of disengaged teaching and scholarship at Columbia’ (*Out of Place: A Memoir* ([1999] London: Granta, 2000), 293, cited by Bernard, 46) into his role as a spokesperson for Palestinian self-rule, ultimately, as Bernard argues, on non-identitarian grounds; and Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Chapter 5, ‘The Battle over Edward Said’, where he discusses Said’s ‘intermittent tendency to romanticize the uncommitted, exilic, individual vocation of intellectualism’ (202).

the role of the Saidian ‘intellectual’ and that of the critic–teacher. This is not to say that a person may not take on both roles successfully, and I do not want to disparage Said or others who have done so. Instead I want to examine how his inspiring vision of the intellectual sat with his vision of literary education, and to explore what implications Said’s model of intellectual intervention may have for the justifications of academic work in the humanities.

At one stage in *Representations of the Intellectual* Said cites Russell Jacoby’s argument about the regrettable disappearance from today’s world of the non-academic intellectual. Although he disagrees with Jacoby on some issues, and – notably – sticks up for the work of US universities, he initially describes Jacoby’s argument as ‘unimpeachable’; and Said’s use of a kind of *style indirect libre* or free indirect discourse sometimes blurs the boundaries between Jacoby’s point of view and his own. It is when glossing Jacoby, a history professor with a strong interest in intellectuals and education, that Said makes the remark I quoted as the first of this chapter’s epigraphs: ‘today’s intellectual is most likely to be a closeted literature professor, with a secure income, and no interest in dealing with the world outside the classroom’. Such a person is not an intellectual at all in Said’s primary, positive sense, of course. The slippage in his terminology is another indication that he assumes all academics are prospective intellectuals; and it is clear he shares some of Jacoby’s distrust of professors who appear uninterested in ‘the world outside the classroom’, or who ‘write an esoteric and barbaric prose that is meant mainly for academic advancement and not for social change’.<sup>5</sup> What does this imply, if you are considering how teachers in different disciplines should behave in the classroom, and what they should teach? What falls ‘inside’ the classroom, for instance when you are studying a novel about the Carthaginian wars, or about contemporary immigration, or even a campus novel? Is all ‘esoteric’ academic prose also ‘barbaric’? And how well is the range of possible ambitions for academic writing captured in the alternative between ‘academic advancement’ and ‘social change’?

One way to read Said’s remarks about intellectuals, I want to suggest, is as another sign of ambivalence about being an academic and about teaching. At moments in *Representations of the Intellectual* Said seems

5 Said, *Representations*, 70–71, discussing Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1987).

to *oppose* the single-minded energy of the intellectual to the stasis and conformism of the teacher. He comments that ‘unlike teachers and priests, who seem more or less to remain in place, doing the same kind of work year in and year out, organic intellectuals are always on the move, on the make’, and describes the early career of James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus as ‘a seesaw between the blandishments of institutions like the church, the profession of teaching, Irish nationalism, and his slowly emerging and stubborn selfhood as an intellectual’.<sup>6</sup> One could also see an implicit distrust of academics in Said’s praise of the ‘amateur’ intellectual and his suspicion of expertise, a suspicion that, as we have seen, was already evident in *Orientalism*.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most striking statement made by Said about the political bubble in which academic literary criticism/teaching may appear to exist, or may have appeared to exist around the time *Orientalism* was published, is the 1982 essay ‘Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community’. It leads off with an anecdote about Said’s conversation with an academic publisher at the annual conference of the MLA (the Modern Language Association), of which Said would later become president. Said asked about the sales and circulation of books of literary criticism, and the publisher replied that his press reckoned on selling about 3000 copies of each book, a figure that many academics would consider very respectable, but which Said considered derisory. The circulation of these texts is a matter, Said surmised, of ‘three thousand advanced critics reading each other to everyone else’s unconcern’ (127) – the sort of thing one can imagine some politicians and university managers wanting to say publicly, though perhaps not quite daring. This is the moment where Said describes ‘an implicit consensus [that] has been building up for the past decade in which the study of literature is considered to be profoundly, even constitutively nonpolitical’. He goes on to voice suspicion of specialism, commenting:

6 Said, *Representations*, 4, 16. Said does indicate that Stephen Dedalus’s pursuit of personal independence is self-defeatingly extreme; but this may reinforce my point, in that negative connotations are attached almost casually, and in passing, to the teaching profession.

7 Besides the comments quoted above on American Orientalists, see, for example, the reference to ‘experts’ in note 4 above. Although many people will share Said’s misgivings about the ways ‘expertise’ may be fetishized or less expert than it seems, and how opinions may be bought, no-one, surely, is in favour of pseudo-expertise as such. Those who employ pseudo-experts to serve their interests rely on the established value of true expertise.

To an alarming degree, the present continuation of the humanities depends, I think, on the sustained self-purification of humanists for whom the ethic of specialization has become equivalent to minimizing the content of their work and increasing the composite wall of guild consciousness, social authority, and exclusionary discipline around themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Said offers an alternative vision: ‘interference’, ‘breaking out of the disciplinary ghettos in which as intellectuals we have been confined’. More than that, he attacks two famously political literary critics, Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, for accepting a state of ‘cloistral seclusion from the inhospitable world of real politics’. The ‘crucial next phase’, he says, is ‘connecting these more politically vigilant forms of interpretation to an ongoing political and social praxis’ (147).

That line of argument seemed natural enough in the wake of *Orientalism*. The conceptual links between *Orientalism* and Said’s political advocacy are clear thematically and also methodologically, in the sense that the book gave priority to questions about works’ political or ideological impact. (I will return to this point.) What is less clear is whether all other critic–teachers could and should follow Said’s advice, and his example, with respect to activity outside teaching and criticism. How far should extra-academic commitments such as Said’s be accepted as a necessary corollary of certain sorts of academic work? And how far does or should the possibility, desirability, or even the actuality of those engagements serve to legitimate academic activities as such?

We may well accept that the sort of position occupied by Said as a public intellectual was and remains a desirable one, but the first problem to consider is how many critic–teachers could take on the role. More than do at the moment, no doubt, but in universities around the world there are very large numbers of critics. The MLA currently has about 25,000 members.<sup>9</sup> These 25,000 people, though drawn from many different countries, must be only a small proportion of the world’s total collection of academics who are prospective public intellectuals. The MLA is US-based and communicates primarily in English, which perhaps makes international recognition easier for its members. Yet not

8 Said, ‘Opponents, Audiences’, 132, 139. The phrase ‘the present continuation of the humanities depends’ is intriguingly, and perhaps symptomatically, ambiguous.

9 ‘About the MLA’, <https://www.mla.org/About-Us/About-the-MLA>, consulted 1 March 2019.

many of these 25,000 can realistically hope to achieve the eminence or to effect the prominent political interventions of a Said or a Chomsky.

In any case, academic qualifications, positions and publications should not be treated as prerequisites for public intellectuals or activists, as Said made clear. Moreover, the eminent academic work that may help establish a political platform can be at a considerable distance, as in the case of Chomsky, from the political terrain on which the academic intervenes. Consequently, such work cannot be assumed either to ground it or to undermine it. The apparent disconnection between Chomsky's academic work in linguistics and his political work has no bearing on the legitimacy or effect of his political interventions – no bearing in principle, and probably none in practice.<sup>10</sup> And the opposite must be true too: Chomsky's work as a professor of linguistics, like Said's work as a professor of literature, is neither validated nor invalidated by his political activities, and would not in itself be any less or more valid if he spent more or less of his time engaged in those political activities. Of course, if someone like Said calls for 'an ongoing political and social praxis', understood to mean activity outside the academy, he will risk being called a hypocrite if he spends none of his own time in that way. Yet even if that charge of hypocrisy were to stick, it would not, in itself, invalidate his arguments. In the end, there is something perverse and self-defeating about trying to justify academic work by showing that its practitioners can or must engage in extra-academic activity; the justification needs to lie in the work itself.

### Orientalism and literature

This returns us to *Orientalism*, the sort of book that Said was professionally committed to producing.<sup>11</sup> At the start of the book, Said identifies three interlinked senses of Orientalism: an academic discipline; a 'style

<sup>10</sup> It is of course possible to argue that Chomsky's linguistics and his politics are connected. Jackson Lears has linked Chomsky's work in the two spheres as that of 'an Enlightenment rationalist and humanist' ('Mysterian', *London Review of Books* 39:9 (4 May 2017), 18–20: 18). This does not really affect the principle of the argument I am making here.

<sup>11</sup> For an exploration of the relationship between notions of profession, professorship and literature, see Derrida, *L'Université sans condition* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), a book that began life as a series of lectures on the future of the university and the 'humanities'.

of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident” (2); and ‘the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’. The ‘Orient’ in this sense is a phenomenon with a long history, and stretches from Morocco in the West, through the rest of the Maghreb and the Middle East, all the way to the ‘Far East’. Even so, by virtue of his personal background and his academic interest in English- and French-speaking cultures, the approach of the ‘West’ to the ‘Arab world’ in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as seen in literary texts among others, is a particular focus of the book.

A little later in the Introduction (20–21) Said remarks:

Orientalism is premised on exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. [...] The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation [...] My analysis [...] places emphasis on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations as representations, not as ‘natural’ depictions of the Orient. This evidence is found just as prominently in the so-called truthful text (histories, philological analyses, political treatises) as in the avowedly artistic (i.e., openly imaginative) text. The things to look for are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient. ‘Sie können sich nicht vertreten, sie müssen vertreten werden,’ as Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

There are several problems here. Perhaps the most important, on which other critics have focused, concerns the notion of representation.<sup>12</sup> The quotation from Marx, which Said used in English as the first of his book’s epigraphs, concerns representation primarily in its political senses (as in

12 See, for example, Christopher Prendergast, *The Triangle of Representation* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000), Chapter 6; and, for discussion of the notion of discourse in Said, Foucault and related contexts, Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 383–410.

‘representative democracy’), but much of Said’s analysis concerns representation in its other senses, as in novels and paintings. (When he quotes the phrase in the body of the text Said does not provide the translation: ‘They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented’.) Clearly, he is exploiting – suggestively – a slippage in English that points towards the interconnections between the word’s different meanings. Nevertheless, given that in German many of his uses of ‘represent’ would call not for ‘vertreten’ but for ‘darstellen’, his invocation of Marx involves some sleight of hand.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, passages such as these reveal Said’s much-discussed Foucault-influenced uncertainties over the possibility of misrepresentation, a notion Said is tempted to see as naive but on which – for good reason, I would argue – he relies nonetheless. He implies that ‘Western’ representations of the Orient are misrepresentations, which is meant, of course, as a criticism; but he also implies that *all* representation is misrepresentation. That undercuts the basis of the criticism; it also helps explain the whiff of disapproval around the very notion of representation in the perplexing remark, ‘The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation’. (‘Product’ is strange, and ‘principal’ is evidently questionable too.)

A second problem, related to the first, is that Said makes too mechanical an association between geopolitical location or origin and conceptual point of view, implying that ‘Western’ representations of the Orient are *inevitably* misrepresentations. This leaves insufficient room not only for ‘correctness’ but also for the imaginative and empathetic leaps that, by Said’s own account, occasional writers were able to effect in considering other people’s perspectives, leaps sometimes hindered but sometimes facilitated by reading and education. This rather rigid general

13 Spivak discusses this issue in her influential essay of 1983 ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, reprinted in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 271–313: 276–79. Marx’s point concerns the political role of the French peasantry in mid-nineteenth-century France, which he sees as constituting a class in some respects but not others: they do not form a community and are not united by a ‘national bond or political organization’. He remarks ‘the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes’. Consequently he considers them ‘incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention’. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* ([1934] London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 109 / *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (Stuttgart: Dietz Nachf, 1921), 102.



framework also limits his understanding of historical change in attitudes and relationships, and of the very possibility of historical change.<sup>14</sup>

The third problem, about which I will say more, lies in the way Said distinguishes, or fails to distinguish, between the ‘so-called truthful text’ and the ‘avowedly artistic (i.e., openly imaginative) text’. Said indicates that he will be concerned particularly with the evidence that representations *are* representations, not “natural” depictions of the Orient’. He is no doubt right that Westerners have repeatedly adopted what he calls a ‘textual attitude’ to the Orient, by which he means that most Orientalists, academic or not, have formed their attitudes towards the Orient primarily on the basis of reading, rather than through direct observation; and he is no doubt right that readers have repeatedly placed too much faith in Orientalist texts, have been misled by them, and had prejudices reinforced by them. The ‘textual attitude’, Said argues persuasively, afflicted even Orientalists who travelled and wrote about travel; Gérard de Nerval, for instance, incorporated plagiarized chunks from other writers into his *Voyage en Orient*, a book that gives the impression that he spent time in places that he never actually visited.

I am not sure, though, that the self-consciously ill-fitting notion of a “natural” depiction’ captures the reasons why some readers put excessive faith in some representations. Said says that the evidence of the constructedness of representations is ‘by no means invisible’, and he conceives of this visibility, I suppose, as a constant aspect of texts, even if some of the evidence may be clearer from historical distance. Said seems to suggest too that the evidence is more visible in some texts than others; it may be ‘prominent’ in all texts, as he implies, but only certain texts are ‘avowedly artistic’ and ‘openly imaginative’. These are the texts that are usually called literary. Recognizing them as such does not preclude questions about the texts’ relation to the social and historical circumstances of their conception and circulation, any more than it precludes questions about ways in which they represent, and may misrepresent, their subject matter. But such texts are *allowed* to misrepresent reality, in a way that other texts are not; there is a sense in which readers may accept that the literary text ‘is not even

14 In the Introduction Said describes Orientalism as a system of ideas that has remained ‘unchanged as teachable wisdom [...] from the period of Ernest Renan in the late 1840s until the present in the United States’ (6). He also suggests that the phenomenon of Orientalism goes much further back, alluding for instance to Aeschylus’s play *The Persians* (21).

trying to be accurate' (to use a phrase he used in elaborating his notion of Orientalist discourse, 71); whereas histories, to repeat one of Said's examples, are less well described as 'so-called truthful' than as 'would-be truthful', or as having strict obligations towards the truth. They may or may not fulfil those obligations, but if they misrepresent facts, deliberately or accidentally, or if they drift unannounced into unsupported speculation, they are flawed. Literary texts, by contrast, have often been defined precisely in terms of their capacity to 'tell' us, in some sense, that 'The things to look for are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original' (to quote again from that early passage). The 'us' I am invoking here – also present implicitly in Said's 'the things to look for' (and in some of the passive phrases I have used in this paragraph) – could be defined in disciplinary terms, or more broadly in terms of a certain approach to literary texts; and in the case of such texts in particular, perhaps there is something to be said for that approach.

We can see more evidence of Said's hesitations on this point, and on the place of literature in Orientalism – and so, I want to suggest, in education – in his discussions of Nerval (1808–1855) and another canonical French author, Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880). Early in the Introduction to *Orientalism*, immediately after offering one of the definitions I quoted earlier ('Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"'), he states:

Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind', destiny, and so on. (2–3)

Literary writers are lumped in with propagandists, economists, administrators and the other objects of his criticism. At a certain, crucial level, according to *Orientalism*, novels and poems are not to be distinguished from theories or political accounts. On that level, the question is: 'How did philology, lexicography, history, biology, political and economic theory, novel-writing, and lyric poetry *come to the service* of Orientalism's broadly imperialist view of the world?' (15, my italics). With that sort of list, a stylistic device that is characteristic of the book,

Said evoked, then flattened, distinctions of language, register, intention and so on in order to argue that the varied writings by these diverse figures all fed into Orientalist 'discourse' and politics.

Frequently in *Orientalism* it seems, for such reasons, that Said has knocked famous literary figures from their pedestals. For example, when stressing the prevalence and the coercive weight of the 'textual attitude' to the East, Said states: 'Orientalism imposed limits upon thought about the Orient. Even the most imaginative writers of an age, men like Flaubert, Nerval, or Scott, were constrained in what they could either experience of or say about the Orient' (43). He talks later of an 'operation, by which whenever you discussed the Orient a formidable mechanism of omniscient definitions would present itself as the only one having suitable validity for your discussion' (156). Within the work of Nerval and Flaubert one can find many of the familiar topoi of Orientalism, including the use of the Orient as a space of personal indulgence and private fantasy, a certain hazy sympathy for or identification with the 'mysterious East', and their sense of disappointment as an imagined, text-based Orient came into contact with contemporary reality in North Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, they drew on the often tendentious and condescending Orientalist writers who are Said's main focus: 'From these complex rewritings', Said writes, 'the actualities of the modern Orient were systematically excluded, especially when gifted pilgrims like Nerval and Flaubert preferred Lane's descriptions to what their eyes and minds showed them immediately' (177). On this basis, literature should be accorded no special privileges in a discussion of Orientalism; Flaubert and Nerval should get the same treatment as all other Orientalists.

Despite all this, the literary writers whom Said most admired, including Flaubert and Nerval, seem to keep slipping off the hook. When he remarks, for instance, 'Not only does a learned Orient inhibit the pilgrim's musings and private fantasies; its very antecedence places barriers between the contemporary traveler and his writing', the argument seems at first to be the one we have just seen about 'omniscient' Orientalist definitions recirculating unchallenged in literary texts among others. On this occasion, however, Said continues: '*unless*, as was the case with Nerval and Flaubert in their use of Lane, Orientalist work is severed from the library and *caught in the aesthetic project*' (my italics).<sup>15</sup>

15 Said, *Orientalism*, 168. The phrase 'severed from the library', which carries anti-academic overtones, will seem incongruous to anyone who has struggled with

In attempting to flesh out the idea of the ‘aesthetic project’ and to justify the special treatment he, or part of him, apparently wished to accord to writers such as Flaubert and Nerval, Said offered a taxonomy of three curiously *ad hominem* ‘intentional categories’, ascribing complicatedly, self-consciously different projects to writers in each group (157–58). In the first is the writer ‘providing professional Orientalism with scientific material’ (157); in the second, the writer ‘who intends the same purpose but is less willing to sacrifice the eccentricity and style of his individual consciousness to impersonal Orientalist definitions’ (157–58); and in the third category, ‘the writer for whom *a real or metaphorical trip* to the Orient is the fulfilment of some deeply felt and urgent project’ (158, my italics).<sup>16</sup> Nerval is given as an example of the third category, and Said goes on: ‘His text therefore is built on a personal aesthetic, fed and informed by the project’, adding a little later that in texts of that sort, ‘the self is there prominently, [...] dominating and mediating everything we are told about the Orient’ (168). In categories two and three, he explains, ‘there is considerably more space than in one for the play of a personal – or at least non-Orientalist – consciousness’ (158).

The psychological speculations here are confusing in relation to the general project of *Orientalism*. It is anomalous, notably in terms of Said’s own criticisms of the ‘textual attitude’ and his appeal to the authority of ‘what eyes and minds showed them immediately’, that in his characterization of the creative writer the distinction between a real and metaphorical trip suddenly appears inconsequential. The distinction must have mattered to the writers, and should still matter to Said. It is also peculiar and implausible to present the development of ‘a personal aesthetic’ as somehow the *result* of the urge to make such a trip (‘His text is *therefore* ...’). More importantly, this scheme again seems to skirt vital questions about accuracy and empathy, and it provides little basis on which to distinguish between, on the one hand, the ‘geniuses’ Nerval and Flaubert (180) and, on the other, Lamartine, another accomplished writer whose project may also have been ‘deeply felt’, but of which Said was much more critical.

the web of allusions in Nerval’s *Chimères* (1854) or has read Flaubert’s *Salammbô* (1862), a lurid novel set in Carthage in the third century B.C.

16 He also claims that ‘Flaubert, Vigny, Nerval [...] and others] all undertook their pilgrimages in order to dispel the mustiness of the pre-existing Orientalist archive’ (169).

Returning a little later to the reasons why some sort of exception is to be made for Nerval and Flaubert, Said writes:

The paramount importance of Nerval and Flaubert to a study such as this [...] is that they produced work that is connected to and *depends upon* the kind of Orientalism we have so far discussed, yet remains *independent* from it. [...] [T]heir Orient was not so much grasped, appropriated, reduced, or codified as lived in, *exploited aesthetically and imaginatively as a roomy place full of possibility*. What mattered to them was the structure of their work as an *independent, aesthetic, and personal fact*, and not the ways by which, if one wanted to, one could effectively dominate or set down the Orient graphically. Their egos never absorbed the Orient, nor totally identified the Orient with documentary and textual knowledge of it (with official Orientalism, in short).

On the one hand, therefore, the scope of their Oriental work *exceeds the limitations* imposed by orthodox Orientalism. On the other hand, the subject of their work is more than Oriental or Orientalistic (even though they do their own Orientalizing of the Orient); it *quite consciously* plays with the limitations and the challenges presented to them by the Orient and by knowledge about it. (181, my italics throughout)

This is less than clear, and less than convincing. There are some strange turns of phrase: what does it mean to talk of ‘the structure of their work as an *independent [...] and personal fact*’? ‘Exploited’ is an awkward choice of word in this context (insofar as ‘exploited aesthetically’ seems to be meant positively); and the notion of ‘independence’, which comes uncomfortably close on the heels of an assertion of dependency, seems at the very least to modify significantly, if not to contradict, Said’s overarching account of the constraints imposed by ‘exteriority’ and Orientalist discourse. This in turn raises questions about the very notion of discourse, as used here: while one advantage of its breadth is arguably its recognition that a worldview or a consciousness often accommodates attitudes and opinions that are strictly contradictory, a disadvantage is that the notion tends, by the same token, to neglect the question of when and how dis-illusionment is positive, or when and how contradictions are experienced as such, and unsettle or modify a worldview. These questions are certainly pertinent to Nerval’s *Voyage en Orient*: its very first page draws attention explicitly to the frictions between travellers’ expectations, reality, and the writer’s urge to offer readers a good story; Nerval later notes ironically that proper, satisfactory ‘Oriental’ cafés can be found only in Paris; and his escapades (some no doubt fictional) include his pursuit in Cairo of two

exotic veiled women who turn out to be French.<sup>17</sup> What happens, one might ask, when a text such as this feeds back into Orientalism?

Said's emphasis on intention tends to divert him from that sort of question of reception, but it is the more important issue if one is interested in the circulation of Orientalist discourse across generic, disciplinary and temporal boundaries, and if one is speculating on the political impact of Orientalist texts over a period of 200 years or more. I mean 'reception' in a broad sense; not just critics' or reviewers' published responses, but the ways in which texts were read, and what effects they had, recognized or unrecognized. Said's main concern in this context, in other words, should have been how Flaubert's and Nerval's writings flowed into Orientalist mentalities. The notion of intention would help only if Said showed why 'what mattered to them' may have mattered to their readers, or should matter to us. To put it another way, we need some account of how the aesthetic 'independence' these writers reportedly sought became the kind of independence Said attributed, at least at moments, to their writing; or how, to put it another way again, some notion of 'aesthetic independence' may have mediated, or may mediate now, certain encounters between readers and texts. The issues go far beyond Said, of course: at stake is the relationship of literary texts (among other cultural forms), and the ideas they frame and convey, to the historical contexts from which they emerge, with which they engage, and in which they are read.

In *Orientalism* Said does offer a few more ideas on 'aesthetic independence', but the notion never really comes into focus. He offers a rather bathetic phrase about literary authors' 're-presentation of canonical material guided by an aesthetic and executive will *capable of producing interest in the reader*' (177, my italics). At another moment, drawing an unfavourable contrast between Lane, a 'category one' writer,

17 Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* ([1851] Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1980), vol. 1, 55, 200, 179. Jennifer Yee finds a comparable 'many-layered irony' in Segalen's *Les Immémoriaux*: 'when Térii and Paofaï prepare their journey, they plan what they will say about it in advance – as apparently do all voyagers: "Même ceux-là qui n'attendent point d'aventures prennent grand soin d'en imaginer d'avance, pour n'être pas pris de court" [Even voyagers who are not expecting to have any great adventures make sure they make some up in advance, so as not to be caught out]'. *Exotic Subversions in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (London: MHRA and Legenda, 2008), 100. For detailed analysis of Nerval's text and its relationship to Orientalism see Madeleine Dobie, *Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), Chapter 4.

and figures from categories two and three, he remarks: 'He [Lane] is quoted as a source of knowledge about Egypt or Arabia, whereas Burton or Flaubert were and are read for what they tell us about Burton and Flaubert over and above their knowledge of the Orient' (158–59). But reading *Salammbô*, Flaubert's Orientalist novel, to find out about Flaubert, if that meant Flaubert as a person, would be an odd project. Perhaps, in making the comment, it was Flaubert's correspondence that Said had in mind; but I am not sure that 'finding out about Flaubert' really explains the writing's attractions even with regard to the correspondence. In any case, one of the reasons there is a lack of clarity around *Orientalism's* positioning of canonical literary figures such as Nerval and Flaubert is that Said pays little attention to their canonical literary texts. His decision to rely instead on their letters and notebooks muddies the waters; letters and notebooks did not necessarily form part of their 'aesthetic project' in the apposite sense, and do not typify the work for which primarily the writers have been valued and granted special status, in education and elsewhere.

The argument on which I want to insist here is that the literary nature of the texts for which writers such as Flaubert and Nerval became known, and/or the literary nature of readers' relationship to those texts, was in principle important to Said's project, concerned as he was with texts' ideological impact. Historically, partly because of conventions of genre (including 'literature' as a genre) in particular cultures, readers have brought different expectations to different texts; and different levels and forms of authority have attached to those texts. This is where writers' intentions, and more importantly readers' perceptions of their intentions, come back in, feeding into reception. For similar reasons, some texts, not only because of their particular themes but by virtue of their form, 'voice' or genre, may have offered experiences and even insights not available elsewhere, and so may have played a distinctive role in shaping certain realms of experience or climates of opinion.

Rather than resolving the hesitations that run through Said's treatment of the literary in *Orientalism*, however, this argument – the argument that aesthetic conventions as modes of reception are important, or should be important, to a project such as *Orientalism* – if pushed a little further, tends to bring out the reasons to hesitate, blurring rather than sharpening one's understanding of what effects literary texts have had on the worlds through which they have moved. I have just suggested that even if your main concern about a group of literary texts is their purported influence, there is a methodological need to

give due weight to the reading conventions specific to ‘literature’ and to different genres, such as ‘theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts’, since those conventions shaped the varied reactions elicited by those diverse texts and the authority granted to them. But the conventions are complicated: where the literary is concerned, they may involve subtle and potentially disorientating manipulations of frame and form, possible irony, and so on; and they may involve the reader in complex experiences whereby linguistic reference is at once activated and suspended, or deflected. The reader knows that literature can misrepresent reality, even and especially when it claims not to be doing so; and the reader’s ‘belief’ in a work of fiction is enmeshed with a kind of unbelief. The conventions also allow considerable space for different readers to react in different ways, in terms of, for example, what they find moving, or what they feel the text is ‘trying to say’. What is more – and I will return to this issue in the Conclusion – the conventions are changeable; they are not universal, and in some respects they are fragile. They can shift, or even disintegrate, and have certainly shifted in the past; they have varied from one reader or community of readers to another, and from one historical moment to another.

Speculations on how exactly literary texts have been received or what their ‘impact’ has been tend, then, to bring into play two incommensurable methodologies, one of which could be termed literary-critical, the other socio-political. They refuse to coalesce into a single vision of the socio-political work that is done by literature, or should be done by literary criticism – or by literary teaching. The two approaches may be juxtaposed and, on some levels, they may ‘speak’ to each other, in the ways I have just discussed, and others too. If and when socio-political methodologies hit the problem that the socio-political impact of literary texts is impossible to measure, literary-critical methodologies may help elucidate why. But, on another level, the light cast by literary-critical methodologies cannot *disprove* the argument, or the hunch – whose political force tends to compel attention in a way that methodological niceties do not – that in practice, on balance, texts such as those discussed by Said, including those by Flaubert and Nerval, merged into wider currents of Orientalism and other forms of prejudice. Accordingly, critics – and perhaps teachers – who feel that their primary concern is or should be socio-political impact are liable to worry that dedicating themselves to literature or literary criticism is a waste of time, or worse; and those who do concentrate on literature will struggle to justify that decision on a certain political level.



I noted just now that some texts, and genres, may offer insights and experiences not available elsewhere, and added that those texts may thus have played a particular role socio-politically, including, perhaps, in influencing opinion. But the first claim – that some texts and genres may offer insights and experiences not available elsewhere – could also stand on its own: a reader may legitimately not have much knowledge of the history of those texts’ circulation and, in any case, as I have just argued, may not have any real measure of their historical influence. At this point, I think we are closer to understanding Said’s intermittent reluctance to treat Flaubert and Nerval as mere grist to the mill of Orientalism, or *Orientalism*; and we are closer to some notion of distinctive literary value, the sort of notion that I believe ultimately underpins academic attention to literary texts, in both criticism and teaching. If that is right, academic literary critics/teachers are committed, not always consciously or willingly or even coherently, but by the nature of their work, to the idea that something like ‘the aesthetic project’ has an adequate degree of independence, and of merit, to make it a justifiable pursuit in the face of other possible and actual demands on their energies, including pressing political injustices.<sup>18</sup> In the academic climate I tried to describe in the Introduction, however, and in the realm of literary criticism (one way of describing the sphere in which this book took root, and in which much of my own teaching takes place), both the commitment to the notion of aesthetic value and what I have presented as the incommensurability of different methodologies are often less than manifest, when many critics are ‘critical’

18 I have found the study of music an important point of comparison in considering this issue, as it was for Said too. For example, Said made an argument for treating the pianist Glenn Gould as an intellectual, but struggled to reconcile that argument with his primary definition of the intellectual as ‘the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power’ (‘The Virtuoso as Intellectual’, Chapter 6 of *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2006), 132). See also *Representations*, 72–73; Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim, *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), including the discussion of Wilhelm Furtwängler (15–23); Lindsay Waters, ‘In Responses Begins Responsibility: Music and Emotion’, in Paul A. Bové (ed.), *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 97–113; and Rokus de Groot, ‘Edward Said and Polyphony’, in Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom (eds), *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 204–26.

about the objects of their attention in active and far-reaching ways, often for good reason, and often on political grounds.

In significant respects *Our Civilizing Mission* belongs to the Saidian 'school', as I gladly acknowledge. But in the course of this book I hope to show that Said had better reasons than he recognized in *Orientalism* to remain attached to the literary as such, and to a notional space – which may be called 'aesthetic', and which I will link with certain practices of teaching – of which it is no criticism to say that it is political only in certain respects. Those who know Said only from *Orientalism*, or from his advocacy of the work of the public intellectual, may be surprised to learn that, when asked in an interview of 1997 which role he found most comfortable, that of writer, activist or teacher, he said 'teacher' and added the remarks I quoted as the second epigraph for this chapter: 'I've stuck pretty carefully to the notion that the classroom is sacrosanct to a certain degree'.<sup>19</sup> There seems to be a tension between that idea of a 'sacrosanct' classroom and his disdainful description of the 'closeted literature professor'. Another way of describing what follows is as an attempt to deepen that tension, historically and conceptually, and eventually to understand it better.

19 Said, 'I've Always Learnt during the Class', 280–81.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ‘Nos ancêtres les colons’

Mon cher ami,

Il n'est aujourd'hui personne qui n'ait une opinion sur la question indigène. Partant de ce principe, vous avez supposé que je devais en avoir une. Vous ne vous êtes pas complètement trompé. J'en ai même plusieurs et je crois qu'il m'arrive parfois d'en changer. Non pour me mettre l'esprit en repos, selon la tactique de Renan, en me disant qu'ainsi j'aurai été une fois au moins dans le vrai, mais plutôt parce que cette question m'apparaît comme si complexe, les points de vue dont on peut l'envisager si divers, les solutions qu'on peut en proposer si nombreuses et si contradictoires que, n'étant heureusement pas, de par mes fonctions, obligé de la trancher, j'en profite pour me dispenser de chercher à la résoudre.

‘Lettre-Préface’ by Georges Marçais,  
Directeur de la Médersa de Tlemcen, for the book *L'Algérie  
française vue par un indigène*, 1914<sup>1</sup>

The French conquest and colonization of Algeria began in 1830. By the mid-1830s there were already several French schools, and Pierre Genty de Bussy, the most important government representative in Algiers in

1 ‘Dear Friend, | It seems as if everyone today has an opinion on the subject of the native. On this basis, you imagined that I would have one too, and you are not completely wrong. Indeed, I have several and even change my mind on the matter from time to time. It's not that I am trying to reassure myself by adopting Renan's strategy, according to which I will have been right at least once. No, it's rather because the question seems so complex and multi-faceted, the possible solutions so numerous and contradictory, that I can enjoy the liberty of not adopting a firm position, not being professionally obliged to do so.’

Georges Marçais, ‘Lettre-Préface’ in Chérif Benhabîlès, *L'Algérie française vue par un indigène* (Algiers: Imprimerie orientale Fontana Frères, 1914), i–iv: i.

those early years, could write: ‘Appelée au beau rôle de coloniser une des régences barbaresques, la France a pris pour auxiliaire de sa marche le plus puissant moyen de civilisation, l’*instruction*’ (‘Called to the fine work of colonizing one of the Barbary kingdoms, France has taken as an aid in her duties the most powerful means of civilization: education’).<sup>2</sup> If, from a ‘postcolonial’ perspective, that statement appears archaic, it is for more than one reason. Few people today can think of the project of colonization as a *beau rôle*, or a ‘noble mission’ (another of Genty de Bussy’s phrases); the idea of ‘civilization’ now arouses a great deal of suspicion; and the cheerful alliance of colonialism and education in Genty de Bussy’s rhetoric, which we have come to understand as characteristic of the *mission civilisatrice*, is alien to most modern teachers’ conception of their work. (As noted in the Introduction, who ‘we’ are in all this is one of the questions I am hoping my material will raise.)

The fact that colonial Algeria’s pre-eminent lycée came to be called the Lycée Bugeaud is evocative of all that now appears most reprehensible about colonial educational history. The school’s origins stretched back to the start of the colonial period but the institution moved premises, and only in the middle of the twentieth century, having been known previously as the Lycée d’Alger or Grand Lycée, was it baptized the Lycée Bugeaud. By that time it was housed in a building opposite the Caserne Pélissier, the Pélissier barracks. Both choices of name, Bugeaud and Pélissier, were provocative, for reasons that are made clear in Assia Djebar’s celebrated novel *L’Amour, la fantasia* of 1985. Djebar’s text, which braids together the historical, the fictional and the autobiographical, revisits the very beginnings of the French conquest and brings to the fore the physical ferocity of the conflict and the colonizers’ preoccupation with how their successes would be recorded and remembered. The French fleet, Djebar notes, carried painters, draughtsmen and engravers to Algiers; and numerous French eye-witnesses published descriptions of the first battles. Among the contemporary accounts available to her, she points out, only three out of 37 looked at events from the perspective of the besieged. To have even three is quite unusual: the contemporaneous

2 Pierre Genty de Bussy, *De l’Établissement des Français dans la Régence d’Alger et des moyens d’en assurer la prospérité* ([1835] Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1839, 2nd edition), vol. II, 202. For more detail see Osama Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simoniens and the French Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 59–62. Abi-Mershed’s book offers thoughtful analysis of educational policy in the first decades of French colonialism.

perspective of the colonized on other moments and incidents in the history is missing entirely.

One chapter in *L'Amour, la fantasia* is based indirectly on an official report written by Lieutenant-Colonel Aimable Pélissier – the Pélissier after whom the barracks were later named – describing how his troops slaughtered hundreds of members of the Ouled Riah tribe in 1845. He instructed his soldiers to light fires in the mouth of the caves where the tribe had taken refuge, and as heat and smoke billowed in on them they were burned and asphyxiated, or crushed by their panicking animals. The report sparked controversy in Paris because of the brutality of Pélissier's methods: an investigating commissioner remarked: 'Nous avons dépassé en barbarie les Barbares que nous venions civiliser' ('We have surpassed in barbarism the Barbarians we came to civilize').<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, he was rewarded with a promotion in 1846, and ended his career as governor of Algeria, from 1860 to his death in 1864.

Behind Pélissier in 1845, and backing him, was General Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, who was governor-general from 1841 to 1847. In massacring the Ouled Riah, Pélissier was following Bugeaud's orders; his instructions to Pélissier, according to Djébar, were: 'Enfumez-les tous comme des renards !' ('Smoke them all out like foxes!').<sup>4</sup> The criticisms of Pélissier in France extended to Bugeaud, of course, but some commentators viewed his ruthlessness positively, in his own era and subsequently. Several laudatory biographies of Bugeaud appeared in the 1930s, part of a wider wave of imperial hero-worship that enveloped the centenary

3 The quotation comes from Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale (1830–1954)* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 21; *Algeria: A Short History, 1830–2000*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 5. The possible etymological link as well as the assonance between *berbère* and *barbare* is pertinent here. For a fuller account of the massacre, including its precedents and aftermath, see Jennifer E. Sessions, "'Unfortunate Necessities': Violence and Civilization in the Conquest of Algeria', in Patricia Lorcin and Daniel Brewer (eds), *France and Its Spaces of War: Experience, Memory, Image* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2009) 29–45: 35–41.

4 *L'Amour, la fantasia*, 83. The wording of Bugeaud's order according to Yves Lacoste, André Nouschi and André Prenant, *Algérie, passé et présent* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1960), was 'Si ces gredins se retirent dans leurs cavernes, imitez Cavaignac aux Sbeha. Fumez-les à outrance comme des renards' (305, 'If these scoundrels retreat to their caves, do as Cavaignac did to the Sbéah. Smoke them out mercilessly like foxes!'). The French-language Wikipédia has a page on 'Enfumades d'Algérie' which gives further references.

celebrations of the French invasion and the grand colonial exhibition of 1931 in Vincennes. A pro-colonial book published in 1940, *L'Empire français* by Philippe Roques and Marguerite Donnadiou (who was better known, in due course, as Marguerite Duras, and who in due course became embarrassed by *L'Empire français*), picked up on the theme, praising Bugeaud for having been just the man needed to vanquish Abdelkader.<sup>5</sup> Roques and Donnadiou hinted only gently, if at all, at Bugeaud's reputation for savagery: 'Tandis que se poursuivait la lutte contre Abd-El-Kader,' they wrote, 'le maréchal Bugeaud entreprenait la colonisation de tout le pays, d'une façon particulièrement active, selon sa devise « *ense et aratro* », par l'épée et par la charru' ('Whilst the fight against Abdelkader continued, Marshal Bugeaud was colonising the country in particularly energetic fashion, and following his motto "*ense et aratro*", with sword and plough').<sup>6</sup>

For their part, Algerians still remembered Bugeaud as a kind of bogeyman. Mouloud Feraoun, a teacher and writer whom I shall discuss at length in Chapter 3, explained to Albert Camus in an anonymous open letter of 1958: 'À cette époque [i.e. the 1930s], monsieur, la femme du Djebel ou du bled, quand elle voulait effrayer son enfant pour lui imposer silence, lui disait : « Tais-toi, voici venir Bouchou. » Bouchou, c'était Bugeaud. Et Bugeaud, c'était un siècle auparavant !' ('Around that time, Sir, if women in the mountains and rural areas wanted to frighten their children into being quiet, they would say: "Be quiet, Bouchou is coming". By "Bouchou" they meant Bugeaud, and it was almost a century since Bugeaud had been around!').<sup>7</sup> Bugeaud was also a reference

5 The Emir Abdelkader (a name transcribed in various ways, including 'Abd al-Qadir) was a major leader of resistance to the French from 1832 to 1847. Duras was later to sign the *Manifeste des 121*, published in support of Algerian independence and against French conscription.

6 Philippe Roques and Marguerite Donnadiou, *L'Empire français* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), 32. For more on that book see Laure Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen ([1998] London: Victor Gollancz, 2000), and Julia Waters, *Duras and Indochina: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Liverpool: SFPS, 2006), Chapter 1. Berny Sèbe discusses Bugeaud among others in *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); the 1930s biographies are discussed 85–86.

7 Feraoun, 'La Source de nos communs malheurs', letter to Camus in the journal *Preuves* 91 (September 1958), after publication of Camus's *Actuelles III: Chronique algérienne* (1958); reprinted in Feraoun, *L'Anniversaire* (Paris: Seuil,

point for prominent anti-colonial voices in the mid-twentieth century. An article by Frantz Fanon in the FLN's journal *El Moudjahid*<sup>8</sup> in 1958 linked the French forces' use of intensive bombing and its scorched earth policy to 'les procédés de Bugeaud de sinistre mémoire, dont M. Lacoste s'est récemment flatté d'être le digne successeur' ('the notorious methods of Marshal Bugeaud, someone whose worthy successor Monsieur Lacoste recently declared himself to be');<sup>9</sup> in his preface to Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), Jean-Paul Sartre referred to 'Cette vieille brutalité coloniale qui a fait la gloire douteuse des Bugeaud' ('The old colonial brutality that made Bugeaud a dubious hero'); and, in the same book, Fanon himself wrote: 'Chaque statue, celle de Faidherbe ou de Lyautey, de Bugeaud ou du sergent Blandan, tous ces conquistadors juchés sur le sol colonial n'arrêtent pas de signifier une seule et même chose: « Nous sommes ici par la force des baïonnettes... »' ('Every statue of Faidherbe or Lyautey, Bugeaud or Blandan, every one of these conquistadors ensconced on colonial soil, is a constant reminder of one and the same thing: "We are here by the force of the bayonet ..."').<sup>10</sup> Mourad Bourboune, to give a final example, mentioned in passing Bugeaud's 'réputation de sauvage' ('reputation for savagery') in his anarchic 1962 novel *Le Mont des genêts*, which is set on the eve of the war of independence. A character is reading Pierre Bosquet's

1972), 35–44: 38. *L'Anniversaire* does not make clear that the letter was unsigned, but within the letter Feraoun says he wishes to remain anonymous. Later he got to know Camus, and identified himself as the author of the letter. The letter is also reproduced by Boussad Berrichi in the Dossier that closes his edited collection *Mouloud Feraoun: lectures postcoloniales et trans-inter-culturelles*, special issue of *Dalhousie French Studies* 100 (Fall 2012), 97–122.

8 *El Moudjahid* was the journal of the FLN (*Front de Libération nationale*), launched in French in the summer of 1956. An Arabic-language version – a parallel project, not a translation – appeared from 1957. See Monique Gadant, *Islam et nationalisme en Algérie, d'après 'El Moudjahid', organe central du FLN de 1956 à 1962* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988).

9 Frantz Fanon, 'Stratégie d'une armée aux abois', 28 February 1958, reproduced in *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté*, ed. Jean Khalifa and Robert J. C. Young (Paris: La Découverte, 2015), 487–90: 489; 'The Strategy of an Army with its Back to the Wall', in *Frantz Fanon, Alienation and Freedom*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 591–94: 593.

10 Sartre, 'Préface' in Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* ([1961] Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 37–61: 57; Fanon, *Damnés*, 116. Sartre, Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), xliii–lxii: lx; Fanon, *The Wretched*, 42–43.

correspondence and reflects that Bosquet too, another senior soldier responsible for blood-letting in Algeria, was ‘relié à la *civilisation* par ces quelques lettres, lettres écrites à sa mère, mère sur laquelle il avait transféré tous ses restes de tendresse’ (Bourboune’s italics; ‘connected to *civilization* by the handful of letters he wrote to his mother, to whom he offered what remained of his tenderness’).<sup>11</sup>

When, a century after the *enfumades*, Bugeaud’s name was bestowed on the most prestigious school in Algiers, it was an affront to all those, from the time of the conquest onwards, who considered his tactics inhuman.<sup>12</sup> After independence the school’s name was changed; today, it is called the Lycée Emir Abdelkader, in honour of Bugeaud’s eminent adversary, revered in Algeria as a hero of anti-colonialism. To modern eyes, the whole history behind the belated renaming of the Lycée Bugeaud can only strengthen the association of colonial education with colonial violence right across the colonial period. From that perspective it also seems symptomatic that under new administrative arrangements put in place in 1848, just after Bugeaud had left Algeria, responsibility for education in the colony was divided between two ministries, with schooling for Europeans a matter for the Ministry of Public Education, whereas education for the indigenous population was overseen by the Ministry of War.<sup>13</sup> The implication was that colonial education was – officially – a weapon of conquest and control.

11 Bourboune, *Le Mont des genêts* (Paris: Julliard, 1962), 116–17. Bosquet, described here as General, later Maréchal, was posted in Algeria for nearly two decades from 1834. The passage’s irony about ‘civilization’ is unmistakable; and I take the final remark to be a sideswipe at Camus, who, when receiving his Nobel prize in December 1957, famously said: ‘En ce moment on lance des bombes dans les tramways d’Alger. Ma mère peut se trouver dans un de ces tramways. Si c’est cela, la justice, je préfère ma mère’ (cited by C. G. Bjurström, ‘Postface’ (1997), in Camus, *Discours de Suède* ([1958] Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 78–79; ‘At this moment, they are putting bombs on the trams in Algiers. My mother could be on one of those trams. If that is justice, I prefer my mother’).

12 A further irony (a weak word in this context) of choosing to name a lycée after Bugeaud, and to do so in the mid-twentieth century, was that he was an opponent of education even for the lower classes in France. He remarked: ‘la Nation ne peut vivre que par un travail très dur qui ne laisse aux hommes des champs et des fabriques ni loisirs, ni force pour l’étude’ (‘the kind of hard work needed to keep the Nation thriving leaves the man working in the fields or in the factories no time to study’). Cited by Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine: la conquête et les débuts de la colonisation (1827–1871)* (Paris: PUF, 1964), 166.

13 ‘Arrêté du 16 août 1848 relatif à l’administration des cultes en Algérie’,



That was not, however, the whole story. In colonial Algeria there were significant variations in the relationship between education and the (other) projects of colonialism: educational institutions and practices varied widely; so did attitudes to colonial education, among individuals and both pro- and anti-colonial policy-makers, groups and shapers of opinion; and so did the outcomes of colonial education for those who went through it. Several of the writers I shall discuss in this book, including Djébar and Camus, attended the Grand Lycée/Lycée Bugeaud; and among its alumni a significant number, including Djébar, became committed anti-colonialists. This already suggests – though it does not prove – that their experiences of education amounted to more than colonial indoctrination and subjection, and that the work of colonial education was less predictable in its relation to politics and in its effects than could ever be surmised from its crass association with the name of Bugeaud, or with the Ministry of War.

In later chapters I will go on to explore in more detail the colonial education offered to, and imposed on, individuals such as Djébar, in an educational environment that exposed them to propaganda and discrimination but that did not ultimately prevent them from flourishing, and which in complex and paradoxical ways seems to have encouraged them to do so. The present chapter fills in some of the historical background to their stories, but, as I indicated in the Introduction, its aim is not to offer a comprehensive or chronologically ordered narrative of colonial education Algeria.<sup>14</sup> Instead it will move between different

reproduced in Jules Ferry, *Le Gouvernement de l'Algérie* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1892), 91–93. Reading about this prompted me to think about the frequent restructuring and renaming of ministries in my own country; when I first drafted this chapter, universities were the responsibility of the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), created in 2009, and the 'What we do' section on the top page of its website read, in its entirety: 'The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) is the department for economic growth. The department invests in skills and education to promote trade, boost innovation and help people to start and grow a business. BIS also protects consumers and reduces the impact of regulation' (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-innovation-skills>, consulted 14 August 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Among general histories of Algeria in English I recommend John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* ([1992] Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005, 2nd edition), and James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). On education as on other topics historians continue to draw deeply on the work of Charles-Robert Ageron,

historical moments, placing emphasis on the diversity of contrasting and contested ideological perspectives on education in order to raise questions about colonial education's role in or under colonialism. If, as I have already suggested, 'colonial education' did not always simply serve colonialism, was it nonetheless always designed to do so, by policy makers and teachers? If colonial education was intended to 'civilize' the colonized, did 'civilization' always mean something like 'Frenchness', as it apparently did for someone like Genty de Bussy? How effective was this educational programme, and how seriously was it pursued? Or, to approach the issue from another direction, how far was colonial education ironically, regularly perverse in its effects, radicalizing those

notably *Les Algériens musulmans et la France, 1871–1919* ([1968] Saint-Denis: Bouchène, 2005), and *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine II: de l'insurrection de 1871 au déclenchement de la guerre de libération (1954)* (Paris: PUF, 1979). For those wanting an overview in English of Algerian educational history, Harik and Schilling in *The Politics of Education in Colonial Algeria and Kenya* (Athens, OH: Ohio University, Papers in International Studies, Africa Series, no. 43, 1984) offer a forty-page summary drawn from existing sources. More recently, Aïssa Kadri has offered a useful chapter-length overview in French: 'Histoire du système d'enseignement colonial en Algérie', in Frédéric Abécassis, Gilles Boyer, Benoit Falaize, Gilbert Meynier and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (eds), *La France et l'Algérie: leçons d'histoire: de l'école en situation coloniale à l'enseignement du fait colonial* (Lyon: Institut national de recherche pédagogique, 2007), 19–39. Widely cited works on French colonial education in Algeria include Yvonne Turin, *Affrontements dans l'Algérie coloniale: écoles, médecines, religion, 1830–1880* ([1971] Algiers: ENAF, 1983, 2nd edition); Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens: 1883–1939* (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, and Algiers: Office des publications universitaires, 1975, based on a thesis supervised by Bourdieu); Abdallah Mazouni, *Culture et enseignement en Algérie et au Maghreb* (Paris: Maspero, 1969); and Léon, *Colonisation, enseignement et éducation. 1830–1962: de la Régence aux Centres sociaux éducatifs* (Paris: Publisud, 2001); Aïssa Kadri (ed.), *Instituteurs et enseignants en Algérie 1945–1975: histoire et mémoires* (Paris: Karthala, 2014); Kamel Kateb, *Le Système éducatif dans l'Algérie coloniale: bilan statistique historiographique (1833–1962)* (Algiers: Apic, 2014); and Jean-Robert Henry and Florence Hudowicz (eds), *L'École en Algérie, l'Algérie à l'école* (Poitiers: Canopé, 2017). Pascale Barthélemy provides a wide-ranging historiographical survey, 'L'Enseignement dans l'empire colonial français', in Pascale Barthélemy, Emmanuelle Picard and Rebecca Rogers (eds), *L'Enseignement dans l'empire colonial français (XIXe–XXe siècles)*, special issue of *Histoire de l'éducation* 128 (October–December 2010), 5–27.

pupils it was intended to tranquillize and control? What else did it offer them? And what, finally, from all this, do we imagine we have inherited today?

### Policies, positions and fears

Genty de Bussy's enthusiasm for 'native' education was far from universal among colonists. In a confidential report addressed to Jules Ferry as *Ministre de l'instruction publique* in 1888, *Inspecteur général* Leysenne wrote: 'On offre à l'enfant indigène une instruction française qui le tire en apparence de son milieu mais qui le laisse ensuite désarmé, incapable de se faire une place entre une civilisation qui l'abandonne et une barbarie qui le reprend' ('French education seems to offer the indigenous child a way to escape his origins, but in fact leaves him helpless, alien both to the civilization that abandons him and the barbarian culture to which he returns').<sup>15</sup> The report also revealed that literacy statistics had been used to deceive Ferry previously about levels of educational attainment among Algerians. Other commentators were still more fiercely critical of what colonial education could achieve: according to an article in *L'Atlas* in 1882, 'Nous pourrions nous demander pourquoi nous réchauffons dans notre sein les enfants de ces vipères et pourquoi le lycée d'Alger est peuplé de jeunes Arabes qui retournent [sic] à leurs tanières, comme le chacal qu'on veut apprivoiser, aussitôt qu'ils deviendront libres' ('We should ask ourselves why we nurture at our breast the children of these vipers, and why the lycée in Algiers is populated by young Arabs who, as soon as they are set free, return to their lair, like jackals that cannot be tamed').<sup>16</sup>

Although both these interventions conveyed distrust of colonial education, they need, clearly enough, to be placed at different points on the spectrum, or matrix, of colonial opinion. The description of the 'indigenous' child in limbo strikes a rather plaintive note, implying that colonial education could transform individual Algerian children but not the culture or society from which they had emerged. To some minds, this sort of analysis suggested the need for *more* education, drawing in more children (a position that became more influential late in the day, in

15 Cited by Rigaud, 'L'École en Algérie', in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 23–73: 29.

16 *L'Atlas*, 7 June 1882. Cited by Rigaud in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 25.

the 1950s, as we will see in the next chapter). By contrast, the comment about vipers and jackals implied deep hostility to all French-sponsored or French-endorsed education for the colonized, and a profound pessimism – nourished, one assumes from the language in which it is couched, by visceral racism – about education’s power to change ‘Arab’ (or Berber) children.<sup>17</sup> Evidently, the animal vocabulary was not only dehumanizing (as it was in the notorious phrase with which Bugeaud reportedly launched the *enfumades*); it also carried specific implications of inborn treachery. At the same time, nonetheless, one may detect in those remarks a perverse confidence that education might indeed change Arab children – for the worse, from a certain colonial perspective, giving them strength and making their prospective treachery an even greater threat to the colonizers.

More explicit and more precise versions of that last line of thought were commonplace across the colonial era. Auguste Billiard, in his tract *Politique et organisation coloniales: principes généraux* of 1899, noted that colonial education was a hot topic, and that ‘il existe toute une école politique qui voit dans la diffusion des lumières le moyen suprême de gouvernement’ (‘a whole school of political thought sees the spreading of Enlightenment as the ultimate means of government’), but his view was different:

17 What group of people exactly was being referred to when colonial commentators used words such as ‘indigène’ or even ‘arabe’ was not always clear. ‘Indigène’ sometimes, but not always, included those Algerian Jews who had been granted French citizenship, without having to forego their religion, by the Décret Crémieux of 1870 (later abrogated under Vichy). Denis Guénoun, *Un sémite* (Belval: Circé, 2003), is enlightening on Algerian Jewish history (*A Semite: A Memoir of Algeria*, trans. Ann and William Smock (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014)); see also Sarah Abrevaya Stein’s *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2014), which reveals extraordinary inconsistencies around the treatment of Jews in different parts of Algeria; and Kamel Kateb, *Européens, indigènes et Juifs en Algérie, 1830–1962: représentations et réalités des populations* (Algiers: el Maarifa, 2010). ‘Arabe’ was sometimes, but not always, used to create a distinction from Berbers, the main peoples of North Africa before the Arab/Islamic conquests of the seventh century C.E., who have their own languages. I will touch on this distinction again later. I will continue to use the term ‘Berber’ as a general category, as the alternatives are not yet widely used in English, and are not always preferred by Berbers themselves. For more on different Berber languages and identities, see Mohamed Benrabah, ‘The Language Planning Situation in Algeria’, *Current Issues in Language Planning* 6:4 (2005), 379–502.

rien n'est plus absurde qu'un gouvernement se faisant le propagateur d'un enseignement devant logiquement aboutir à la condamnation des principes mêmes qu'il juge nécessaire d'appliquer. Si donc, dans un État républicain ou simplement libéral, il est naturel qu'on habitue les esprits à l'examen et à l'analyse de toutes choses et, par conséquent, que l'instruction soit fortement imprégnée de littérature, d'histoire et de philosophie ; en revanche, sous un régime autoritaire, il importe d'éviter tout ce qui peut faire naître ou développer l'esprit de discussion, et l'enseignement ne peut offrir qu'un caractère purement pratique et professionnel.

nothing is more absurd than for a government to propagate a form of education that logically leads to the condemnation of the very principles on which the government is run. In a republican or liberal state it is natural for people to be encouraged to examine and analyse everything, and, consequently, for the education on offer to involve plenty of literature, history and philosophy; whereas under an authoritarian regime, anything that encourages or nurtures a spirit of discussion should be avoided, and teaching should be of a purely practical and professional nature.<sup>18</sup>

Billiard, who was promoting an 'authoritarian regime' as necessary to colonial rule, feared that educated natives would end up seeking political power. The point was made again by another commentator in 1891: '« L'Inde aux Indiens! » est aujourd'hui le mot d'ordre de tout indigène ayant reçu une éducation anglaise. [...] Éduquons nos Arabes et le cri de « l'Algérie aux Arabes » sera bientôt leur devise' ("India for Indians!" is now cried by every native who has received an English education. If we educate our Arabs they will soon be chanting "Algeria for the Arabs").<sup>19</sup>

18 Billiard, *Politique et organisation coloniales: principes généraux* (Paris: Giard & Brière, 1899), 33–34. On Billiard, a colonial administrator in Algeria, see Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *De l'Indigénat: anatomie d'un 'monstre' juridique: le droit colonial en Algérie et dans l'empire français* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

19 Cited by Henri Saurier, 'Esquisse de l'évolution de l'enseignement primaire en Algérie de 1830 à 1962', in Émile Hazan et al., *1830–1962: des enseignants d'Algérie se souviennent ... de ce qu'y fut l'enseignement primaire* (Toulouse: Éditions Privat, 1981), 11–127: 22. Saurier appears to be drawing on Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France*, but does not indicate his source precisely. Rabah Aissaoui gives a comparable example, from *Huit jours en Kabylie: à travers la Kabylie et les questions kabyles* by the lawyer François Charvériat (Paris: Plon, 1889): 'L'hostilité d'un indigène se mesure à son degré d'instruction française. Plus il est instruit, plus il y a lieu de s'en défier' (148, 'Natives' hostility towards us can be measured by their level of French education. The more educated they are, the more we should distrust them'). "For Progress and Civilization": History, Memory and Alterity

Half a century later Jean Amrouche, a writer, intellectual and one-time teacher, published in *Le Figaro* an essay, 'France d'Europe et France d'Afrique', which made the same sort of point from a different perspective. In the eyes of *colons*<sup>20</sup> worried about educated, uppity natives, Amrouche may have seemed, ironically, to confirm their fears when he wrote: 'Un trop grand nombre de Français d'Algérie pensent avec amertume: « C'est la faute à Voltaire ... ». Ils voudraient faire croire que l'Algérien instruit, dès qu'il est en mesure d'argumenter d'égal à égal, aussitôt tourne contre la France les armes dont ses maîtres français lui ont enseigné l'usage' ('Too many French Algerians think, bitterly, "It's Voltaire's fault ...". They would like you to think that an educated Algerian, as soon as he is in a position to argue as an equal, immediately takes the weapons that his French masters have taught him to use and turns them against France').<sup>21</sup> This appeared in October 1945, at a moment when the experience of the Second World War had given a new impetus to independence movements in many colonies around the world and when in Algeria there was horror at the way that

in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Algeria', *French History* 31:4 (November 2017), 470–94: 483.

20 The French word 'colon' is occasionally used in a broad sense similar to the English colonist or colonizer (more readily translatable as *colonisateur*), but in Algeria it was most often used more specifically about French or European landowners. Mostefa Lacheraf writes, for example, 'Les cinq ou six Français installés à demeure dans notre village n'étaient pas des colons' (*Des noms et des lieux: mémoires d'une Algérie oubliée* (Algiers: Casbah, 1998), 33, 'The five or six Frenchmen who had settled in our village were not *colons*'). This usage stems from the term's etymological link to Latin *colere*, to cultivate or till.

21 Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche, 'France d'Europe et France d'Afrique', in *Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français ou l'histoire d'Algérie par les textes (1943–61)*, ed. Tassadit Yacine (Paris: L'Harmattan/Awal, 1994), 7–11: 9. That volume names *Le Figaro* 1945 as the original place of publication (and adds definite articles to the title), but the correct reference is *Les Lettres françaises* 79 (27 October 1945), 1 and 3, and the original title is as I have given it. The phrase 'C'est la faute à Voltaire' is most often associated with *Les Misérables*, and Amrouche's contestatory invocation of Hugo clearly has a reflexive quality: it conveys irony about conservative reactions to the French revolution, and by extension about conservative fears concerning the effects of a French literary and political education. For a brief account of the longer history of the phrase see Clément Solym, 'L'Expression qui accuse: c'est la faute à Voltaire', *ActuaLitté* 8 May 2008, available at <https://www.actualitte.com/article/patrimoine-education/l-expression-qui-accuse-c-est-la-faute-a-voltaire/2230>, consulted 21 December 2018.

victory parades, especially in Sétif and Guelma, had degenerated into massacres. A very large number of nationalists, and a significant number of Europeans, had been killed.<sup>22</sup> Especially in that context, the image of turning your 'arms' on your 'masters' and/or on your supposed allies did not appear wholly metaphorical; and the anxiety that educated 'natives' might speak out or rise up against their former masters was starting to prove well-founded.

Not only in Algeria but all over the French empire, important anti-colonial leaders emerged from French education. In this sense perhaps the *colons* grasped more readily than some of their masters in Paris the constitutive contradictions of the *mission civilisatrice*, with its muddled blend of assumed superiority and projected assimilation.<sup>23</sup>

22 At a victory parade on 8 May 1945 in Sétif some participants flew the banned Algerian nationalist flag. The French security forces reacted violently and the conflict spread to other towns. Some of the details of the events, including the number of fatalities, are disputed, but thousands died on the Algerian side and about 100 on the European side. The official figure on the Algerian side, offered by the FLN at the time and adopted subsequently by the government, was 45,000. Several books have appeared on the subject, including Mehana Amrani, *Le 8 mai 1945 en Algérie: les discours français sur les massacres de Sétif, Kherrata et Guelma* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010). Fanon alludes to Sétif in *Les Damnés de la terre*, 110, E38; and it is central to Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, where it is described from the perspective of the demonstrators, 226–29, E303–307.

23 As various historians point out, there were different historical phases during which the ideal of 'assimilation' was more or less prominent, vying with 'associationism' and, later, 'integration'. For a sense of what colonial enthusiasm for assimilationism (followed by disillusionment) looked like, see W. Bryant Mumford, in consultation with Major G. St J. Orde-Brown[e], OBE, *Africans Learn to be French: A Review of Educational Activities in the Seven Federated Colonies of French West Africa, based upon a tour of French West Africa and Algiers undertaken in 1935* (first published London, Evans Brothers (no date); New York, NY: Negro Universities Press, 1970). On the history of assimilation, besides the general histories cited earlier, see Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity* (the Introduction frames the book's consideration of the relationship between assimilation and association); Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914* ([1960] Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005, expanded edition); Michelle Mann, 'The Young Algerians and the Question of the Muslim Draft, 1900–14', in Rabah Aissaoui and Claire Eldridge (eds), *Algeria Revisited: History, Culture and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), Chapter 2, which describes how some French-educated Algerians took conscription as an opportunity to push for equal rights; and Guy Pervillé, *Les Étudiants algériens de l'université française*

Equally, perhaps some of the *colons* grasped something important about the possible effects of education. Some reactionary Europeans whose racial ideology told them that no Arab or Berber child could ever reach Europe's highest levels of education, enlightenment and civilization believed assimilation to be impossible. But others, right across the colonial period, believed assimilation was both possible and desirable, and that education could serve a crucial function. And others, such as Billiard, believed it was possible, but to be avoided. Again, this attitude implied a certain perverse faith in the transformative power of education; and in that respect, Billiard's anti-assimilation, anti-education perspective shared an important assumption with his opponents who were pro-assimilation and pro-education.

One of the most eloquent advocates of the pro-assimilation, pro-education position was Camus. His article 'L'Enseignement' ('Education') was first published in *Alger républicain* on 11 June 1939

1880–1962 (Paris: CNRS, 1984). Pervillé is especially interested in the educated elite, about whom he writes: 'En principe, la promotion des « indigènes évolués » était souhaitable, à condition qu'elle ne mît pas en danger la « prépondérance française » sur la masse restée réfractaire. L'élite ne serait inoffensive que si elle se détachait du peuple arriéré dont elle était issue pour s'identifier totalement à la France : mais dans ce cas, elle desservirait la cause de l'assimilation en perdant toute influence sur son milieu d'origine. La politique française s'embrouilla dans ce dilemme' (12, 'In principle, the promotion of "enlightened natives" was to be desired, as long as it did not threaten the general predominance of the French over the recalcitrant masses. This elite would only be tolerable if its members rejected their backward origins and identified completely with France; yet an elite of that sort would do nothing to help assimilation as they would retain no influence over the community from which they came. This was a dilemma from which French policy never managed to extricate itself'). In relation to other parts of the French empire, see also Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2005); J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Spencer D. Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul. French Education, Colonial Ethnology, and Muslim Resistance, 1912–1956* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); and Harry Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa: Battles over Schools and the Colonial Order, 1900–1950* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), which argues that those educated under colonialism and subjected to the rhetoric and policies of assimilationism 'often worked to bend their education to their own purposes' (7); 'schools,' Gamble adds, 'by their very nature, gestured beyond the existing order, toward a shifting horizon of future possibilities' (8).



as part of his 'Misère de la Kabylie' series. Two photos accompanied it: one showed a child who was apparently healthy and, as far as one could see, happy, with the caption 'Tous les enfants kabyles seront comme celui-ci quand il y aura assez d'écoles' ('All Kabyle children will be like him when there are enough schools'); the other showed a large, imposing, colonnaded building, and was captioned 'L'école-palais de Djamis-Sahridj' ('The palace-school of Djamis-Sahridj').<sup>24</sup> The phrase 'école-palais' may appear positive at first, but comes to seem ironic and critical as one reads Camus's article: he bemoaned the very low levels of schooling in Kabylie, for boys and especially for girls, and the government's tendency (not restricted to colonial environments) to spend lavishly on eye-catching showcase schools rather than trying to establish a real education *system* that reached all children. A similar point could be made about the schools created in 1945 to serve nomads in the region of the Hoggar (or Ahaggar) mountains in the far south. Some of those schools were themselves itinerant, carrying with them a film camera and a mobile canteen, and they were impressive in their way; but they reached only a very small proportion of the children in the region.<sup>25</sup>

According to Camus, the demand was high among Kabyles for a universal system, or at least for many more school places, for girls as well as boys. His article began: 'La soif d'apprendre du Kabyle et son goût pour l'étude sont devenus légendaires. Mais c'est que le Kabyle, outre ses dispositions naturelles et son intelligence pratique, a vite compris quel instrument d'émancipation l'école pouvait être'

24 Camus, 'L'Enseignement' [1939], reprinted in *Actuelles III: Chronique algérienne, 1939–1958* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 57–64: 57; and as 'Education' in *Algerian Chronicles*, introduced by Alice Kaplan, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 59–64: 59. The article is reprinted, again without photos, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), vol. 4, 319–23. Kabylie (or Kabyliya) is a predominantly Berber area in the North of Algeria.

25 See Saurier in Hazan et al., *1830–1962: des enseignants d'Algérie se souviennent*, 76. Saurier also offers interesting details on provision for 'enfants inadaptés', including orphans, deaf children and 'débiles' (the 'retarded'). Saurier, like other contributors to that volume, is defensively positive about colonial education and colonialism more generally, and says the nomadic schools showed how 'l'école pouvait gagner la confiance des populations les plus lointaines' ('schools could gain the trust of even the most distant populations'), though he admits they were a drop in an ocean of sand.

(57, ‘The Kabyles’ thirst for learning and taste for study have become legendary. They have practical intelligence as well as natural ability, and they quickly grasped the fact that education could be an instrument of emancipation’, 59). ‘Emancipation’ was not meant to have any nationalist connotations here, though it may have had that resonance for some of Camus’s readers. (Equally, Camus’s phrasing may have called to mind the ‘Berber myth’ for some readers, though I do not think that was his intention.<sup>26</sup>) He continued:

Les Kabyles réclament donc des écoles comme ils réclament du pain [...] Les Kabyles auront plus d’écoles le jour où on aura supprimé la barrière artificielle qui sépare l’enseignement européen de l’enseignement indigène, le jour enfin où, sur les bancs d’une même école, deux peuples faits pour se comprendre commenceront à se connaître.

Certes, je ne me fais pas d’illusions sur le pouvoir de l’instruction. Mais ceux qui parlent avec légèreté de l’inutilité de l’instruction en ont profité eux-mêmes. En tout cas, si l’on veut vraiment d’une assimilation, et que ce peuple si digne soit français, il ne faut pas commencer par le séparer des Français. Si je l’ai bien compris, c’est tout ce qu’il demande. Et mon sentiment, c’est qu’alors seulement la connaissance mutuelle commencera. Je dis « commencera » car, il faut bien le dire, elle n’a pas encore été faite et par là s’expliquent les erreurs de nos politiques. Il

26 It is Camus’s description of the ‘legendary’ abilities of the Kabyles that may evoke colonialism’s ‘Berber myth’, summarized by James McDougall as ‘an elaborate system of oppositions [...] contrived between “Arabs” and “Kabyles”, with the former generally denigrated as civilizationally unimprovable, the latter as “closer to Europe” in race, culture and temperament’ (McDougall, ‘Myth and Counter-Myth: “The Berber” as National Signifier in Algerian Historiographies’, *Radical History Review* 86 (2003), 66–88: 67). See also Ageron, *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine*, 137–51; Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*; and Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995) – the fullest treatment of the issue. Pernicious as the myth was, ‘no policy came into being that was preferential to the Berbers’, as Lorcin points out (225) – citing Colonna’s work in relation to education in Kabylie, where a differential policy might have been expected to emerge. See too Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race and Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), especially Chapter 2, ‘Colonization and the Production of Ethnicity’, which links colonial history to contemporary politics in France. It should also be recognized that a version of the ‘Berber myth’ has itself been mythified by Algerian nationalists who, in the interests of a particular notion of national identity, have tended to downplay precolonial and ongoing differences between Arab and Berber cultures.

suffit pourtant, je viens d'en faire l'expérience, d'une main sincèrement tendue. Mais c'est à nous de faire tomber les murs qui nous séparent. (63-64)

The Kabyles want schools, then, just as they want bread [...] They will have more schools on the day that the artificial barrier between European and indigenous schools is removed – on the day when two peoples destined to understand each other begin to make each other's acquaintance on the benches of a shared schoolhouse.

Of course, I am under no illusions about the powers of education. But those who speak so easily about the uselessness of education have nevertheless benefited from it themselves. If the authorities really want assimilation, and if these worthy Kabyles are indeed French, then it makes no sense to start off by separating them from the French. If I understand them correctly, this is all they are asking for. And my own feeling is that mutual comprehension will begin only when there is joint schooling. I say 'begin' because it must be said that to date there has been no mutual understanding, which is why our political authorities have made so many mistakes. All that is needed, however, is to reach out a hand in good faith – as I have recently discovered for myself. But it is up to us to break down the walls that keep us apart. (63-64)

Part of the interest of this passage lies in Camus's ambiguous assessment of the power of education: on the one hand, he says he has 'no illusions about the powers of education', and suggests that the simple fact of putting different children in the same room (including, surely, 'Arab' children as well as Kabyle and French children) may be what is most important ethically and politically; on the other hand, he makes the point that 'those who speak so easily about the uselessness of education have nevertheless benefited from it themselves'. Camus's support for assimilation is, then, strongly associated with support for schooling, and also with what seems to me a serious-minded commitment to equality, notwithstanding his lack of support for Algerian independence.

By contrast, an article published within a year of Camus's, in *El Ouma*, the journal of the nationalist PPA (Parti du peuple algérien), stated: 'L'assimilation est une utopie chimérique, nous ne serons jamais français, ni par la race, ni par la langue, ni par la religion ... Malgré la répression, aussi bas que nous soyons tombés, nous avons toujours ancré en nous le sentiment national' ('The idea of assimilation is an impossible utopia. Our race, language and religion prevent us from ever becoming truly French ... In spite of the repression we suffer, and no matter how downtrodden we are, we hold on firmly to our sense of

national identity’).<sup>27</sup> Fanon echoed this later, writing: ‘Les phénomènes de résistance observés chez le colonisé doivent être rapportés à une attitude de contre-assimilation, de maintien d’une originalité culturelle, donc nationale’ (‘Instances of resistance amongst the colonized should be understood as a rejection of assimilation, as people maintaining their cultural, hence national, originality’).<sup>28</sup> Clearly, resistance to assimilation and integration among anti-colonial nationalists was consistent, at some important level. All the same, even in this regard, the detail of the history sometimes reveals a tangled and ambivalent relationship between education, culture and politics, as we will see in the next chapter. Feraoun, on whose work I focus there, quoted Camus’s ‘L’Enseignement’ in one of his own articles, saying that *privilégiés* such as himself were halfway between ‘vous et les leurs’ (‘you and their own people’) and wanted only to ‘venir à vous, s’assimiler tout à fait’ (‘draw closer to you and assimilate completely’), to join the ‘famille adoptive’.<sup>29</sup> As one might expect, Feraoun was criticized by some fellow Algerians for his apparent enthusiasm for assimilation. Yet he came to believe passionately in the need for independence – even as he continued to work within the colonial education system, and even as he continued to believe, or so one can argue, in some kind of ‘assimilation’. He could thus be described as anti-colonial and/yet pro-colonial-education. That combination of views may appear especially perplexing; but perhaps, in senses I will explore further, it is not so distant from attitudes we may find ourselves adopting today.

### Adaptations

Beyond the circle of those who questioned whether it was worthwhile, or wise, to provide any education to indigenous children, a decisive issue was, of course, the *sort* of education on offer. A pivotal concept was ‘adaptation’, which meant tailoring curricula and teaching materials to local circumstances and particular student bodies. Gender, religion

27 No. 64, 1938; quoted by Gadant, *Islam et nationalisme en Algérie*, 29.

28 Fanon, ‘L’Algérie se dévoile’, in *L’An V de la révolution algérienne* ([1959] Paris: La Découverte, 2001), 16–47: 24; ‘Algeria Unveiled’, in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1965), 35–67: 42. The equation of ‘originalité culturelle’ with ‘originalité nationale’, which is important to Fanon’s argument about the nation as a vehicle of anti-colonialism, is evidently questionable.

29 Feraoun, ‘La Source de nos communs malheurs’, 37, 38.

and ethnicity were all considered relevant, in different cases, and 'local circumstances' could be imagined on very different scales.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most famous example of 'non-adaptation', so to speak, or its most notorious emblem, is the history-book phrase 'Nos ancêtres les Gaulois', 'Our ancestors the Gauls'. It is associated above all with school textbooks from the Third Republic, and with myths that were promoted in the wake of France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71, myths that concerned not only the ethnic origins and timeless borders of modern France but also Gaul's heroic resistance to the Roman empire.<sup>31</sup> Ernest Lavisse's entry on 'Histoire' in the first part of Buisson's influential *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* (1878–87) presented Vercingétorix as 'un héros national, le héros de la résistance à l'ennemi' ('a national hero, the hero of the resistance to the enemy'). Nevertheless, Lavisse also

30 The notion of adaptation receives sustained attention in Jonathan K. Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria 1930–1954* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), and in Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa*. See also Christiane Achour, *Abécédaires en devenir: idéologie coloniale et langue française en Algérie* (Algiers: ENP, 1985); and, in relation to Tunisia, Driss Abbassi, *Quand la Tunisie s'invente: entre Orient et Occident, des imaginaires politiques* (Paris: Autrement, 2009).

31 Eugen Weber notes that proponents of French colonialism were not always averse to parallels between Gaulish and Algerian resistance to empire; and he quotes Ferry's right-hand man, Paul Bert, who served briefly as education minister, expressing respect for Abdelkader alongside Jugurtha and Vercingétorix, and gratitude for the way the Roman conquerors had civilized the Gaulish natives (*My France: Politics, Culture, Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 334). As Weber also notes, the phrase 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois' itself has taken on a mythical quality. He argues that the phrase was less common than is now assumed; that may be true, but he is wrong to claim it was never used by 'the great Lavisse' (31), as Lavisse used it in Buisson's *Dictionnaire de pédagogie*. Weber's point is not to deny that this sort of notion of heroic Gaulish 'ancestors' was pushed by schools so much as to remind readers that there was a rival tradition 'whose preferred founding hero was neither Vercingétorix nor Clovis but Charlemagne', and to argue that 'by the 1880s, children were taught not conflict but reconciliation. The fatherland was forged, the nation built, not by one race against another, but by a mixture of peoples'. 'Fortunately, by the 1890s,' he adds, 'Gaulish exclusivism was on the wane' (37). He also notes, however, that 'as late as 1985, a *Fête gauloise* to benefit [Jean-Marie] Le Pen's National Front featured the slogan: "La Gaule aux Gaulois" ("Gaul for Gauls")' (39). See also Danielle Tucac, 'L'Histoire ou l'éducation du patriote républicain', in Daniel Denis and Pierre Kahn (eds), *L'École républicaine et la question des savoirs: enquête au cœur du Dictionnaire de pédagogie de Ferdinand Buisson* (Paris: CNRS, 2003), 125–46.

argued that the Gauls were lazy and ‘toute voisine encore de la barbarie’ (‘barely beyond barbarism’), and underscored the point that, whereas in modern France, with its great capital city, ‘tous les habitants [...] sont unis entre eux par des liens étroits’ (‘all the country’s inhabitants [...] are linked to each other by close ties’), Gaul had no capital and the Gaulois were ‘divisés en petits peuples, sans armée nationale, guerroyant les uns contre les autres’ (‘divided into small groups, lacking a national army, and waging war on each other’). For such reasons, Lavissee suggested, they could be conquered by Rome.<sup>32</sup> Much of Lavissee’s phrasing – including his evocation of *barbarie* – and his implicit warnings about the risks of failing to cement a national identity must have taken on a strange hue for anyone reading Buisson’s book in colonial Algeria.

Today, the phrase ‘nos ancêtres les Gaulois’ strongly connotes educators’ colonial obliviousness to the diverse backgrounds of their pupils. Fanon wrote in *Peau noire, masques blancs* that the repetition in the classroom of the phrase ‘nos pères, les Gaulois’, though people thought it laughable, encouraged young Antilleans to idolize and identify with White people, and look down on Africans.<sup>33</sup> The motif crops up repeatedly in ‘francophone’ literature. In Feraoun’s posthumous novel *La Cité des Roses*, set during the war of independence, there is a moment when the Algerian headteacher drops in on a class by Françoise, an enthusiastic new teacher who is keen to impress him (and who is very aware of how political circumstances divide them, despite their mutual attraction), and he notes: ‘Elle faisait une leçon d’histoire : Vercingétorix. Elle m’a dit en rougissant : – C’est du programme. Vous savez, moi, je pourrais leur enseigner n’importe quoi’ (‘She was giving a history lesson, on Vercingetorix. Blushing, she said to me, “It’s on the syllabus. You know, for my part, I’d be happy to teach them anything”’).<sup>34</sup> Djébar used the phrase in her inaugural speech at the Académie française, giving the classic French mythical narrative around Gaul, France and ‘Barbary’ a twist:

32 Lavissee [not named], ‘Histoire’, in Ferdinand Buisson (ed.), *Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d’instruction primaire* ([1878–87] Paris: Hachette, 1882), part I, vol. i, 1264–80: 1265–67. See the introduction of Denis and Kahn, *L’École républicaine*, for information on the complex publication history of the Buisson *Dictionnaire*.

33 Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952), 120; *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008), 126. Malek Haddad quotes this paternal version of the phrase in *L’Élève et la leçon* (Paris: Julliard, 1960), 114–15.

34 Feraoun, *La Cité des Roses* (Algiers: Yamcom, 2007), Kindle edition, loc. 1212.

Il serait utile peut être de rappeler que, dans mon enfance en Algérie coloniale (on me disait alors « française musulmane ») alors que l’on nous enseignait « *nos ancêtres les Gaulois* », à cette époque justement des Gaulois, l’Afrique du Nord (on l’appelait aussi la Numidie), ma terre ancestrale avait déjà une littérature écrite de haute qualité, de langue latine ...

It may be worth remembering that when I was a child in colonial Algeria (when I was termed a ‘French Muslim’) they taught us ‘*nos ancêtres les Gaulois*’; and that in the era of the Gauls, my ancestral land of North Africa (then known as Numidia) already possessed a rich literary tradition of its own, written in Latin ...<sup>35</sup>

In the same spirit, she provided a preface for Salah Guemriche’s *Dictionnaire des mots français d’origine arabe*, whose back cover announced: ‘Il y a deux fois plus de mots français d’origine arabe que de mots français d’origine gauloise ! [...] De quoi méditer la question de l’« intégration » sous un nouveau jour’ (‘There are twice as many French words of Arabic origin as of Gaulish origin! [...] Which perhaps casts new light on the idea of “integration”’).<sup>36</sup> Another Algerian writer to give the idea a twist, and a more violent one, was Kateb Yacine: in an important passage in *Nedjma*, one of the characters, Mustapha, gets suspended from school for writing an essay that talks contemptuously about the effects of colonial education on him and the privileged few. ‘Sur les milliers d’enfants qui croupissent dans les rues, nous sommes quelques collégiens, entourés de méfiance’ (‘Out of the thousands of children swarming in the streets, just a few of us are in secondary school, and everyone views us with suspicion’), he writes. He cites Tacitus on the Romans’ manipulation of the Bretons, who were led to believe they were favoured over the Gaulois, and who, enthusiastically learning Latin, ‘appelaient civilisation ce qui faisait partie de leur servitude’ (‘accepted as a matter of “civilization” things that actually helped enslave them’).<sup>37</sup>

As Kateb’s history lesson suggested, the whole debate around assimilation and adaptation was not only a matter for the colonies. The drive

35 Djebar, ‘Discours de réception’, Académie française, 2006, 15, available at <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/reception-de-mme-assia-djebar-f5>.

36 Guemriche, *Dictionnaire des mots français d’origine arabe* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

37 Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma*, 222; *Nedjma*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: George Braziller, 1961), 297.

towards a certain sort of national identity was a thorny political issue in mainland France too, and, as in Algeria, was often entwined with policies around language. Brittany is one of the obvious examples: there too, educators' apparent indifference to the backgrounds of their pupils could appear offensively colonial, or quasi-colonial. (I wrote this sentence in 2015; at the time, Wikipedia had an entry on 'Nos ancêtres les Gaulois' in two languages, French and Breton.) In her memoir about her childhood in Brittany, *Composition française: retour sur une enfance bretonne*, the historian Mona Ozouf recalls her confusion as she tried to negotiate between the stories told to her at school and the attitudes she found at home and at church:

j'avais du mal à comprendre que nos ancêtres les Gaulois, vedettes moustachues de la classe, soient inmanquablement accompagnés par l'ironie de ma mère : elle me disait qu'on apprenait la même chose aux petits Tunisiens, aux petits Marocains, autrement pourvus d'ancêtres ; et que nous-mêmes nous en avions d'autres, plus vraisemblables, en la personne des Gallois.

I found it puzzling that our ancestors the Gauls, the moustachioed stars of the classroom, were always the object of my mother's irony: she said that they taught the same thing to Tunisian and Moroccan children, who had their own ancestors; and that we too had other, more plausible, ancestors in the shape of the Celts [Ozouf's text has *Gallois*, meaning the Welsh, to pun on Gaulois].<sup>38</sup>

In the end, though, Ozouf is very positive about republican education, and about the compromises that republican schools made around the church and around local identities, in Brittany as in Alsace and Lorraine, not least through the recruitment of local teachers. The Republic's schools, she asserts, achieved the 'articulation heureuse du local et du national sous le signe de l'harmonie' (222, 'achieved a happy and harmonious convergence between the local and the national'); the so-called 'hussards noirs' – a nickname that *instituteurs* (primary school teachers) acquired in the early twentieth century – should be absolved of 'une entreprise concertée de déracinement' (223, 'a concerted effort to cut people off from their roots');<sup>39</sup> and, all things considered, 'Il faut [...] corriger l'image du

<sup>38</sup> Mona Ozouf, *Composition française: retour sur une enfance bretonne* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 121.

<sup>39</sup> I am reminded of a provocative comment by Fred Inglis about Raymond Williams: 'Williams later spoke of the grammar school as "intellectually



maître d'école colonisateur, dépêché dans les villages tel un commissaire politique, acharné à républicaniser et à franciser la troupe enfantine qui lui est confiée, à extirper d'elle des appartenances particulières' ('We should correct the image of the colonizing schoolmaster, dispatched to the villages as if he were a political emissary, determined to republicanize and Gallicize the group of children entrusted to him whilst stamping out any sense they might have of their particular origins'). A sceptic might think that such comments, coming from the daughter of Breton nationalists, could be taken to show almost the opposite of what Ozouf explicitly declares, demonstrating how far she had been successfully republicanized and Gallicized by her education. Or, at least, her comments could be taken to suggest that she viewed this history through rose-tinted republican spectacles, and with a characteristically republican/colonial blind spot. When she mentions the 'colonizing schoolmaster', the image apparently does not prompt her to think again about the colonial histories in Tunisia and Morocco (and elsewhere) evoked by her mother.

One reason not to overstate the effectiveness of a programme of educational indoctrination, as Ozouf points out, is that in the classroom individual teachers have some ideological room for manoeuvre. Ozouf tends to interpret teachers' 'wiggle room' as a strength of republican educational ideology, but here too one could argue something like the opposite: if the ideology dictates a certain uniformity of curricular content and a certain indifference to many aspects of pupils' identities (regional, religious and so on) then teachers' individual acts of 'adaptation' may be thought of more as a weakness or, more precisely, as an inevitable inconsistency that reveals something disturbing about the ideology's universalist (or nationalist) claims. Either way, this was also an issue in the colonies. Former teachers from colonial Algeria can be found protesting, in interviews and memoirs, that they never pushed the idea of 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois', even when it was in their textbooks. One of those ex-teachers, André Grossetête, said he always felt his main task was to teach literacy in French, and remarked: 'J'insiste pour affirmer avec

deracinating", but this is both a mistake and the paradox which posed his life-question. Abstract thought, the powers of theorisation and the habit of detachment, the very project of human enlightenment are exactly that: they pull up roots to examine and understand them. Education is intended to free the mind from the darkness of locality, its superstition, habit-learning, its denial of the possibility of progress and its grudging refusal of emancipation' (Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge, 1988), 54).

force que je n'ai jamais rencontré, en 20 années de carrière en Algérie, de maîtres qui auraient pu oser parler de « nos ancêtres les Gaulois ». Cette sinistre plaisanterie a beaucoup nui à l'enseignement français à l'étranger, mais aussi en France' ('I really should insist here: in twenty years of teaching in Algeria not once did I encounter a teacher who would have dared to talk about "our ancestors the Gauls". This harmful joke has done a lot of damage to French education not only abroad but also in France').<sup>40</sup> Another former teacher, Lucette Besserve-Bernollin, recalled that, in her French teaching, examples were drawn from everyday life:

Par exemple, c'était, au cours préparatoire, les vêtements : gandourah, pantalon, chéchia, turban, babouches ; les repas : galette, pain, farine, couscous [...] Et l'on pouvait assister à ce genre de scénario : une classe rassemblée autour du puits de l'école, un élève actionnant le balancier de la pompe pendant que le chœur des enfants scandait 'Aomar pompe l'eau', 'Mohand emplit le bidon'.

During the *cours préparatoire*, for example, when we taught clothing, we would refer to gandouras, trousers, chechias, turbans and babouches; for food, it would be galettes, bread, flour, couscous [...] It was quite common to see a class assembled around the school well, with one student working the pump whilst the other children recited 'Aomar is pumping the water' or 'Mohand is filling the bucket'.<sup>41</sup>

Another ex-teacher – Jean Simonet, posted to Ait Aicha in Kabylie in 1954–55 – remembered something similar, but from a different angle: 'Je me souviens, ma première leçon était : « Ali a une chéchia », dès la première page. Or, à Ait Aicha il n'y a jamais eu de « chéchia »' ('I recall my first class: "Ali has a chechia" was the opening line of the textbook. The thing is, in Ait Aicha no one had ever worn a "chechia"').<sup>42</sup> Someone had adapted his teaching materials to a certain vision of Algeria or perhaps the Maghreb, but they did not fit that corner of Kabylie.

Anti-colonialists, past or present, have good reason to balk at the sort of education, real or mythical, connoted by 'Nos ancêtres les

40 Grossetête interview in Ahmed Ghouati, *École et imaginaire dans l'Algérie coloniale: parcours et témoignages* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 149; see also Yves Roux's contribution to the same volume, 25.

41 Lucette Besserve-Bernollin, 'Adaptation de l'idéalisme des textes aux réalités algériennes', in Hazan et al., *1830–1962: des enseignants d'Algérie se souviennent*, 131–47: 135.

42 Simonet interview in Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 32.

Gaulois'; and the idea of 'adaptation', while raising the fundamental question of who and what defined the norm that was to be 'adapted', at least held out the prospect of some sort of accommodation of pre- or para-colonial cultures. Nonetheless, approval for adaptation could be a pro-colonial position too. Someone like Billiard did not want to push 'Nos ancêtres les Gaulois' onto Muslim children; he did not want to offer them an 'academic' education at all, or, one might say, a 'French' education. Instead, as we have seen, he believed that the curriculum should be 'adapted' as a way of avoiding the *risks* of 'assimilation', or of emancipation. Other commentators, by contrast, with other political goals, believed that the correct forms of 'adaptation' ultimately facilitated assimilation. And others again felt it was their duty to spread the benefits of French culture, to give all pupils the chance to study Racine, say, and the duty of the French Republic to treat all its pupils alike – and perhaps, ultimately, in principle, all of its subjects and citizens.

Roques and Donnadieu, writing in 1940 and casting their gaze across the whole of the French empire, yet distinguishing, to some extent, between different cultures within it, favoured a kind of adaptation of adaptation. On the one hand, they thought colonized peoples were not ready for academic education: for now, they argued, 'En Afrique [...] l'enseignement populaire a tout à faire. Dans un pays essentiellement primitif, il s'adapte au milieu; l'école est professionnelle, artisanale, rurale et même ménagère' (231, 'In Africa, the work of basic education has only just begun. In an essentially primitive land, teaching must be adapted to its context; schools there are vocational, makeshift, rural and even domestic'). And – linking colonized peoples with childhood, a trope that was a colonial commonplace – they went on: 'notre immense Afrique est encore en tutelle. La race noire est en enfance, habituée au régime de la tribu et du village' ('Our immense Africa still needs to be under the guidance of a parent body. The black race, accustomed to tribal and village life, is still in its infancy').<sup>43</sup> This was close to the

43 That trope provides another angle on the relationship between colonial education and education in general; indeed, 'trope' may be the wrong word, if it implies that the link between Africans and children was 'only' metaphorical for those using it. Amrouche complained that *indigènes* were 'Considérés comme des pupilles frappés à jamais d'incapacité' (*Journal* 1928–62, intro. and ed. Tassadit Yacine Titouh (Paris: Non-lieu, 2009), 254, 'Considered to be pupils who would never learn anything'). In her DEA thesis, Colonna quoted from the programme at Bouzaréah: 'La France a été de tous temps [...] l'éducatrice du genre humain' (cited by Youssef Nacib, *Mouloud Feraoun* ([1982] Algiers: ENAL-ENAP, 1983, 2nd edition, 18,

perspective voiced by Maurice Poulard in *L'Enseignement pour les indigènes en Algérie* of 1910:

Les indigènes arrivent au lycée mal préparés avec une instruction élémentaire bien insuffisante le plus souvent pour commencer avec fruit l'étude aride du latin, des sciences et de la littérature [...] Enfin les indigènes qui recherchent toujours le côté pratique des choses préfèrent orienter leurs enfants vers un enseignement dont ils retireront plus d'avantages et de profits (médersas, écoles professionnelles, écoles normales, emplois administratifs) que du baccalauréat, titre sans grande utilité pour eux.

The natives arrive at the lycée ill-prepared, lacking the basic education necessary for a successful initiation into the dry academic study of Latin, the sciences and literature [...] In any case, the natives, who are always drawn to the practical side of things, would rather push their children towards the sort of education (in médersas,<sup>44</sup> vocational schools, teacher training colleges (*écoles normales*) or administrative posts) that will be more advantageous and profitable than the *baccalauréat*, a qualification that is of little use to them.<sup>45</sup>

'France has forever been [...] the educator of the human race'). Said quotes a comparable description of the 'subject races' by Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer) in 1908: 'people who are all, nationally speaking, more or less *in statu pupillari*' (Evelyn Baring, *Political and Literary Essays, 1908–1913* ([1913] Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1968), 40, 53, 12–14; quoted in *Orientalism*, 37). Krishna Kumar generalizes: 'At the heart of the colonial enterprise was the adult–child relationship. The colonizer took the role of the adult, and the native became the child. This adult–child relationship entailed an educational task. The colonial master saw it as his responsibility to initiate the native into new ways of acting and thinking' (Kumar, *Political Agenda Of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 26). I touch on the issue of the 'metaphoricity' of links between women, Africans, the lower classes and the unconscious in 'Metaphorical Memories: Freud, Conrad and the Dark Continent', in Patrick Crowley and Jane Hiddleston (eds), *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 49–70; see also Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

44 In English this word is usually rendered as *madrasa* and applied to religious schools, but in Arabic its usage is wider. In French, *médersa* is associated particularly with religious secondary schools – of more than one sort – in Algeria. I will continue to use the French term, without italics. See Samuel D. Anderson, 'Les Médersas' in Henry and Hudowicz, *L'École en Algérie*, 25–30, and 107; also the entry on 'médersa' in Alain Rey, *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française* (Paris: Robert, 2005).

45 Poulard, *L'Enseignement pour les indigènes en Algérie* (Algiers: Imprimerie administrative/Gojosso, 1910), 169; cited by Kadri, 'Histoire du système d'enseignement', 33.

On the other hand, Roques and Donnadiou thought that education systems should evolve as the populations evolved through their education, and accordingly envisaged the coexistence of practical and academic elements in the curriculum from the start. Having acknowledged the need for education based on the artisanal, the rural and 'even' the domestic, they went on:

Une instruction proprement dite doublera cet apprentissage et amorcera chez le Noir un goût de la connaissance, une curiosité indispensable. Il faut le tirer de son économie primitive qui l'immobilise et l'annihile, lui faire découvrir une nouvelle échelle de valeurs plus conformes à la vérité. En un mot, lui faire vivre une vie plus humaine. (224)

An education in the true sense of the word will accompany these forms of training and cultivate in the Black population a taste for knowledge, that spark of curiosity that is so essential. They must be rescued from the primitive economy in which they stagnate and come to nothing; we must allow them instead to discover a new set of values that are closer to the truth. In a word, we must get them to live a more human life.

What may be most immediately striking now about these comments are the racist assumptions about 'primitive', static, ignorant 'Black' culture; but again they also suggest, however uncomfortably, a commitment to education as something wider and more transformative than 'training', and driven by curiosity; and they show us, as did Simonet's experience with the textbook *chechia*, that favouring 'adaptation' did not (and does not) resolve the question of what to teach, or what the norms underpinning it should be, or how far 'adaptation' can and should go. Among other things, Simonet's story is a reminder that one person's 'adaptation' can become the opposite for someone else: non-adaptation, or misadaptation.

In colonial Algeria much of the debate about 'adaptation', as I have already indicated, concerned the basic nature of the education that should be offered to indigenous children, rather than the relatively fine-grained considerations raised by Simonet's *chechia*. Someone like Billiard, who was worried about the potentially inflammatory effects of the wrong sort of education, thought that schooling for colonized children should be practical and nothing else: for boys in rural Algeria it should focus on matters such as how to make mosquito nets and how to improve agriculture, while girls should enhance their skills in feminine pursuits such as needlework and 'puériculture' (child-rearing). The teaching of something like housework could be made more academically

respectable, to an extent, if infused with modern scientific or would-be scientific understandings of hygiene, but the ‘même’ in Roques and Donnadiou’s phrase ‘même ménagère’ (*even domestic*) is a sign that there were misgivings even among proponents of adaptation about the sorts of training that were worthy of a place in a school’s curriculum. Again, these were questions not just for the colonies but also for France, where there were parallel debates about education for girls and the working classes.

With regard to issues around education, training and gender, the work of ‘Madame Luce’, explored at length in Rebecca Rogers’s book *A Frenchwoman’s Imperial Story: Madame Luce in Nineteenth-Century Algeria*, offers an intriguing case study. Eugénie Luce moved from France to Algeria in the 1830s, during the early years of the conquest, and established the first French school for Muslim girls in Algiers in 1845. Initially the school offered a relatively academic syllabus, with an emphasis on maths and French, albeit alongside sewing, and claimed its mission was: ‘to change native morals, prejudices and habits, as quickly and as surely as possible, by introducing the greatest possible number of young Muslim girls to the benefits of a European education’.<sup>46</sup> In 1856 one of the pupils became the first Muslim woman to pass the *brevet de capacité*, an academic qualification that opened the door to a teaching post. The girl’s achievement was the school’s achievement too, and lent some substance to the idea propounded by Madame Luce and others that for indigenous girls another benefit of French education was the prospect of ‘emancipation’. As I noted earlier, Roques and Donnadiou also used that word, just as Camus used it about education in Kabylie. In each instance the notion had some substance but restricted scope. On the one hand, the ‘emancipation’ was of a limited socio-economic order and concerned particular individuals; on the other, the benefits were imagined to go beyond the individual, at least potentially. At times, seeking financial support for the school, Luce not only mobilized the rhetoric according to which Muslim women were tools of moral conquest and assimilation (and perhaps believed in that rhetoric) but also claimed she was interested in ‘the fusion of the two races’.<sup>47</sup>

46 Letter from Mme Allix [/Luce] to the *Conseil d’administration* in Algiers, 31 January 1846; cited (in English) by Rogers, *A Frenchwoman’s Imperial Story* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 1.

47 See Rogers, *A Frenchwoman’s Imperial Story*, 65, 71.

Later, however, amidst changing political circumstances, the school turned into something more like an embroidery workshop, with a commercial as well as an instructional dimension. Here lies another odd twist in the story of assimilation and adaptation: to some extent needlework was valorized precisely in its unmodernized aspects, and even in its resistance to a certain kind of assimilation, insofar as some colonial educators could take pride in the contributions of colonially sponsored artisanal schooling to a rumoured revival of pre-industrial indigenous arts and crafts. The range of items offered in Madame Luce's shop suggests a more complicated interaction of tradition and colonial modernity: visitors could buy handkerchiefs, wall hangings, Moorish, Kabyle and Jewish outfits (winter and summer) for dolls, and busts of Madame Luce. Still, the embroidery was sufficiently fine and distinctive to find its way into major museums, including the Victoria and Albert museum in London and the Musée National des Antiquités in Algiers; and Luce's workshop won support from figures including Barbara Bodichon, a prominent early British feminist whose journalism spread Luce's reputation abroad. The gender politics of the school's turn towards handicrafts are complex, then (and were part of a wider shift in French attitudes to girls' education at the time, as Rogers explains); the school's investment in craftwork helped dignify, and commercialize, traditionally female activities, at the same time distancing the girls from academic education and the less traditional pathways to which it might have led.<sup>48</sup>

48 Rogers is of course attentive to chronology, in a way that my own discussion of colonial education is not. One of her aims is to call into question the view shared by a number of historians that 1870 marked a clear turning point in the history of the *mission civilisatrice*. The changes in Madame Luce's curriculum reflect shifts in colonial educational policy, which in the middle of the nineteenth century moved away from the idea 'that girls should have the opportunity to become literate, and indeed that indigenous families should learn to value feminine literacy' (135). Thus, she argues, 'indigenous girls' education vanished as a cultural goal a decade before the settler regime came to power in 1870' (214). I am reminded of a passage in the autobiographical novel *Rue des tambourins* by Taos Amrouche (1913–76; sometimes known as Marie-Louise Taos Amrouche, or Marguerite Taos) about the tough love the narrator and her friend Daria received from their French teacher: if she found them wasting time in the street, 'Elle nous attrapait par l'oreille et nous forçait à rentrer à la maison. Elle nous menait comme des garçons en nous appelant par notre nom de famille. Coudre pour nous était une pénitence, elle le savait' ([1960] Paris: Joëlle Losfeld, 1996), 167, 'She would grab us by the ear and drag us back home. She treated us as if we were boys, calling us by our surnames. Sewing was a form of penitence for us, and she knew it').

As one might imagine, Luce had her critics. Especially in the school's early years an air of immorality lingered around the *directrice* and her pupils, at least in the eyes of colonists who feared that the inevitable product of European education was a kind of *déclassement* or social dislocation of girls who would end up unmarriageable, or worse. For some, the 'fusion of the two races' was no doubt the stuff of nightmares, or other fantasies. (One commentator cited by Rogers (3) remarked: 'By raising them as Europeans, we have sullied them for Arab life; we are preparing concubines for Europeans rather than wives for native men'.) Criticisms came from more rational perspectives too: not least because of the dolls' clothing and souvenir busts of Madame Luce, some commentators were suspicious – as subsequent historians have been – that behind the high-minded rhetoric of education, civilization and revitalized tradition lay some canny self-interest.<sup>49</sup> As with many other stories about colonial educators, diverse attitudes and ideologies seem to run through the story of Madame Luce. Whether one focuses on Luce herself, or on the wider political climate around education in her era, especially for 'indigenous' girls, there are remarkable fluctuations and inconsistencies: one can glimpse idealism at one moment and opportunism and cynicism at another.

The teaching of Arabic was another strand of colonial educational history in which there were some notable fluctuations, although the Arabic language was often the object of condescension on the part of the French colonizers and was marginalized in various ways under colonial rule. (One may recall Said's comment (*Out of Place*, xiv), with regard to his own colonial/postcolonial experience of education, 'The basic split in my life was the one between Arabic, my native language, and English, the language of my education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher'.) In his writing on education, Genty de Bussy contrasted Arabic negatively with French: Arabic, he assumed, had no significant or worthwhile cultural hinterland, whereas French was the royal road to 'tout ce que les connaissances humaines, tout ce que les progrès de l'intelligence ont entassé' (205, 'all that human knowledge and the progress of the intelligence have accumulated'). And a damaging colonial disdain for the Arabic language and Arabic culture was still evident long

49 To some extent Rogers's book is meant as a corrective to the negative assessment of Luce by historians including Turin, who gave Mme Luce short shrift in her 1971 book *Affrontements dans l'Algérie coloniale* – still a standard reference point in the field, as I noted earlier.



after Genty de Bussy's time. Nina Hayat's *L'Indigène aux semelles de vent*, a vicarious memoir about her schoolteacher father, Mohamed Belhalfaoui, is instructive on that score. Belhalfaoui trained at the École Normale founded in Algiers in 1865; initially it was known as the École Normale d'Alger, but it was often referred to simply as 'Bouzaréah' (sometimes written Bouzaréa) after it moved to new premises in 1887. To understand Belhalfaoui's experience of colonial attitudes to Arabic, one first needs to have some understanding of Bouzaréah.

The teacher training college in Bouzaréah was perhaps the Algerian colonial educational institution that inspired most loyalty among its former students. One of the aims of its founders was to produce more indigenous *instituteurs*, and in writings and interviews by former pupils and staff one finds many happy memories of friendships formed by the trainee teachers across barriers of ethnicity, religious affiliation and language, whether their background was Berber, Arab or European, Christian, Muslim or Jewish. It should be emphasized, however, that this fluidity did not overcome all cultural barriers – not least because Bouzaréah was only for men. A women's teacher training college opened in 1876 in Miliana.

Denis Guénoun, in his intriguing and engaging book *Un sémite* – another vicarious paternal memoir – says that when his father entered Bouzaréah in 1929, aged 17, he experienced it as a kind of liberation: 'Il parlera de cette époque comme d'un éblouissement pur. L'Universel le saisit. Il n'avait traversé que des particularités: judaïsme, Algérie, quartiers pauvres. Ce qu'ouvrait l'École Normale, c'était l'humain, le cosmos laïque. L'égalité, la France' (27, 'Later, he would describe it as an interlude of blazing illumination. He was seized by the Universal. Up to then, he had encountered only particularities: Judaism, Algeria, impoverished neighbourhoods. What revealed itself to him at the Training College was the human, the secular cosmos. Equality; France', 24). Leïla Sebbar strikes a similar note ('Il avait été ébloui' – 'He was dazzled') in describing the experiences of her father, who met Feraoun at Bouzaréah.<sup>50</sup> In the same vein Louis Rigaud, a teacher trained at Bouzaréah who later wrote about education in Algeria and served as head of a teachers' union, recalled the college, from the late

50 Sebbar, 'Portrait de famille: les écoles', in *Mes Algéries en France: carnet de voyages* (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: Bleu autour, 2004), 17–46: 30. See also Sebbar, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* ([2003] Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule: Bleu autour, 2016, expanded edition).

1920s onwards, as ‘un microcosme privilégié d’intégration’ (‘a privileged microcosm of integration’). Rigaud quoted Feraoun in support of his view, and Feraoun, for his part, remembered his feeling of joy on arriving in Bouzaréah. ‘La communauté franco-arabe, nous l’avons formée, il y a un quart de siècle, nous autres, à Bouzaréa !’, he wrote (‘We founded the Franco-Arab community, a quarter of a century ago, at Bouzaréah!’).<sup>51</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, Bouzaréah seems to have been about as good as it got, in colonial Algeria, in terms of the integration of Europeans and the colonized in and through an educational community.

Even enthusiasts such as Feraoun, however, saw reasons to moderate their praise. He was no doubt aware that entry to Bouzaréah was a lot more competitive for Algerians than for Europeans. In 1932, the year he passed the entrance exam, there were 20 places in the Section Indigène, for which there were 318 candidates, whereas only 64 candidates competed for 54 places in the European section.<sup>52</sup> The exams for the two sections were different, an arrangement that continued until after the Second World War. After his remark about the ‘communauté franco-arabe’, Feraoun added that in due course the school would reveal ‘ses imperfections, ses préjugés et ses castes’ (‘its imperfections, prejudices and castes’), a criticism he had already voiced in the first edition of his first novel, *Le Fils du pauvre*.<sup>53</sup> Rigaud notes that within Bouzaréah there were formal differences in the treatment and training of ‘native’ teachers through to the end of the 1940s, when the formal division between European and Muslim primary schools was at last abolished and the

51 Rigaud, ‘L’École en Algérie (1880–1962)’, in Jouin et al., *L’École en Algérie*, 23–73: 50; and Feraoun, ‘Images algériennes d’Emmanuel Roblès’, *Simoun* 30 (December 1959), reprinted in *L’Anniversaire*, 59–69: 59–60. Feraoun was at Bouzaréah with Roblès for two years.

52 These figures are given in Christiane Achour, *Mouloud Feraoun, une voix en contrepoint* (Paris: Silex, 1986), 95.

53 The English translation, *The Poor Man’s Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*, trans. Lucy R. McNair (Charlottesville, VA and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005), is of this first edition. For more information on the different editions of *Le Fils du pauvre* see Chapter 3. That first version, published in 1950, included a section on Bouzaréah which contained much that was positive, including a description of its ‘exceptionnelle fécondité intellectuelle et morale’ (163, ‘exceptional intellectual and moral fertility’, 118), but also included (164, E118–19) reflections on the division of the student body along lines of class, ethnicity and, above all, socio-economic background. The history of inconsistencies and forms of discrimination at Bouzaréah is discussed at length in Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*.

curriculum standardized.<sup>54</sup> It was at that moment, in principle, that the colonial authorities dismantled what Camus had called 'the artificial barrier between European and indigenous schools'. As we shall see in later chapters, however, even after that date, many colonized children, especially in villages in the countryside, found themselves living in a different universe from European children; and, even after that date, Arab and Berber teachers' job and career opportunities did not match those of the European *co-écoliers* with whom they had shared lessons and dormitories.<sup>55</sup> According to Léon in *Colonisation, enseignement et éducation*, Albert Truphémus's 1935 novel *Ferhat, instituteur indigène* – the story of a disillusioned Bouzaréah-trained teacher who ends up committing suicide – was widely read among Algerian students at Bouzaréah in the late 1930s (and no doubt beyond that time).<sup>56</sup> Another tale of disillusionment is Mouloud Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du juste* of 1955; the protagonist, Arezki, is keen to fight in the Second World War, partly because of his admiration for his teachers at Bouzaréah, but his war-time experiences leave him confused and embittered; he rejects a teaching career and, after getting involved in politics, ends up in prison. For Algerian students, as Rigaud put it in another publication, 'l'École normale n'a pas été [...] un passage à l'égalité, mais une égalité de passage' ('the *École normale* offered only a fleeting experience of equality, not a path to equality').<sup>57</sup>

Belhalfaoui's memories of Bouzaréah seem to have been positive in many respects, but his daughter's book gives a clearer sense of what was meant by Feraoun (whom he knew) when he alluded to its

54 Kamel Kateb indicates in *École, population et société en Algérie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005) – a book that is mainly on the post-independence period but offers a useful overview of the colonial period – that the decree of 5 March 1948 suppressing separate schooling was a response to 'la demande ardente des Musulmans' (25, 'the pressing demand from Muslims').

55 Rigaud gives some details (in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 39–42) about the history of discrimination against native teachers, including restrictions on their political activities.

56 Léon, *Colonisation, enseignement et éducation*, 207–15. Truphémus's *Ferhat, instituteur indigène* was self-published; it has been reproduced in Guy Dugas (ed.), *Algérie: un rêve de fraternité* (Paris: Omnibus, 1997).

57 Rigaud interview in Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 82. See also the obituary by Kadri, 'Décès de Louis Rigaud, un compagnon de route de l'émancipation politique de l'Algérie', *El Watan* 12 June 2011, available at <http://www.djazairss.com/fr/elwatan/328336>, consulted 1 September 2015.

imperfections, prejudices and castes. When Belhalfaoui entered the institution in 1932, people still spoke about the Bouzaréah ‘schools’ in the plural. On the premises Algerian teachers were not allowed to speak to one another in ‘local’ languages; partly in reaction, Belhalfaoui insisted on speaking Arabic, and also started wearing a chechia. This enraged Dumas, the director: ‘Nous commençons à vous confondre avec vos camarades français’, he said, ‘Vous paraissiez civilisés. Voilà que vous portez la chéchia !’ (‘We had begun mistaking you for your French classmates. You seemed civilized. Now you’re wearing a chechia!’).<sup>58</sup> Dumas, according to Hayat, was a very good teacher, but ‘un colonialiste « bon teint »’ (33, ‘a dyed-in-the-wool colonialist’) and a racist. In 1933, when Belhalfaoui went to France for the first time, on a school trip celebrating the end of his cohort’s time at Bouzaréah, he and the other *indigènes* were seated in a separate compartment, where, naturally enough, some of them started speaking Arabic; but Dumas, overhearing them from the corridor, burst in and told them off: ‘On pourrait vous prendre pour ce que vous n’êtes pas !’ (33, ‘You could be mistaken for something that you are not!’). Later in life Belhalfaoui wrote a thesis arguing that Algerian Arabic was a language, not a dialect, an argument that failed to win him a doctorate (121). Later again, in 1959, he was approached in Paris with a request to give Arabic lessons to French police officers. He assumed this was to facilitate the torture of Algerian militants, and he refused, then moved to Berlin for fear of reprisals (130–31).

In *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* Djébar recalls her bravery – or temerity, from the perspective of her headteacher – in asking, aged 10, if she could study literary Arabic at school. She had already studied written Arabic, she explained, in her village, but only ‘« à l’école coranique [...] où le Coran s’apprend par cœur, donc sans vraiment comprendre ! »’ (104, ‘at the Quranic school [...] where you learn the Quran by heart, so without really understanding it!’). The headteacher responded curtly that there was no question of appointing an Arabic teacher for her alone, so she should take English – or switch out of *lettres classiques* and into *lettres modernes*, where a couple of other girls were studying Arabic. The very idea of ‘literary’ Arabic seemed dubious to the headteacher, according to Djébar; and although Djébar was already in rebellion against that prejudice, she was still at an age, and in an era, where she had not asked herself why her ‘European’ fellow pupils

58 Nina Hayat, *L’Indigène aux semelles de vent* (Paris: Tirésias, 2001), 30–31.

had no interest in learning Arabic, even though it was all around them – 'comme si la période coloniale où nous vivions anesthésiait en moi aussi l'étonnement qui aurait dû être le mien' (105–06, 'as if the colonial period in which we were living had also anaesthetized me, dulling the amazement I should have felt').

In Djébar's story as in Hayat's, the accent is on French colonialism's appalling mixture of hostility and indifference to Algeria's Arab/Arabic culture. Malek Haddad, in an essay of 1961, rams the point home, drawing attention to a law of 18 October 1892 that put the teaching of Arabic under the control of the French administration, and a law of 8 March 1938 that categorized Arabic as a foreign language.<sup>59</sup> Even so, it should be noted that colonial hostility to Arabic did not necessarily entail a simple attempt to obliterate it. Djébar's colonial school, as her story reveals, did offer some teaching of Arabic, albeit as a 'foreign' language, and albeit not within the prestigious stream of *lettres classiques*. Perhaps more surprisingly, Feraoun had found, about a decade earlier, that he was expected to study Arabic at Bouzaréah, though he did so without much enthusiasm, as he was a Kabyle speaker and always planned to return to Kabylie to teach. (This may make it seem odd that he might ever have embraced the idea of a 'communauté franco-arabe', but also helps explain why he might have accepted that French should be the lingua franca of any such community at Bouzaréah.) And in 1947–48 – about a year after Djébar made her request to study literary Arabic – Arabic was recognized as an official language in Algeria, as the distinction between 'indigenous' and European schools was in principle erased. According to Kamel Kateb, by this time all (non-'European') Algerian political groupings, irrespective of their substantial doctrinal differences in other respects, agreed on the need for compulsory universal education and the teaching of Arabic.<sup>60</sup>

Among colonists there had been some support for teaching Arabic from the colony's earliest days. Despite his intellectual disdain for Arabic culture, Genty de Bussy recommended that the French population of Algeria learn the language. From his point of view it was purely a matter

59 Haddad (drawing on Harbi), 'Les Zéros tournent en rond', *Écoute et je t'appelle* (Paris: Maspéro, 1961), 7–46: 43. Derrida in *Le Monolinguisme* refers to Arabic as 'interdit' (57, 'forbidden' 31), but subsequently makes clear it could be studied at school as a foreign language (or, as the English translation has it, 'alien' language (66, E37)).

60 Kateb, *École, population et société en Algérie*, 30.

of instrumental convenience, but even that sort of openness to Arabic had implications for institutional frameworks and the students that filled them. And it was of course entangled in colonialism's relationship to Islam. I mentioned at the start of the chapter that the French were quick to establish schools in Algeria in the 1830s. The first schools that opened under Genty de Bussy's auspices were French, but as early as June 1833 he opened a school where both French and Arabic were used for teaching, with about 200 pupils. Similar schools soon opened in Oran and Bône (now Annaba), and another in 1834 in Algiers. These early 'mixed' schools were treated with suspicion by Muslims, however, and most of their 'non-European' pupils were Jewish. When in 1839 a boarding school was opened in Paris for boys of upper-class Muslim families, most of the families who were meant to embrace it feared and distrusted the initiative and did their best to avoid sending their sons, even disguising them as girls, on occasion, because they were worried that French officials might resort to kidnapping. In its eight years of existence, the school had only 11 students.<sup>61</sup> This expensive failure induced the colonial authorities to change tack slightly: a few years later, in 1850, a decree established several more Arab–French schools in Algeria for both boys and girls (separate institutions for each sex, that is), which recruited European and Muslim students, and European and Muslim teachers, and used both French and Arabic as a medium of teaching. Included on the curriculum was Quranic teaching at the nearest mosque. A further decree of 1883 made a test in Arabic a compulsory part of the *certificat d'études primaires* for 'natives', specifying too that in schools in *communes indigènes* teaching should be offered in both French and Arabic, and that headteachers should have a command of Arabic. A decade later, the programme for 1898 prescribed the teaching of Arabic in *écoles primaires indigènes* – a 'fait peu remarqué' ('a fact that has received little attention'), as Ageron notes, though he adds that what actually happened in schools seems often to have fallen short of these stipulations.<sup>62</sup>

61 Turin, *Affrontements dans l'Algérie coloniale*, 63–69. See also Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 69.

62 Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France*, vol. II, 924. Kyle Francis in "Algeria for the Algerians": Public Education and Settler Identity in the Early Third Republic, notes that in 1881 lessons in the Kabyle language were instituted in the teacher training college (still in Mustapha at this point, before its move to Bouzaréah), with a view to sending European teachers into new schools in Kabylie, but there was no uptake (*French Politics, Culture & Society* 36:1 (March 2018), 26–51: 35–36).

Another significant detail revealed in passing by Djébar in her story about wanting to study Arabic at school is that even if she did not get to study the Arabic poetry she would have liked to study, and did not learn to write Arabic properly,<sup>63</sup> she, like other Algerian children, *did* study Arabic in this era, in the Quranic school in her village. Sadek Hadjerès, a figure well known in Algeria for his involvement with anti-colonialism and the Communist party, expressed gratitude to his Quranic school for that very reason, adding that it played an important role in creating a shared culture for young Algerians and giving them confidence that they had a culture of their own, though he shared Djébar's frustration with the limitations of rote learning.<sup>64</sup> The fact that the French authorities allowed that sort of religious educational tradition to continue under colonialism may be unsurprising; what is more striking, however, is that in colonial Algeria the French authorities put money into Islamic educational institutions, and did so over a long period, albeit not consistently. Three state-run *médersas* were established from 1850, offering training in justice and administration under Islamic law (and, of course, education in Arabic), and the French authorities supported them for a century, well into the era when, in France, *laïcité* was officially the hard-won norm. Only in 1953 did they become secular 'lycées franco-musulmans'.

There are several ways to interpret French support for the *médersas*. Some colonial commentators thought that any education was better than none: Roques and Donnadiou, noting that in the Maghreb there was a tradition of education founded on the Quran, or on the Talmud for the Jewish minority, generalized about Muslim countries by saying: 'l'enseignement revêt toujours un caractère religieux. Il est mal compris, littéral, dogmatique, mais il existe et c'est l'essentiel. L'Administration a su le consacrer' (220, 'teaching always has a religious character to it. It is badly informed, overly literal and dogmatic, but it exists, and that is the main thing. The Administration has sanctioned its provision'). Their feeling seems to have been that for 'natives' any education, or acculturation, into any formally established value system was better

63 Djébar also made this point in a discussion recorded in Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe (eds), *Postcolonialisme et autobiographie: Albert Memmi, Assia Djébar, Daniel Maximin* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998), 182.

64 Hadjerès, 'Quatre générations, deux cultures' (an essay first published in the communist journal *La Nouvelle Critique* in January 1960), reprinted in *Culture, indépendance et révolution en Algérie, 1880-1980* (Paris: Temps actuels, 1981), 19-56: 22-23.

than none.<sup>65</sup> Some commentators evinced greater respect for Islamic culture, though this was double-edged when it meant praising earlier Islamic cultures in order to denigrate Islam in its contemporary forms. Others who accepted or promoted the existence of the *médersas* believed that since in practice the truly desirable goal of stamping out Islamic and Arabic cultures entirely was, regrettably, out of the question, it was politically wise to keep some French involvement in that sphere.<sup>66</sup>

Mostefa Lacheraf's *Des noms et des lieux: mémoires d'une Algérie oubliée* offers a different, 'internal' perspective on the *médersas*' relationship to Islam and to colonial authority – specifically in the case of the *Médersa d'Alger*. Lacheraf led a remarkable life: born in 1917, he became a political activist as a young man and in due course a prominent figure in the FLN; he was travelling with Hocine Aït Ahmed, Ahmed Ben Bella, Mohamed Boudiaf and Mohamed Khider in 1956 when their flight from Morocco to Tunisia was intercepted by the French, and he spent most of the remainder of the war in French prisons, often in solitary confinement; then, after independence, he worked as a journalist, an ambassador and an educational advisor, serving briefly as Education Minister in 1977–78. He also published poetry, and numerous books and articles concerned with Algerian culture.<sup>67</sup> Earlier in life he attended French schools including the Grand Lycée (before it was baptized the Lycée Bugeaud), and he went on to become a teacher. But, unlike some of the other Algerian writers and teachers in this book, he

65 Jacques Simon in his essay 'L'École en Algérie (1830–1880)' (in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 12–22) compares literacy levels in Algeria around 1830 favourably with those in France, and notes that the conquest damaged severely the educational institutions – Quranic schools and *médersas* – that existed previously. He cites Tocqueville's comment of 1847: 'nous avons rendu la société musulmane plus ignorante et plus barbare qu'elle n'était avant de nous connaître' (18, 'we have made Muslim society more ignorant and barbaric than it was before it encountered us'). Not all of Simon's scholarship is reliable but here he is drawing on Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France*, and Turin, *Affrontements dans l'Algérie coloniale*.

66 For more examples see Kadri, 'Histoire du système d'enseignement', 33, and 'Médersiens et Normaliens: les présupposés de la formation des élites coloniales, l'échec du modèle bilingue', in Omar Lardjane (ed.), *Mostefa Lacheraf: une œuvre, un itinéraire, une référence* (Algiers: Casbah, 2006), 203–23.

67 A useful biobibliography is provided by Omar Lardjane in *Mostefa Lacheraf*, 283–97. Lacheraf's *Des noms et des lieux* was composed between August 1993 and January 1997 (as noted on its final page). Lacheraf died in 2007.



also pursued his Islamic education after he had left the Quranic school in his village. Living a socially isolated, austere and studious life at the Grand Lycée, he enrolled on his free days, Thursday and Sunday, in the *Chabiba* médersa, mainly with a view to improving his written Arabic. The school was directed by the celebrated poet Mohammad al-'Id Àl-Khalifa, included the historian Abderrahmane Djilali among its teachers, and was associated with 'la naissante mouvance culturelle uléma' ('the nascent cultural movement of the ulema').<sup>68</sup> Then, when his straitened personal circumstances forced him suddenly to leave the Grand Lycée, he started attending the *Tha'âlibiyya*, or Médersa d'Alger.

*Des noms et des lieux* is an odd mix of a book, part autobiographical, part essayistic. It is somewhat disjointed, and somewhat polemical. Besides offering diverse recollections of Lacheraf's life during the colonial era, it contains a series of discussions of authors and other figures who were important to him – particularly Arab writers but also writers from France, Europe and beyond (William Faulkner, for example), as well as teachers and painters. It strives to communicate his romanticized view of a fundamental 'Algerianness' or Algerian identity that, according to him, survived colonialism to a large degree, but had been undermined and distorted from the late colonial period onwards by Ba'athism and Islamism. For all its considerable erudition, and however well-founded some of his qualms about Ba'athism and Islamism, the book is not always a reliable guide to Algerian history; at the time he was writing, Lacheraf had contemporary political as well as historical reasons to discuss the *Tha'âlibiyya* and the comparable médersas in Constantine and Tlemcen almost exclusively in terms of a certain Arab intellectual tradition. Nonetheless, the colonial regime did support the *Tha'âlibiyya*; and Lacheraf's memories of the institution cast light on the institution's – and his own – particular relationship to Islam, the 'humanities', nationalism and colonialism.

Lacheraf studied at the *Tha'âlibiyya* for six years. Initially he was lodged and fed, very poorly, in a cold, uncomfortable building that was close to the lycée but separated from it by a not-merely-figurative 'gouffre', a chasm filled with intimidating plants, rats' nests and snakes (300). Whatever hardships he suffered in his lodgings, Lacheraf's description of the *Tha'âlibiyya* treats it as demonstrative of all that

68 Lacheraf, *Des noms et des lieux*, 260. On the ulema see James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

was best about Algeria, and of what Algeria, in his view, should be, or should have been, in the post-independence era. This is striking coming from someone known as a socialist and nationalist ideologue, and a fierce critic of French colonialism. Lacheraf promoted Arabic as the national language, and at one time worked as a teacher of Arabic. But he also argued consistently for the benefits of bilingualism, recognizing that his own mastery of French as well as Arabic helped him explore wide intellectual worlds and histories; and he endeavoured to promote French as an official language of post-independence Algeria.

To Lacheraf it seemed that the *Tha'âlibiyya* built on all that he had already learned from his colonial and Islamic schools and his own wide reading. His book talks admiringly about the institution's longstanding emphasis on what he calls '« humanités » ou « humanisme » littéraires arabes et maghrébins' (279, 'literary Arab/Arabic and Maghrebi "humanities" or "humanism"'), and about the intellectual trajectory of some of its eminent teachers, such as Mohammed ben Cheneb, who carried out groundbreaking philological work on Arabic after becoming interested in the history of the language while at Bouzaréah (277). He contrasts this approach favourably with the rote learning imposed in Quranic schools (a contrast also drawn by Djebar in the remark quoted earlier), or the Zitouna in Tunis (291), and lays stress on the school's high academic standards; he did not get through the entrance examination the first time he took it, and the tough exams at the end of each academic year meant that many students failed to progress. Subjects taught at the school included Malekite law, which was studied, according to Lacheraf, in the *médersa's* characteristic spirit of critical comparativism, and also French; and the students wrote essays in French on both French and Arab authors (296). Perhaps Lacheraf's account of all this is coloured by nostalgia, as well as by his opposition to a certain strain of 'Arabism' associated with dogged monolingualism. Nonetheless, he provides quite a convincing account of the sorts of intellectual independence these institutions embodied and that they fostered in their pupils.

Further support for this vision of the *médersas*, or of this particular *médersa*, can be found in Mohammed Harbi's memoir *Une vie debout: mémoires politiques*.<sup>69</sup> Harbi, who is one of the major historians of modern Algeria, also had a mixed Islamic and French education

69 Mohammed Harbi, *Une vie debout: mémoires politiques, Tome 1: 1945–1962* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001).

and became deeply involved in Algerian politics at a very young age. (It is tempting to say: and *on that basis* became deeply involved in Algerian politics at a very young age. He himself puts it in such terms – Chapter 1 ends: 'Je crois en tout cas qu'El-Arrouch doit à la profonde empreinte de son école d'être devenu par la suite un centre puissant de nationalisme. Des dizaines d'élèves, dans ce petit village, avaient suivi le cours secondaire' ('In any case, I believe that it is because of the profound impact made by its school that El-Arrouch, my home village, became an important centre for nationalism. Dozens of students from this little village went to secondary school'.)) He was born into a wealthy family in 1933 and his formal education began with him attending both a French school and a Quranic school. In that era, he says, 'L'école française n'était plus perçue comme une menace' (29, 'French schools were no longer seen as a threat'), and demand was high, especially in urban areas. (In rural areas additional impediments included the distances many children had to travel to reach a school, and the difficulty of finding and paying for lodgings for children whose nearest school was too distant to allow them to commute.) He pursued his studies of Arabic both privately and at his lycée, where most of his Arabic teachers were, he says, incompetent. The one exception, he notes, was a bilingual graduate of a médersa, and he adds: 'soyons juste, c'est au lycée que j'ai découvert la littérature arabe moderne' (26, 'to be fair, it was at the lycée that I discovered contemporary Arabic literature').

It was around the age of nine that Harbi himself started attending a médersa. There he learned about the history and geography of Algeria and the Muslim world, an experience he describes as deeply formative of the activist and historian he was to become. 'J'étais arabe et musulman,' he writes; 'Je devenais aussi algérien. Désormais, les leçons d'histoire de l'Algérie dispensées à l'école française devaient glisser sur moi comme l'eau glisse sur un cygne' (26–27, 'I was an Arab and a Muslim. I also became an Algerian. Henceforth, I let the history lessons on Algeria given at the French school wash over me like water off a duck's back'). So the médersa helped him see deficiencies in his French education, but his book has very positive things to say about the lycée too; and, like Lacheraf, he contrasts the intellectual stimulation of both lycée and médersa with the rote learning and general ethos of his Quranic school.<sup>70</sup> According to Lacheraf, the *Tha'âlibiyya* and its pupils were

70 Harbi also talks about the Scouts as a politicizing influence. Information

characterized by ‘maturité’ and ‘comportement réfléchi’ (‘maturity and thoughtful behaviour’), to the extent that some European teachers preferred it to the Grand Lycée: he cites the example of one Jean Garoby, *agrégé d’histoire*, who applied successfully to move from the lycée to the médersa in the 1920s.<sup>71</sup>

It was in this era too that the book *L’Algérie française vue par un indigène* appeared, whose ‘Lettre-Préface’ by Georges Marçais provided this chapter’s epigraph.<sup>72</sup> I quoted his disconcertingly light-hearted remarks about the tangle of opinions around ‘la question indigène’ partly because they capture something of the political and intellectual climate in which the history of colonial education in Algeria could take such unpredictable twists and turns. But I hoped too that readers might be struck to see a man with a name such as Georges Marçais writing in his capacity as Directeur de la Médersa de Tlemcen a decade after

about the history of Algerian Muslim Scouts and their involvement in the nationalist movement can be found on the organization’s website, <http://www.scouts-dz.org/> or, in English, <http://www.scouts-dz.org/en/scouts.php>.

71 Garoby was before Lacheraf’s time, but Lacheraf had a notable teacher in Max-Pol Fouchet, who had moved to Algeria as a child and counted Camus among his school friends (see Fouchet, *Un jour, je m’en souviens: mémoire parlée* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1968)). He played an important role in the French resistance and later became very well known in France as an arts broadcaster, art historian and author. Part of his reputation rested on his vocal opposition to colonialism, a position that meant estrangement from Camus (see *Fontaines de mes jours* (Paris: Stock, 1979), 38). At the *Tha’âlibiyya* Fouchet taught art history, inculcating in his students a love of eighteenth-century painting, and geography and history, including the history of the Maghreb. At that time, however, he was no critic of colonialism; Lacheraf recalls challenging Fouchet in class, with the support of fellow students, over his colonial take on North African history, and also recalls being thanked publicly for this by an older, anti-colonial Fouchet in around 1967 (*Des noms et des lieux*, 281).

72 Marçais was an Orientalist specializing in the art and architecture of the Maghreb. As Benhabîlès explains in the ‘Avant-propos’, the second half of the book, entitled ‘La Guerre à l’ignorance’, consists of his French translations of lectures given by Mohammed El-Mouloud Benmouhoub, ‘muphti malekite et professeur de philosophie musulmane à la Médersa de Constantine’. The book is given as an example of an ‘assimilated’ mentality by Pervillé in *Les Étudiants algériens*, and for good reason: in the contributions from both Benhabîlès and Benmouhoub there is much that smacks of colonial propaganda, and what we might now see as cultural self-hatred. Nonetheless, Benmouhoub identifies civilization with (his notion of) Islam, and speaks in favour of education in Arabic as well as French.

French law separated churches from the state. Unless one is already familiar with the detail of educational history in Algeria there is something quite shocking about finding a twentieth-century French/colonial educationalist in such a position, speaking proudly of how the particular *indigène* to whose book he was contributing, Chérif Benhabilès, had been 'formé dans nos lycées et dans nos médersas' ('trained in our lycées and our médersas'). The 'nos' ('our') draws in – with what degree of self-consciousness, it is now impossible to say – the French readers to whom his remarks are addressed. On one level, of course, this is simply an example, from well into Ferry's era of *laïcité*, of colonial hypocrisy and inconsistency. But on another level, the particular educational experiences of people such as Lacheraf and Harbi, whose lives as anti-colonial intellectuals were shaped by these inconsistencies, are some of the most striking illustrations of the general point on which I have been insisting: what happened inside these anomalous 'colonial' structures cannot be reduced to the work of colonialism.

### The bottom line

The historian Aïssa Kadri is among those to have challenged recently what may be considered the standard historiographical view of colonial education in Algeria, which held that 'native' Algerians generally distrusted and avoided French schooling up to 1883, but warmed to it increasingly after that. (It was in 1881 in France that Jules Ferry as *Ministre de l'instruction publique* introduced laws establishing free and obligatory primary schooling; and it was in 1883 that those laws were in principle extended to Algeria.) Kadri, in his essay 'Histoire du système d'enseignement colonial en Algérie', rejects this narrative on the grounds that it implies a serious commitment to education from the French authorities, a commitment they never really had. On this issue, Lacheraf was certainly an influence on Kadri: repeatedly in his work Lacheraf argued: 'On nous a dit qu'on nous avait imposé l'usage du français. Le croire tout bonnement, sans procéder à la moindre analyse, reviendrait à accorder un préjugé favorable au colonialisme, dans un pays qui compte près de 85% d'analphabètes bien qu'il soit resté pendant 130 ans en contact direct avec la langue française' ('We are told that the use of French was imposed upon us. To adopt this simplistic view, without pausing for any analysis, is to give undeserved credit to colonialism in a country where, after 130 years of direct contact with the

French language, almost 85% of the population were illiterate').<sup>73</sup> In *Des noms et des lieux* he wrote: 'Pour ce qui est des générations précédentes dont la nôtre héritait quant à l'ancrage profond dans une Algérie algérienne, comme pour les autres générations jusqu'à la fin de la guerre de libération nationale, la « déculturation » telle que décrite plus tard et jusqu'à nos jours, n'existait pratiquement pas' (22, 'As for the previous generations, whose profound rootedness in an Algerian Algeria our generation inherited, and as for every generation up until the end of the war of national liberation, the "erosion of culture" as it was described later, and that people still talk about today, scarcely took place').

Highly literate in two languages though he may have been, and a graduate of colonial Algeria's finest educational establishments, when Lacheraf spoke of French colonial reluctance to educate and to share knowledge he was speaking from personal experience. While a pupil at the Grand Lycée in 1933–34 he used to go regularly to the municipal library, where he gravitated towards works such as *La Faillite politique et morale de l'Europe en Orient* by Ahmed Réza, a Turkish political scientist, or Gustave Lebon's *La Civilisation des Arabes*. He heard the director of the library telling someone on the phone, in a tone that implied he was stating the obvious, that library books lent to hospitals should be kept away from the 'natives'; and, assuming that the director's remarks were in fact addressed in part to him, he stopped going to that library, and tried the *Bibliothèque nationale* instead. But there the situation turned out to be even worse: he was repeatedly told the books he wanted, or had already spent a day reading, had been sent away for rebinding (48–49).

One of Lacheraf's aims in his book, as I have noted already, was to criticize a version of history and of cultural politics pushed in Algeria, in the decades after the war, by 'arabisants' and 'intégristes' (51). But his criticisms certainly also concerned the French, especially the *colons*, the theme that Kadri pursues. Kadri concludes that 'l'œuvre scolaire coloniale a eu un faible impact en Algérie [...] [O]n peut sans forcer les faits déceler un invariant à l'ensemble des politiques scolaires en

73 Lacheraf, 'Réflexions sociologiques sur le nationalisme et la culture en Algérie', first published March 1964 in *Les Temps Modernes*, reprinted in *L'Algérie: nation et société* (Paris: Maspéro, 1965), 313–46: 313. Kamel Kateb provides comparative statistics on schooling in Algeria, France and other countries (*École, population et société en Algérie*, 26–27), noting that by the end of the the Second World War all European children in Algeria were or had been in education – lagging about 50 years behind metropolitan France in that respect.

ce qu'elles ont toutes toujours tenté de ne pas impliquer massivement les Algériens et en tous les cas jamais au-delà d'un seuil minimal d'éducation' ('Colonial education had a limited impact in Algeria [...] We can, without distorting the facts, say that all education policies set out to avoid schooling Algerians on a mass scale, and never beyond a basic level of education').<sup>74</sup> This explains why the extended educational experiences of the highly literate francophone Algerian writers on whom this book focuses were, as I have already stressed, atypical; as Lacheraf underlined when talking of approximately 85 per cent illiteracy, the proportion of indigenous children achieving literacy, let alone proceeding beyond primary education, remained pitifully small right to the end of the colonial period. A tiny proportion of the colonial government's budget went into education, and the funding per head for colonized children was very significantly lower than for Europeans.<sup>75</sup> Kadri estimates that in 1943 only about 10 per cent of Algerian 6- to 14-year-olds were in French schools, and even by the start of the war of independence, after a period during which more resources had been put into education and there had been some new initiatives to eliminate barriers between education for Europeans and for the colonized, no more than around 15 per cent of school-age Muslim children were in school – a figure that correlates with Lacheraf's.

It is also worth emphasizing that the situation was substantially worse for girls than for boys: in 1954, overall female illiteracy stood at 98 per cent, with about 10.7 per cent of girls in school.<sup>76</sup> Fadhma Amrouche

74 Kadri, 'Histoire du système d'enseignement', 25. He is inclined nevertheless to attribute a relatively high degree of coherence and control to colonial educational policy; too high a degree, according to my analysis. By the same token, Lacheraf's phrase about 'contact direct' seems misleading: for many Algerians, there was no real contact at all. See also Kadri, 'Médersiens et Normaliens': that essay is partly about Lacheraf, but differs significantly from Lacheraf in its assessment of the work of the médersas and their relation to colonialism.

75 Kateb, *Le Système éducatif dans l'Algérie coloniale*, 32–33. The level of funding increased towards the end of the colonial period, but its effect was lessened by increases in the size of Algeria's population.

76 Neil MacMaster gives this figure in *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women, 1954–62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 155. His book does not give a lot of space to education, but it is enlightening in relation to other issues around the (non-) 'assimilation' of Algerian women under colonialism. The most recent and comprehensive source for statistics is Kateb, *Le Système éducatif dans l'Algérie coloniale*.

(mother of two writers I have mentioned already and will return to later, Jean and Taos Amrouche) touches on this issue in her memoir. She portrays the nuns responsible for her first, negative educational experiences as sadists; but after that trauma she had the opportunity to go to a new school in Taddert-ou-Fella, where she passed her *certificat d'études* in 1892. She recalls that primary education was compulsory for 'native' boys at this point – the fathers of absentees could be given three days in prison – 'Mais, pour les filles, on n'imposa rien d'analogue, hélas !' ('But for girls, no such rule was imposed, alas!'). The juxtaposition of 'imposer' and 'hélas' is striking. She went on: 'Il n'y eut jamais d'enseignement laïque pour les filles, en dehors de notre propre école, laquelle ne devait malheureusement pas tarder à fermer' ('A secular education was never offered to girls, beyond our own school, which was soon shut down, unfortunately').<sup>77</sup>

A certain strand of colonial propaganda always presented all of this quite differently, of course, above all in terms of the putative general educational ethos of the *mission civilisatrice*, and also more specifically in terms of *laïcité* and gender equality. I mentioned earlier that literacy statistics had been used to deceive Jules Ferry as *Ministre de l'instruction publique* about levels of schooling among Algerians. Roques and Donnadiou, after noting the continuation of Quranic education under colonialism in the Maghreb, said that it was complemented by 'un enseignement populaire destiné au plus grand nombre. Celui-là existe partout, même dans les pays de civilisation récente, comme l'Afrique' (223, 'a general education programme designed to reach as many students as possible. That exists everywhere, even in countries where civilization is relatively new, such as in Africa'). Looking now at colonialism's educational achievements in Africa, one has to conclude not only, with Kadri and others, that colonial education was never really pursued so widely and vigorously, and certainly not consistently, but also that colonial propaganda commanded less authority than we may now assume, both in the colonies and in France.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps, then, those

77 Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche, *Histoire de ma vie* ([1968] Paris: La Découverte and Syros, 2000), 38.

78 It seems symptomatic that Roques and Donnadiou's book, commissioned in 1938 by the French Colonial Office to hymn the virtues of the French empire, sold very poorly, although it had been timed to appear before the 'France Overseas' exhibition that opened on 1 May 1940: only 700 copies were bought by the general public, besides the 3000 bought by the Colonial Office itself. (Admittedly, the start



today who, hostile to colonialism, tend to see colonial education simply as a servant and tool of colonialism have been paradoxically too swayed by colonial propaganda, as Lacheraf suggested; and there is no doubt that propaganda is one of the things that makes it hard to see accurately what the 'civilizing mission' really meant, and did, in the realm of colonial education, where a remarkable variety of attitudes, practices and degrees of good and bad faith were in play. In this chapter I have drawn attention to the variety and inconsistency as such, and I have also wanted to show that in the colonial era similar educational policies could be promoted from very different political starting points, while similar political starting points could lead to, or coexist with, drastically different attitudes towards education. Some of the individuals and 'discourses' I have mentioned were broadly, as one might expect, pro-colonial and in favour of colonial education, or anti-colonial and hostile to colonial education; but others were pro-colonial and hostile to colonial education; and others again were anti-colonial and/yet in favour of colonial education.

My aim has not been to weigh up the changing fortunes and relative influence and peculiar intersections of these different tendencies. Instead, my hope has been that all that is disorientating and unfamiliar about this history may prompt readers to re-examine their own as-it-were spontaneous reactions to the kinds of historical story I have sketched out. If we feel that the half-heartedness and inconsistency of colonial education is to be condemned, how far might that imply that colonial education should have been pursued more systematically? In what senses, and for whom, might this have been better, or worse? For the colonial authorities? For the *colons*? The colonized? Berber or Arab boys? Muslim girls? And what are we inclined to consider the right attitude to questions of assimilation and adaptation, broadly understood, in the past or in the present? Yes, there was something absurd about colonial textbooks that offered Muslim children in Algiers, say, stories about weekends in French country houses or about collecting logs in the snow at Christmas. But it should be remembered too that, as we saw earlier,

of the Second World War cannot have helped sales.) For an essay that attributes greater efficiency to colonial propaganda, including the major colonial exhibitions, see Sandrine Lemaire, 'Creating the Colonial (1930–1940)' in Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel and Dominic Thomas (eds), *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, trans. Alexis Pernsteiner (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 257–67.

'adapted' materials could also be out of place: children in the mountains of Kabylie were not necessarily familiar with the chechia, though they were familiar with snow. Of course there is an issue here about the scale or scope of adaptation, but resolving that issue in general terms is far from simple. What we might reasonably see as misadaptation or insufficient adaptation in that instance is not only a matter of colonialism's 'coloniality' or cultural insensitivity, or of good intentions gone awry, as there are deeper issues of principle. We are bound to have misgivings about the restrictive norms or fantasies that were projected through the syllabus, but we still need to grapple with the complex range of ideological motivations that could have moved some colonial educators to display a certain level of indifference to the identities of their pupils (their 'gender' identities, their 'ethnic' identities, and so on), and to believe – as at least some truly did – that all those pupils could benefit from their teaching. And what is more, some of those pupils went on to sustain that belief, even if they became vehemently opposed to colonialism.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Teaching in a Time of Crisis

Grève des écoles. Il fallait s'y attendre avec la politique de pacification conduite comme elle le fut en Kabylie.

Est-ce la haine? ... C'en est le commencement.

Ali Hammoutene, 1956<sup>1</sup>

La continuité des petits devoirs toujours bien remplis, ne demande pas moins de force que les actions héroïques ... et il vaut mieux avoir toujours l'estime des hommes que quelquefois leur admiration.

Epigraph from Jean-Jacques Rousseau in first edition of Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* (1950)<sup>2</sup>

The work of 'instituteurs du bled' during the colonial era – that is, primary school teachers working in remote rural locations, often on their own – has gathered a mythic aura in certain strands of French culture. That aura swirls around Albert Camus's story 'L'Hôte' of 1957: its central figure is

<sup>1</sup> 'Schools are on strike. That was to be expected, given the policy of 'pacification' in Kabylie. | Is it hatred? ... That's the way we're heading.' Ali Hammoutene, *Réflexions sur la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Publisud/SNED, 1982), 98.

<sup>2</sup> 'The continued faithful fulfilment of small duties requires no less strength of mind than do acts of heroism [...] and it is infinitely better to enjoy the esteem of one's fellow men all of the time than their admiration some of the time.'

This epigraph comes at the start of 'Le Fils aîné' ('The Elder Son') in the 1950 edition of Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, III, E79. Rousseau's remark (with very slightly different wording) can be found in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond and Robert Osmond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 91; *Confessions*, trans. Angela Scholar (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2000), 89.

a teacher, Daru, ‘qui vivait presque en moine’ in an ‘école perdue, content d’ailleurs du peu qu’il avait’ (83, ‘living almost like a monk in his remote schoolhouse [...] content with the little he had’, 44). He is dedicated to his work and apparently respected by his pupils.<sup>3</sup> The story of Jean Simonet, the teacher I quoted in the last chapter when discussing ‘adaptation’, also corresponds to the most positive, even heroic version of the myth, at least to start with: he recalled that the mountain village of Ait Aicha where he was given his first post after finishing at Bouzaréah did not appear on any of the maps he consulted, so he simply set off for roughly the right region, then asked around until someone could give him directions. On the last leg of his journey he was met by a mule train organized by the villagers, who somehow knew he was coming, and were pleased to see him arrive. This was in 1954; they had been petitioning for a school since 1938, and it had eventually been built in 1952. For Simonet the village was a very unfamiliar environment, far from anyone he knew, so from time to time he would travel to the town of Azazga to seek European company. Once he was invited by a French administrator to stay overnight on a Sunday to play bridge, but he declined, saying he should get back to the village to be ready for his pupils in the morning. The administrator responded with surprise: ‘Vous y allez tout le temps là-haut ? Vous êtes communiste ?’ (‘You go up there all the time, do you? Are you a communist?’). Simonet remarks: ‘Ce qui veut dire qu’il suffisait d’en faire un peu, parce que leur pensée c’était « le jour où ils apprendront, ils nous mettront dehors ! »’ (33, ‘Which was to say that if you made any effort they were suspicious, their mindset being: “the day they start learning about things, they’ll kick us out!”’). Simonet’s description of this mindset implies that there was a strong anti-educational consensus in the French/settler community, and that half-hearted work from colonial teachers and administrators was not unusual, but it also shows that there were those, like Simonet, who worked in difficult circumstances with real commitment, whatever their political perspective.<sup>4</sup> Simonet’s efforts seem to have been appreciated

3 Page numbers refer to the widely available 1957 Gallimard Folio edition of *L’Exil et le royaume*, and *Exile and the Kingdom*, trans. Carol Cosman (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2006). The notes in the Pléiade edition cite Roger Quilliot’s assertion that Camus had the idea for ‘L’Hôte’ before the start of the war in November 1954 (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4, (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 1348–49).

4 Simonet interview in Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 28–39. Another former teacher interviewed by Ghouati, Norbert Boj, who spent seven years from 1949 in Oran teaching a *classe d’initiation* (CI), was told when he started that there

by the villagers, who organized an armed guard for him when the war started, soon after he had arrived. But he was not able to stay outside the conflict, any more than could Daru; by the end of 1955, Simonet's school had been burned to the ground.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter will explore further the ability of colonial education to divide and redivide opinion, and to take on diverse forms and different political valencies. Whereas the previous chapter ranged across the colonial period and paid particular attention to colonial educational policy, with all its variations and inconsistencies, this chapter will be centrally concerned with the writings and experiences of a single figure, Mouloud Feraoun (though other writers he knew, including Albert Camus and Jean Amrouche, appear in the cast). As I have already emphasized, it was very uncommon for a child from a rural colonial background such as Feraoun's to proceed beyond primary education, so his life story was atypical in relation to those among whom he grew up; yet, in the small, relatively elite group of colonized subjects who enjoyed the greatest educational success, it was common to take the path Feraoun took in training to teach in a colonial primary school.

Feraoun's decision to become a teacher may be explained partly by constraints on other possible careers, including that of writer, but I will suggest that it should also be understood in terms of his conception

was insufficient space in the school, and that some classes would be half-time; so the plan was to accommodate all the Europeans, then fill up empty spaces with Algerians, without increasing class size. The headteacher explained: 'car de toutes les façons nous les instruisons et cela se retourne contre nous' (116, 'because in any case we teach them and that ends up working against us'); not one of his colleagues reacted to this, according to Boj. Alexis Artaud de La Ferrière discusses 'a series of maps depicting the distribution of communist teachers across Northern Algeria', distributed within the army in December 1954: 'Stuck in the Middle with You: The Political Position of Teachers during the Algerian War of Independence', *Landscapes of Violence* 3:3 (2015), Article 2, 3–5.

5 The village where Jean Simonet worked had little contact with colonialism until the school was installed, and he implies that the school played a role indirectly in provoking a massacre early in the war (Simonet interview in Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 34–35). Troops in the village were attacked by the Algerian *maquisards*; then paratroopers came in and shot all the male villagers aged 30 to 70. Simonet had left by the time the school burned and he had not been replaced, which made him think the fire was the work of the ALN. He recounts too that a man named Dahmani, whom he describes as 'le chef du village' (36, 'the head of the village'), and who supported Simonet when the war started, had his house burned twice, once by the French, once by those fighting the French.

of education. As we shall see, Feraoun remained committed to that work, and even to what we might call, after Said, a certain notion of the ‘sacrosanct’ classroom, throughout the war of independence. He did so in the face of formidable pressures to do otherwise, and while enjoying significant success as a novelist. The question at the heart of this chapter is how far or in what sense his commitment to education may be exemplary or instructive. Among other things I will explore the ways that Feraoun justified to himself his work as a teacher, but what may matter more for the purposes of this book are the justifications that *we* may wish to project into his situation, or to rule out: the justifications for someone such as Feraoun not joining the FLN, not fighting, and continuing to teach.

The Algerian war was an acute and terrible crisis by any standards, far from comparable with anything I discussed earlier in relation to a ‘crisis in the humanities’. The repetition of the word ‘crisis’ across such disparate contexts could appear tasteless. My hope, nonetheless, is that the extremity of the situation faced directly by Feraoun sharpens questions that concern, or might concern, all of *us*, if less directly (and not only because, if one takes a global view of politics, poverty and war, all eras could be described as eras of crisis). Or perhaps, to avoid assuming too much about ‘us’, I should say it sharpens questions that concern someone like me, even if my own immediate professional and personal circumstances are basically safe and comfortable. In Feraoun’s situation, unlike mine, staying in education took great courage, even heroism, which is part of what makes his story compelling. But, as this chapter will show, the anti-heroic aspect of Feraoun’s stance may be a fundamental part of its importance, both in relation, quite specifically, to the Algerian war, on which his *Journal 1955–1962* casts a clear, grim light, and in relation to wider conceptions of the relationship between education and politics.<sup>6</sup> The journal, as we will see, could be described as ‘speaking truth to power’, to echo another phrase from Said, and one

6 Feraoun, *Journal 1955–1962* (Paris: Seuil, 1962); *Journal 1955–1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, ed. and intro. James D. Le Sueur, trans. Mary Ellen Wolf and Claude Fouillade (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). Le Sueur’s introduction (ix–xlviii) gives a good summary of Feraoun’s career, and also of the Algerian war of independence. Useful biographical sketches of Feraoun and several of the other writers I discuss are provided in Christiane Chaulet Achour and Corinne Blanchaud (eds), *Dictionnaire des écrivains francophones classiques* (Paris: Champion, 2010).

that, as I suggested earlier, seems to have had a significant influence on the notion of the teacher–intellectual in postcolonial studies and other politicized fields of the humanities. Indeed, the journal itself could be seen as a heroic project: it was written secretly and if it had been discovered during a raid on his school it could have placed Feraoun’s life at risk. What is more, it is evident from Feraoun’s actions, as well as from the journal itself and from Feraoun’s correspondence, that he always intended to publish it, although publication incurred the same risk. But the journal also reveals his struggles to persist with his daily tasks as a teacher in a village primary school, a sort of work that does not usually or by its nature involve ‘speaking truth to power’. In this way, Feraoun’s story provides an opportunity to think again about the role of the teacher – in colonialism, and also today – as distinct from the role of the intellectual or activist.<sup>7</sup>

### From cradle to grave

Mouloud Feraoun was born in 1913 in Tizi Hibel, a village in Kabylie. Aged six he started to learn French at school; later, a bursary along with accommodation offered by missionaries allowed him to become one of those very rare colonized children to proceed beyond primary education and, in due course, aged 19, to go to the teacher training college in Bouzaréah. In 1936 he returned to his home region to take up his first post as an *instituteur*.

When Feraoun began writing a few years later, one of his sources of inspiration was Camus. The inspiration was both direct and indirect, as Feraoun made clear. On one level, Camus provoked negative reactions from Feraoun, and some sort of desire to set the record straight: in a letter to Camus in May 1951 he criticized *La Peste* for its lack of ‘native’ characters; then, in a subsequent journal article of 1957 on Algerian literature, he argued that it was significant that the man killed

7 I see an affiliation of sorts between my approach to Feraoun and Gary Wilder’s approach to Aimé Césaire. Wilder, inspired partly by David Scott’s criticism of narratives of heroic resistance in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), says his aim is ‘to challenge the tendency to treat projects for nonnational colonial emancipation as inherently reactionary’. Wilder, ‘Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia’, *Public Culture* 21:1 (2009), 101–40.

by Meursault in *L'Étranger* was an 'Arab', and that it was implausible for Meursault, a European in Algeria, to be condemned to death for killing an Arab.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Feraoun was grateful for certain forms of attention and respect accorded to Algeria by Camus and other writers of his generation, such as Emmanuel Roblès, Marcel Moussy, Jules Roy and Gabriel Audisio (and, before them, writers including Robert Randau).<sup>9</sup> In that same article on Algerian literature he wrote: 'La voie a été tracée par ceux qui ont rompu avec un orient de pacotille pour décrire une humanité moins belle et plus vraie, une terre moins chatoyante mais plus riche de sève nourricière, des hommes qui luttent et souffrent, et sont les répliques exactes de ceux que nous voyons autour de nous' (54, 'The way ahead has been shown by those who rejected a cheap, vulgar Orient in order to depict people who are less picturesque but more authentic, a land that sparkles less but that is richer in nourishing lifeblood; men who fight and suffer, and who are the exact replicas of those we see around us'). (The positive connotation of 'luttent', fight, is striking in this historical context.) This explains the gratitude to Camus that he also expressed in the letter of 1951: 'Si je parvenais un jour à m'exprimer sereinement, je le devrais à votre livre – à vos livres qui m'ont appris à me connaître puis à découvrir les autres et à constater qu'ils me ressemblent' ('If ever I were able to express myself serenely, I would have your book to thank for it. Your books have taught me to know myself and have allowed me to discover other people, whose resemblance to myself I now see'). Much later another Algerian writer, Mammeri, would remind readers – insisting on how easy it was to forget – that when Feraoun began writing, despite the work of the early 'Algerianist' authors, it

8 See Feraoun, *Lettres à ses amis* ([1969] Algiers: Bouchène, 1991, 2nd edition), 204; and 'La Littérature algérienne', *Revue française* [Paris] 3rd trimester 1957, reprinted in *L'Anniversaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 53–58: 55. In his letter of 25 July 1956 to Camus, Jean Grenier said that he liked 'L'Hôte' but that one – unspecified – thing bothered him, adding: 'mais il se peut qu'il soit personnel et extra-littéraire' (Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance 1932–1960*, ed. Marguerite Dobrenn (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 206, 'but it may be personal and extraliterary', *Correspondence, 1932–1960*, trans. Jan F. Rigaud (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 173). Grenier had been an inspirational teacher for Camus at the Grand Lycée (later known as the Lycée Bugeaud); Rigaud explains that Grenier thought that Arabs in Camus's work were often 'passive and silent characters' (248).

9 For a detailed discussion of this generation of writers see Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).



still took courage for a ‘native’ Algerian to treat the stories of ordinary Algerians as worth telling.<sup>10</sup>

Feraoun wrote the bulk of his first novel, *Le Fils du pauvre*, between 1939 and 1944, completing it in 1948. It remains his best-known work. The protagonist and part-time narrator is a teacher called Fouroulou Menrad (a scrambling of Mouloud Feraoun). Feraoun’s initial approaches to publishers were unsuccessful; among those to reject him was Jean Amrouche, another Kabyle francophone writer, who at that time was literary director at Éditions Charlot. That rejection left its mark, as I will explain later. Feraoun decided to publish 1000 copies of the book at his own expense, and it appeared in 1950, with a subtitle imposed by the publisher: ‘Menrad, instituteur kabyle’. The novel went on to win the *grand prix littéraire de la Ville d’Alger* later that year. In his acceptance speech Feraoun said that his success was a tribute to ‘l’École française d’Algérie’ (‘the French schools of Algeria’).<sup>11</sup> He was the first ‘native’ to win the prize, and *Le Fils du pauvre* started to attract significant attention. That led to a second, revised edition of the novel in 1954 with the prestigious Parisian house Seuil.<sup>12</sup> The blurb on the new edition said:

10 Mammeri, ‘Mouloud Feraoun: La Voix de Fouroulou’, preface for ENAG 1988 re-issue of *La Terre et le sang*; reproduced in Berrichi, *Mouloud Feraoun*, 8–10. Mammeri, another teacher–writer who trained at Bouzaréah, published his own first novel, *La Colline oubliée*, in 1952 (Paris: Plon).

11 The speech is included as an annex in Achour, *Mouloud Feraoun*, 99–100. See also Marie-Hélène Chèze, *Mouloud Feraoun, la voix et le silence* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 40.

12 The first French edition is a rarity; the second version is the one that has circulated widely, and is the edition to which I refer in general; however, I have given page references to the 2005 English translation (which is a translation of the 1950 version) if the quoted phrase appears in both versions. Minor differences between the two editions – which are discussed at length by Martine Mathieu-Job in *Le Fils du pauvre de Mouloud Feraoun, ou la fabrique d’un classique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), 17–49 – include the omission of the first edition’s subtitle and the replacement of the epigraph drawn from Rousseau, which Feraoun used at the start of the section called ‘Le Fils aîné’ and which I used at the head of this chapter, with a quotation from Michelet saying he was now proud of the poverty that once made him feel ashamed. The major difference is that the revised version is shorter and stops earlier in Fouroulou’s life. In his introduction to the English translation, Le Sueur observes (partly on the basis of some unpublished correspondence) that there is ‘no evidence to prove that the novel was censored for political content’ (xxvii). As he acknowledges, however, at least some of the cuts may have been made in light of political sensitivities: the omitted material includes material on French

‘Mouloud Feraoun était destiné à devenir berger. Il a eu plus de chance que la plupart de ses camarades, nous dit-il. Il a pu étudier, conquérir un diplôme, arracher les siens à la gêne. C’est comme pour s’excuser de cette chance qu’il a écrit ce livre’ (‘Mouloud Feraoun was destined to become a shepherd. He has been luckier than most of his friends, he tells us, being able to study, to win qualifications and to lift his family out of poverty. In writing this book it is as if he were seeking forgiveness for this good luck’) – which was patronizing, but perhaps not entirely wrong. By this time his second novel, *La Terre et le sang*, had also appeared, and in 1957 he published a third novel, *Les Chemins qui montent*.

In the meantime he had begun writing his journal. As I mentioned just now, Feraoun always intended to publish it, preferably before the war was over, and he set publication in process in 1962. The first entry was dated 1 November 1955, All Saints’ Day in the Christian calendar – exactly a year after the start of the war of independence, as we would see it now; but this was before anyone could be sure it *was* the ‘war of independence’, long before the war’s end was in sight, and before the dates that would appear in history books had been settled. Initially most of the writing in the journal was retrospective, and at times essayistic, but soon it became more diary-like.<sup>13</sup> The very first page sets a desolate tone, beginning with a phrase in quotation marks: ‘« Il pleut sur la ville »’ (“It is raining on the city”). Verlaine is not mentioned, but the phrase tacitly summons up the melancholic opening of one of

discrimination towards Algerians, on Vichy France, on the appalling conditions of poverty in hunger in Kabylie at the time and on some Algerians’ sympathetic interest in Hitler. It may also have been because of political sensitivities that Feraoun made an unmarked cut to the Michelet quotation: the epigraph in the Seuil edition reads: ‘Aujourd’hui cette indigence, fièrement, noblement supportée par les miens fait ma gloire. Alors, elle me semblait une honte et je la cachais de mon mieux. Terrible respect humain!’ (103, ‘Today that poverty, endured proudly and nobly by my family, is a badge of honour. At the time, I thought it shameful, and hid it as best I could. The curse of human respectability!’); the first sentence of the original reads: ‘Aujourd’hui, cette indigence née de la persécution, fièrement, noblement supportée par les miens, fait ma gloire’ – that is, blaming his poverty on persecution (Jules Michelet, *Ma Jeunesse* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884), 118, my italics). The persecution in question was Napoleon’s restriction of press freedom.

13 Najiba Regaïeg, in ‘Journal de Mouloud Feraoun. Journal intime, chronique d’une guerre ou chronique d’une mort pressente’ [sic] (in Berrichi, *Mouloud Feraoun*, 81–96), suggests that the use of the word ‘Journal’ in the title was suggested by Roblès, and is misleading, because of the text’s essayistic and literary qualities. Nonetheless, Feraoun himself refers to it as a ‘journal’ within the text.

his more famous poems: ‘Il pleure dans mon cœur | Comme il pleut sur la ville’ (‘Like city’s rain, my heart | Rains teardrops too. [...]’).<sup>14</sup> That first entry alludes to the breakdown of communication among ‘chrétiens’ (Christians) and ‘musulmans’ (Muslims), ‘« les Français »’ and ‘les « Kabyles »’, and ends: ‘Jour des morts, jour de deuil, jour des vivants silencieux comme des morts, des visages fermés comme les tombes !’ (12, ‘Day of the dead, day of mourning, day of the living who – like the dead – are silent, their faces beyond reach, like impenetrable graves’, 12).

Feraoun’s other publications included a number of essays in journals and the anthology *Les Poèmes de Si Mohand* of 1960. Si Mohand was a Kabyle poet born in the mid-nineteenth century, who appreciated the accomplishments of the French but wanted to protect and sustain his own culture – an attitude Feraoun clearly admired. The anthology added another dimension to Feraoun’s own efforts to preserve and dignify Kabyle culture, which was little known outside Kabyle society before it began to be recorded and promoted in the mid-twentieth century. Jean Amrouche was a significant figure in this respect, publishing a groundbreaking anthology, *Chants berbères de Kabylie*, in 1939, as was his younger sister Taos, a successful novelist, broadcaster and singer who made recordings of many Berber songs.<sup>15</sup> Mammeri edited, translated and introduced another edition of Si Mohand’s work in 1969.<sup>16</sup> Feraoun noted in his introduction to *Les Poèmes de Si Mohand* that it was remarkable that Si Mohand’s work was still remembered and celebrated, given that the people of Kabylie were illiterate, that the Kabyle language

14 This translation is by Norman R. Shapiro, *One Hundred and One Poems by Paul Verlaine: A Bilingual Edition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 78, 79. Verlaine’s poem itself has a similar epigraph: ‘Il pleut doucement sur la ville’ (‘The rain falls gently on the town’). Shapiro explains: ‘The epigraph attributed to Rimbaud has never been found in his works and is presumed to be lost’ (272).

15 Réjane Le Baut’s biography, *Jean El-Mouhoub Amrouche: Algérien universel. Biographie* (Châtenay Malabry: Alteredit, 2003) offers a helpful summary of published work collecting Berber poetry before the mid-twentieth century (the earliest dating from 1867), 138–39. Fadhma Amrouche, mother of Jean and Taos, from whom I quoted earlier, played a role in this, especially through her love of Berber music, but her memoir, *Histoire de ma vie*, was published only later, in 1968.

16 Mammeri (ed. and trans.), *Les Isefra: poèmes de Si Mohand-ou-mhand* (Paris: Maspéro, 1972). Mammeri’s edition was bilingual, with the original poems presented in parallel, transcribed into the Roman alphabet.

was not usually written<sup>17</sup> and that ‘l’homme instruit qui s’est mis à l’école de l’Occident’ – someone like Feraoun or Jean Amrouche, in other words – ‘se voit forcé, au prix de renoncements successifs, de se soumettre aux exigences d’une civilisation sûre de sa supériorité et destructrice de traditions’ (‘the educated man who has been through a Western school is obliged to undergo a series of renunciations, to give in to the demands of a civilization that is sure of its superiority and destructive of other traditions’).<sup>18</sup> If Feraoun himself was in a position to fight against cultural destruction it was partly, he said, because other people in Algerian society had been little changed by French colonialism, having had little contact with it: women, *paysans*, people in villages. Si Mohand’s poetry, Feraoun wrote (33) – again presumably thinking of himself in the twentieth century as well as Si Mohand in the nineteenth – offered ‘un miroir où se reflète l’âme de son pays, d’une génération en désarroi, brutalement arrachée aux traditions’ (‘a mirror in which is reflected his land’s soul, the soul of a generation in turmoil, brutally separated from its traditions’). Throughout his life, for all that he was changed by French education, Feraoun remained deeply attached to the culture of Kabylie.

Feraoun held a succession of posts in small Kabyle villages between the start of his career in the mid-1930s and 1952, when he moved to Fort-National (now called Larbaâ Nath Irathen) to become a *directeur d’école* – partly, according to one of his biographers, to advance the education of his eldest daughter.<sup>19</sup> He was unhappy when a combination of personal, professional and political circumstances obliged him to

17 As Marie-Hélène Chèze notes (*Mouloud Feraoun*, 8), among Berber speakers only the Touaregs used Tifnagh, the script used to write the Berber languages.

18 Feraoun, *Les Poèmes de Si Mohand* (Algiers: Bouchène, 1989), 9; first published in Paris by Minuit, 1960. The Freudian resonance of ‘renoncement’ reminds me of Jane Hiddleston’s analysis in *Decolonising the Intellectual: Politics, Culture, and Humanism at the End of the French Empire* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 159, of a passing remark by Tassadit Yacine that Jean Amrouche suffered from ‘malaise dans la civilisation’. The phrase is an allusion to the French title for *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930), known in English as *Civilization and its Discontents*. This suggests another way in which ‘francophone’ writers who went through French schools could be taken as extreme (and, of course, quite specific) examples of some more general educational/cultural process; Amrouche (like Freud) championed European ‘civilization’, even though he felt that becoming and remaining ‘civilized’ exacted a considerable psychic cost.

19 Jack Gleyze, *Mouloud Feraoun* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1990), 68.

move again, to Algiers, in 1957. He ended up, from October 1960, based in the suburbs of Algiers, working as an Inspector (*Inspecteur chargé de la pédagogie dans les milieux ruraux*) for the *Centres sociaux éducatifs* (CSEs, Educational Social Centres). His colleagues included Ali Hammoutene, another graduate of Bouzaréah, who was appointed the following year, and who, like Feraoun, was to leave behind him some thoughtful writing on the era.<sup>20</sup>

The CSEs had been created in 1955 with significant input from Germaine Tillion, the distinguished anthropologist, who had done academic research in rural Algeria as a young woman in the 1930s, and had returned to Algeria in 1954–55 to lead an enquiry into conditions in the Aurès region, for a report commissioned by François Mitterrand as *Ministre de l'Intérieur*. She would later become a prominent critic of the use of torture by the French military in the war of independence.<sup>21</sup> In helping to establish the CSEs she was working for the Governor General, Jacques Soustelle, who was also an anthropologist and, like Tillion, a former member of the French resistance. As Hammoutene put it in his notebooks, when Soustelle had arrived in Algeria as Governor a lot of people had thought to themselves, ‘enfin la France est là, entendez esprit démocratique et libéral’ (‘at last France has arrived, by which they meant a spirit of democracy and liberalism’) – but things changed: as Hammoutene put it, ‘Soustelle, comme tous ses prédécesseurs, n’a pu résister au chancre algérien’ (16, ‘Soustelle, like all of his predecessors, ended up being corrupted by Algeria’). The biographical sketch on the website of the *Académie française* (to which Soustelle was elected on the same day as Léopold Sédar Senghor, 2 June 1983) skates over Soustelle’s

20 Hammoutene’s *Réflexions sur la guerre d’Algérie* was based on journal-type notebooks found after his death and edited by his son. The biographical notes (151–54) explain that his father was born into a peasant family in Tizi-Ouzou in 1917; did very well at school; and, after studying in a French lycée and Bouzaréah, started teaching in 1939. After two years in the French army in 1941–43 he returned to teaching in 1943. According to his son, Hammoutene was already known for his nationalist ideas by that time, and he joined the PPA; then in 1956 joined the FLN, for which he was active in the production of propaganda. He was arrested several times and had to move to Algiers in 1958.

21 The obituary of Tillion by Nicholas Atkin in *The Independent* (25 April 2008) offers an overview of her life; see <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/germaine-tillion-resistance-fighter-and-ethnologist-815382.html>, consulted 21 December 2018. See also the chronology at <http://www.germaine-tillion.org/a-la-rencontre-de-germaine-tillion/>, consulted 21 December 2018.

political ‘middle period’ rather hastily: ‘Ayant démissionné, il séjourne à l’étranger de 1961 à 1968, puis rentre en France après avoir écrit plusieurs ouvrages scientifiques ou politiques’ (‘After resigning from his post he spent time abroad between 1961 and 1968, writing several scholarly and political works before coming back to France’).<sup>22</sup> These were years of political exile: Soustelle had been a member of the OAS, the *Organisation Armée Secrète*, the notorious pro-French-Algeria military organization founded in 1961, and in 1962 had become a leader of a related organization, the *Conseil national de la Résistance*.

For someone like Soustelle – the Soustelle who first arrived in Algeria – the CSEs were a last-ditch effort to sustain French Algeria, or, as James Le Sueur puts it, ‘the last institutional attempt by the French government to preserve Franco-Muslim solidarity in Algeria’.<sup>23</sup> They were designed to offer education, health care and other services to those Algerians – the vast majority – who, after 120 years of French colonialism, remained illiterate and more or less untouched by French education and modernization. The CSEs were open to boys and girls, and to adults of both sexes. One reason for this broad remit, according to Tillion, was that ‘On voulait [...] que l’enfant instruit ne soit pas un phénomène étranger dans sa famille’ (‘We didn’t want the educated child to become a stranger to his or her own family’).<sup>24</sup> A sense of the CSEs’ daily work, and some sense of their political context, is conveyed in two texts by Feraoun. The first was a short piece, ‘L’Instituteur du bled’, that appeared in 1960 in the *Bulletin des CSE*. The title was one he had used previously for a different text, a longer, lyrical essay that had appeared in *Jours de Kabylie* illustrated with Charles Brouty’s appealing line drawings. Its reuse for the new essay was already a sign that it would present the CSEs as the extension of the noble, modest work of the rural schoolteacher. He defended the new institutions against the charge that they offered education on the cheap (‘un enseignement au rabais’), presenting them

22 ‘Jacques Soustelle’ at <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/jacques-soustelle>, consulted 21 December 2018.

23 See Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), Chapter 3: ‘French educational reform and the problem of reconciliation: the Service des Centres Sociaux’, 55–86.

24 Tillion, ‘La Bêtise qui froidement assassine’, *Le Monde du soir*, 17 March 1962, front page; reproduced in Jean-Philippe Ould Aoudia, *L’Assassinat de Château-Royal. Alger: 15 mars 1962* (Paris: Tirésias, Michel Reynaud, 1992), 16–18: 17.

as a sincere effort to extend the benefits of education beyond the one in ten boys, and one in 100 girls, who had already been reached: the aim of the CSEs, he wrote, was to bring ‘un peu de science, un peu de progrès, un peu de justice et de bonheur’ (‘a little science and knowledge, a little progress, a little justice and happiness’) to ‘les oubliés et les humbles’ (‘the forgotten and the lowly’).<sup>25</sup>

Feraoun’s tone shifted, however, when he revisited these ideas a little later in a private letter. On 6 August 1961 he wrote to Roblès, who was a good friend:

Où en suis-je ? J’ai donc abandonné l’école pour entrer comme inspecteur au service des centres sociaux éducatifs qui sont une institution d’éducation de base chargée de mener une action globale en vue d’aider les masses rurales à accéder au monde moderne : alphabétisation des adolescents et adultes, hommes et femmes, éducation sanitaire, formation rurale, professionnelle, éducation sociale et civique. En principe très grand programme, très intéressant : l’ancien boulot de l’instituteur du bled systématisé, codifié, officiellement encouragé, soutenu ... Trois fois hélas ! il fallait faire ça en 50 et maintenant personne n’y croit : ni l’administration, ni les éducateurs, ni les usagers. Peut-être y faudra-t-il revenir plus tard, lorsqu’on aura fini de se tuer et de se mentir. En soi, c’est formidable, encore un coup. Mais tout est faussé par l’incertitude qui brouille la vue, et remplit d’angoisse les plus généreux et de haine les plus bornés. Personne ne veut plus rien faire de bon. Pour ma part, je regrette simplement les temps heureux où j’avais une vache à Taourirt-Moussa, une classe de 50 élèves et mes cahiers d’écolier où je racontais l’histoire de ‘Madame’.

Where have I got to? I’ve abandoned the school to become an inspector for the *centres sociaux éducatifs*, an institution whose remit is to offer basic education and more generally to help the rural masses join the modern world: literacy teaching for adolescents and adults (both men and women), training in hygiene, how to work the land, professional skills, social and civic education. In principle it’s an extensive and very worthwhile programme: the old job of the *instituteur du bled* now systematized, standardized, officially encouraged and supported ... Dear oh dear! It should have been done in 1950, as no one has any faith in it now: not the administration, not the teachers, and not anyone who uses the CSEs. Something to come back to later, perhaps, when everyone has stopped killing each other and lying to each other. In and of itself

25 Feraoun, ‘L’Instituteur du bled’, from *Bulletin des CSE* no. 14 (2nd trimester, 1960), in Jouin et al., *L’École en Algérie*, Annex II, 192–93.

it's fantastic, another achievement, but everything is distorted by the uncertainty that clouds everything, leaving the most generous full of anxiety and the most narrow-minded full of hatred. No one is interested in doing anything good any more. As for me, I just miss those happy days in Taourirt-Moussa when I had a cow, a class of fifty students and the exercise books where I could write my story about 'Madame'.<sup>26</sup>

It is clear that Feraoun still saw the CSEs as admirable in principle, but thought that they had come too late. Hammoutene remained more positive: in his notebook in October 1961 he wrote: 'Éduquer, c'est bâtir du solide, c'est forger des âmes et des cœurs, c'est former des hommes qui verront clair en eux-mêmes et dans l'avenir' (138, 'To educate is to lay down solid foundations, shaping men's souls and hearts, allowing them to understand themselves and see clearly into the future'). He seemed convinced that the CSEs would continue to play an important role after independence. His final notebook entry, dated 21 January 1962, reads:

J'ai pris à cœur une œuvre généreuse et humaine valable, qui a pour mission d'aider les hommes et les femmes déshérités de ce pays meurtri par la guerre depuis 8 ans, dans le chemin de devenir. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de faire de l'administration, de dresser des statistiques. C'est son cœur qu'il faut donner ; c'est un engagement total que sollicite ce service essentiellement humain. (148)

I am completely committed to this selfless, humane and valuable mission, creating better prospects for the deprived men and women of a country that for the past eight years has been ravaged by war. It is not enough to get your administration done or produce statistics. You have to put your heart into it. This is a profoundly human project and it requires unflinching commitment.

Others took a dimmer view. For some anti-colonialists the CSEs were tainted by association with earlier, in some ways comparable projects pursued by Georges Hardy, a colonial administrator and educationalist who had worked in Algeria under Vichy and who believed that it was dangerous to French interests for colonized peoples, outside a small compliant elite, to receive anything more than a rudimentary

26 *Lettres à ses amis*, 189. The story of 'Madame' refers to *La Terre et le sang*. In a letter sent to Camus from Taourirt-Moussa Feraoun wrote: 'Je suis un bon maître d'école ; j'ai beaucoup d'élèves ; j'aime ma classe' (*Lettres à ses amis*, 27 May 1951, 206, 'I am a good schoolteacher with many students; I am fond of my class').



education.<sup>27</sup> Many pro-colonial observers, by contrast, suspected – partly on the basis that most teachers in the CSEs were Algerian – that the CSEs worked, deliberately and by their nature, in the interests of the FLN. As early as 1957, the year of the so-called Battle of Algiers, General Massu wanted the CSEs dismantled; and in July of that year 16 CSE staff members were arrested and sent before a military tribunal in Algiers.<sup>28</sup>

Another reason for hostility towards the CSEs among members of the armed forces was that the CSEs rivalled another wartime educational initiative, the SFJA (*Service de Formation des Jeunes en Algérie*), launched in August 1958. It offered a similar mix of education and training to those who had missed out previously on Western schooling, particularly older children. Its head, Général de Segonzac, was explicit about his hostility to Algerian nationalism and about the SFJA's aim of winning from the youth of Algeria 'son adhésion à l'Occident, c'est-à-dire la France' ('a loyal commitment to the West, that is, France'); more unexpectedly, perhaps, he declared:

Les éducateurs se souviendront [...] que le véritable sens de l'humain coïncide avec la culture. Une éducation bien comprise vise à enrichir les valeurs esthétiques qui en font l'essence.

D'où l'importance de l'art, de la poésie notamment, qui nous introduit dans la vie concrète des êtres, de l'expression dramatique, de la peinture, de la poterie. Il va de soi que, pour les jeunes Algériens, il n'est pas question dans la recherche de cette culture de se couper d'une tradition arabe fort riche et, au surplus, d'un caractère universel.

Teachers will be mindful that the true meaning of being human coincides with culture. An education, in the proper sense of the term, aims to enrich the aesthetic values that are its essence.

Therein lies the importance of art, and poetry in particular (as it offers us a way into the concrete experience of others), of dramatic works, of painting, of pottery. It goes without saying that these cultural

27 Hardy is discussed at length in Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul*. See also the interview with Louis Rigaud in Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 69–102.

28 The arrests were a means of harassment more than anything else; of the 16 arrested, 13 were acquitted, and two were given suspended sentences. Only one, a young Algerian man, was sentenced to a year in prison. Another young Muslim 'disappeared' while in the hands of the army. Complaints in the wake of these incidents triggered a further wave of intimidation. See Ould Aoudia, *L'Assassinat de Château-Royal*, 67ff. See also Lesne, 'Contribution à l'histoire des Centres Sociaux Éducatifs (1955–62), in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 89–183.

acquisitions will not oblige young Algerians to cut themselves off from an Arabic tradition that is rich and, moreover, universal in nature.<sup>29</sup>

On the ground – predictably – the programme was a lot less ambitious culturally and educationally, and ineffective politically too. In principle the SFJA was directly answerable to the *Délégation Générale du Gouvernement en Algérie*, but in practice it was largely run and staffed by the army – mostly very young men, often on military service, who were not necessarily well educated themselves.<sup>30</sup> Hammoutene noted in November 1961 (144) his disapproval of teaching he had witnessed in an ‘insecure’ area of country, where the soldier–teacher did not take his work at all seriously. Most of the SFJA institutions were attached to a *Section Administrative Spécialisée* (SAS), another body with which the army was deeply involved, and designed to assert French control on all fronts, partly by winning hearts and minds.<sup>31</sup> For such reasons supporters of the CSEs, including Tillion, resisted pressures to merge the CSEs and the SFJA, and the SFJA’s work was opposed by the FLN. Feraoun shared their distrust: in March 1956 he wrote scornfully

29 Segonzac, speaking in December 1959, quoted by Colonel Henry d’Humières in his book *L’Armée française et la jeunesse musulmane: Algérie 1956–61* (Paris: Godefroy de Bouillon, 2002) 228, 226–27. The book offers a defence of the work of the SFJA, and of the army in Algeria. D’Humières’s previous work included *Devoir de mémoire: justice pour le maréchal Pétain* of 1997, also published by Godefroy de Bouillon, which apparently specializes in tendentious right-wing history and commentary.

30 The cover photo on d’Humières’s book shows a young soldier in fatigues teaching children the alphabet, and, given d’Humières’s perspective, is clearly meant to convey a positive image of the army’s work. In the photo one can see, however, that the soldier has neglected to use capital letters where they are needed in his ‘adapted’ examples on the blackboard: ‘voici ali’, ‘omar est ici’ and so on.

31 A useful – if over-charitable – history of the SAS is given by Jacques Frémeaux, ‘Les SAS (sections administratives spécialisées)’, in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 208 (2002/4), 55–68. DOI: 10.3917/gmcc.208.0055; consulted 10 February 2017. An interesting footnote (so to speak) was added to the history of these institutions in 2010 when the French *Assemblée nationale* was called upon to decide, in response to a question from the Algeria-born *député* Kléber Mesquida, whether those who served in the SFJA should, like those who served in the SAS itself, be treated as ‘anciens combattants’ (‘former combatants’). The official response was that it was a civilian organization (‘un organisme civil’), although the army provided both funding and personnel, and although some of the soldiers who worked in the SFJA were killed for doing so. See <http://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q13/13-70476QE.htm>, consulted 10 February 2017.

about a young SAS officer 'qui double le maître et propose de nous pacifier' (8 March 1956, 90; 'who is acting as a teacher and plans to pacify us', 84).<sup>32</sup>

Feraoun, despite his reservations about the CSEs, continued to work for them right to the end of the war; or very nearly. On 15 March 1962, in the middle of the negotiations that would lead, as was already very clear, to Algerian independence, Feraoun, along with five of his immediate colleagues including Hammoutene, was assassinated in his place of work by the OAS. (The other men were Marcel Basset, Robert Eymard, Max Marchand and Salah Ould Aoudia.) Just three days after Feraoun's death the warring parties signed the Evian agreements, which instituted the final formal ceasefire. The day before he died, Feraoun wrote in his journal:

À Alger, c'est la terreur. Les gens circulent tout de même, et ceux qui doivent gagner leur vie ou simplement faire leurs commissions sont obligés de sortir et sortent sans trop savoir s'ils vont revenir ou tomber dans la rue. Nous en sommes tous là, les courageux et les lâches, au point que l'on se demande si tous ces qualificatifs existent vraiment, ou si ce ne sont pas des illusions sans véritable réalité. Non, on ne distingue plus les courageux des lâches. (347; 14 March 1962)

Terror reigns in Algiers. Yet people still go out. Those who must make a living or simply do errands have to go out. They leave without being too sure whether they will come home or be cut down in the street. This is where our common fate has brought us, the bold and the cowardly, to the extent that it makes you wonder whether such labels really exist or whether they are merely illusions, devoid of reality. No, one can no longer distinguish between the courageous and the cowardly. (314)<sup>33</sup>

32 See also Feraoun's journal entry for 11 January 1957, which, despite his respect for some SAS officers, was again bitterly ironic about the SAS's role as 'pacifier'. Some believe that the SFJA also served to establish a network of informants: see Ould Aoudia, *L'Assassinat de Château-Royal*, 94–101. The traffic between teaching and the army was two-way, and always controversial. Artaud de La Ferrière writes: 'A good illustration of the inter-departmental friction that could arise between the security and the education services is the issue of conscripting teachers into the military [mostly into local reserve units called *Unités Territoriales*]. This raised the ire of René Billières, the Minister of Education in 1957. In January of that year, he wrote a letter to the President of the Council, Guy Mollet, as well as to the Algeria Minister and Defence Minister, to protest this practice of using planks from one end of a bridge to extend the other end'. 'Stuck in the Middle with You', 8.

33 Djebar cites these same lines from Feraoun's *Journal* in her moving description

Throughout the journal Feraoun had provided a bleak and disheartening record of events that were not only mortally violent but vicious. For some, killing was not enough; corpses were repeatedly disfigured, faces cut to pieces and obliterated. When Feraoun's turn came, he and his colleagues were shot repeatedly in the lower legs; then, when they collapsed, they were shot repeatedly in the thighs; and only afterwards were they finished off with shots to the torso.

### **Polarization and politicization: teachers in the war**

The terrible slaughter of Feraoun and his colleagues was driven by the violent insurrection of pro-colonial, anti-de Gaulle army officers in the later years of the war. The brutality of the killings, and the fact that the victims were teachers, prompted an outcry – even, according to Roblès, among partisans of French Algeria, including perhaps even some supporters of the OAS. The French Minister of Education, Lucien Paye, paid tribute to the men, and in due course they were honoured with a commemorative plaque in a meeting room in the Ministry in the rue de Grenelle. Although the killers were never formally identified or prosecuted, Jean-Philippe Ould Aoudia, the son of one of the victims, makes it clear in his book *L'Assassinat de Château-Royal. Alger: 15 mars 1962* that members of the army, particularly Massu, lay behind the attack. The OAS may never have claimed responsibility for the assassination, but it did not deny it. And, as the eminent anti-colonial historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet emphasized in a letter that became one of the prefaces to Ould Aoudia's book, Soustelle chose to stay quiet.<sup>34</sup>

The fact that Soustelle was instrumental in setting up the educational institution in which Feraoun held his last job, then became an active member of the organization that killed him for working in that institution, offers a further, particularly awful illustration of how changeable and fiercely contested the debates and policies around education were in

of his death in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* ((Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 107–17, *Algerian White*, trans. David Kelley and Marjolijn de Jager (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 92–100), a book that offers a critique of the cult of violent heroism.

<sup>34</sup> When Jean-Philippe Ould Aoudia's book was published he received a letter from Vidal-Naquet, who was known for his early opposition to colonialism and to the use of torture in Algeria; and that letter became included as an addendum to the book. The book also contains prefaces by Roblès, Tillion and the publisher.

colonial Algeria. By the time Feraoun died the threat of violence to teachers was nothing new. It was the OAS that killed Feraoun, and it did so with a bitter, ostentatious vindictiveness, but during the war teachers were also killed by the nationalists. The first teacher to die, notoriously, was Guy Monnerot, a young Frenchman who, along with his wife Jacqueline, had just arrived in Algeria. He was shot on 1 November 1954, the day later considered to mark the start of the war. Jacqueline, also a teacher, was shot too, and badly injured, but survived. Although there were numerous attacks that day, and a number of other people were killed, Guy Monnerot's death seems to have caused particular shock and outrage, and not only among Europeans, above all *because* he was a teacher – a sentiment echoed eight years later in the shocked reactions to the assassination of Feraoun and his colleagues.

All of this became part of the mythology of the intrepid *instituteur*, and of its disintegration in Algeria. The story of the ambush in which Monnerot died recurs conspicuously in texts approaching it from highly varied political perspectives: it forms the opening set piece of d'Humières's *L'Armée française et la jeunesse musulmane*, for example, and is the subject of Sebbar's autobiographical short story 'On tue des instituteurs'.<sup>35</sup> Both her parents – her Algerian father and her French mother – were primary school teachers in Algeria, from 1935 to 1965, and the story is dedicated to them. Sebbar was still a child in November 1954 and did not really understand what was happening when she heard about the Monnerots, but as an adult, researching the incident, she (or her adult narrator figure) asks: 'Ils ne savent pas que c'est la Colonie et sa langue qu'ils viennent servir, sur ces Hauts Plateaux étrangers, hostiles et beaux?' (195, 'Don't they realize they've come to serve the colony and its language, out there on the High Plateaux, foreign, hostile and beautiful?', 195). The question is reminiscent of a comment made by d'Humières, from his very different political perspective: 'cette éducation a, qu'on le veuille ou non, une portée politique' (228, 'this education has, unavoidably, a political dimension').

In one sense the involvement of the Monnerots in the ambush and the shooting seems to have been accidental: the original target of the ambush, according to some sources, was one of their co-passengers on a

35 D'Humières, *L'Armée française et la jeunesse musulmane*, 11; Sebbar, 'On tue des instituteurs', in Sebbar (ed.), *Une enfance algérienne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 187–98; 'They Kill Teachers', in *An Algerian Childhood*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (St Paul, MN: Ruminator Books, 2001), 187–98.

bus, a Muslim *notable* suspected of being pro-French.<sup>36</sup> The early FLN attacks in general avoided civilians. A teacher named Guy Molières who was posted to Aït-El-Mansour in October 1953 recalled that once, early in the war, when he and his wife returned home after the curfew had started, they found boulders in their path and, although it occurred to them they were probably looking at an FLN roadblock, simply threaded their way through. ‘Quelque temps plus tard’, Molières wrote, ‘les militaires du secteur nous confirmèrent que ce soir-là les fellaghas disposaient un barrage. Reconnaissant au bruit la moto des instituteurs, ils s’étaient dissimulés sans les inquiéter’ (‘A little while later the soldiers in the area confirmed that the *fellagha* had set up a roadblock. When they recognised the sound of the teachers’ motorbike they had hidden, and not bothered us’). The Molières stuck things out almost to the end of the war – which was unusual, and took some courage – but in spring 1962, after being obliged by an armed FLN man to hand over the keys to his offices, Guy was accused by an OAS man of having ‘profité de [sa] qualité d’enseignant métropolitain pour collaborer avec le FLN dans un établissement scolaire’ (‘used his position as a metropolitan teacher in order to collaborate in a school with the FLN’); and, assuming this was his ‘arrêt de mort’ (‘death warrant’), arranged hastily to get out of the country.<sup>37</sup>

Relatively early in the war, in May 1956, when Feraoun was still working in Kabylie, the FLN issued a tract demanding a boycott of French schools and sent telegrams to town halls threatening parents and

36 This is the version of the incident recounted, in somewhat novelistic terms, by Yves Courrière in *La Guerre d’Algérie I: les fils de la Toussaint* (Paris: Fayard, 1968), 333–39, and reiterated more recently in a brief account of that day, Farid Alilat, ‘La Toussaint rouge algérienne’, *Jeune Afrique* 2441–42 (21 October 2007), 53. An alternative version offered by Robert Aron is cited on the Wikipédia page on ‘Toussaint rouge’ (consulted May 2015).

37 Molières, quoted by Ghouati in *École et imaginaire*, 25; 27–28. ‘Fellagha’ originally meant ‘bandit’; other terms used for FLN fighters (with some different nuances) included *mujahid*, *fidayin* (martyr/commando), *moussabel* (partisan) and *djoundi*. See Mohammed Harbi (ed.), *Les Archives de la révolution algérienne* (Paris: Jeune Afrique, 1981), 160–67. Christiane Chaulet Achour notes that Feraoun’s use in his *Journal* of the term ‘fellagha’ – which we will come across later – was ‘étonnant pour un Algérien’ (‘astonishing for an Algerian’); see ‘Mouloud Feraoun, l’écriture émancipée du *Journal*’, conference paper of 2011, available at <https://max-marchand-mouloud-feraoun.fr/articles/mouloud-feraoun-ecriture-emancipee-du-journal> (consulted 7 March 2019).

teachers who disobeyed. The tract declared: 'la rupture est consommée entre le peuple algérien et les autorités françaises dans tous les domaines, jusques et y compris le domaine culturel' ('There is now a complete rupture between the Algerian people and the French authorities in all domains, including the cultural domain').<sup>38</sup> Hammoutene, who from a young age was a political activist and a pro-independence militant in a way that Feraoun was not, wrote in his diary at the time:

Grève des écoles. Il fallait s'y attendre avec la politique de pacification conduite comme elle le fut en Kabylie.

Est-ce la haine? ... C'en est le commencement.

[...]

De grâce M. Lacoste, partez et ne faites plus de mal à mon pays, comme au vôtre.

Schools are on strike. That was to be expected, given the policy of 'pacification' in Kabylie.

Is it hatred? ... That's the way we're heading.

[...]

Please, Monsieur Lacoste, leave, and inflict no more damage on my country, or on your own.<sup>39</sup>

An article in *El Moudjahid* in June 1956 articulated the point of view – real or prospective or imagined – of students who joined the Algerian combatants at this point:<sup>40</sup>

38 'Appel aux Algériens pour boycotter les écoles françaises'. Service historique de l'armée de terre, document no. 1H2587; cited in Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN, 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 499. Feraoun first alluded to the education boycott in his diary entry for 31 May 1956, and at that point, relying on hearsay, was slightly confused about what it entailed; but by 30 September 1956 he had got hold of a copy of the tract, which he stuck into his diary. Regrettably the published version does not reproduce this, in French or English.

39 Hammoutene, *Réflexions sur la guerre d'Algérie*, 98. Robert Lacoste was governor general of Algeria and resident minister from February 1956 to May 1958, under the Mollet government.

40 According to Meynier (499, drawing on Pervillé, *Les Étudiants algériens*, 127), numerous students from lycées and higher education left school and joined the *maquis*, 'dans un mouvement de romantisme patriotique', celebrated in a well-known article in *El Moudjahid* in June 1956. Lacheraf touches on this in *Des noms et des lieux* (90–91), where he talks about students and *lycéens* who joined up in 1956, some during the school strike: this shows, he says, that their contact with French culture radicalized them, rather than the opposite. Nonetheless, as Djébar notes in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (234, E196–97), these new recruits were often

Avec un diplôme en plus, nous ne ferons pas de meilleurs cadavres ! À quoi donc serviraient-ils, ces diplômes qu'on continue à nous offrir pendant que notre peuple lutte héroïquement, pendant que nos mères, nos épouses, nos sœurs sont violées, pendant que nos enfants, nos vieillards tombent sous la mitraille, les bombes, le napalm ? Et nous, 'les cadres de demain', on nous offre d'encadrer quoi ? d'encadrer qui ? [...] La fausse quiétude dans laquelle nous sommes installés ne satisfait plus notre conscience.

An extra diploma will be of little use to our dead bodies! What, then, is the use of these diplomas they continue to offer us whilst our people are engaged in a heroic struggle, whilst our mothers, wives and sisters are raped, whilst our children and old people are killed by machine guns, bombs, and napalm? They say we are destined to work as managers, but what or whom are we supposed to manage? The tranquil situation in which we find ourselves is false, and we can no longer accept it in good conscience.

One of Feraoun's diary entries of January 1957, during the general strike called by the FLN, notes that the FLN did not mess around when it came to enforcing its edicts, and had killed half a dozen teachers (194, E175). Feraoun and his colleagues refused to teach during the strike, although they came to school to keep an eye on the children, wearing warm clothes in case the French authorities arrived and sent them to prison. That didn't happen, as it turned out, but the teachers were subjected to threats and a torrent of abuse from a local official (195–98, E176–77). Other deaths recorded in Feraoun's diary in this early phase of the war included that of an old classmate who had become a headteacher and who died in mysterious circumstances after receiving threats 'des deux clans' (35, 'from both clans', 33; this was September 1955; the official verdict was suicide, but Feraoun doubted it). Sebbar recalls being told, in a conversation with the pied-noir historian Bernard Zimmermann in 2003, that young *normaliens* in Bouzaréah (which her father had remembered fondly as a site of successful 'integration') were gunned down by the FLN in 1958.<sup>41</sup> In November of that same year, Feraoun

treated with suspicion because of their French education – especially in the context of 'bleuite', an operation of infiltration launched in 1957 by the French secret services.

41 Sebbar, *Mes Algéries en France*, 32. Sebbar also refers to Zimmermann's *Quel orage, ô mon cousin Noé ! ... Images et récits d'Algérie* (Périgueux: Pierre Fanlac, 1986).



recorded that the SAS captain in Béni-Douala had praised Feraoun publicly, saying that France was proud of him; and that as a consequence his sisters and parents ‘vivent, paraît-il, dans les affres et s’attendent à ce que le FLN me condamne et m’exécute’ (2 November 1958, 283–84, ‘are living in a state of constant anxiety and expect the FLN to condemn and execute me’, 255).

Teachers from all backgrounds and of all political inclinations were at risk, then, but in the course of the war the gap between native and non-native teachers widened – a situation that Feraoun commented upon in his *Journal* and dramatized in his novel *La Cité des roses*. For most European teachers it was relatively easy to leave, practically and also emotionally, if the places where they worked were indeed ‘foreign’, as Sebbar put it. Someone like Feraoun, at the opposite end of this spectrum, had returned home to pursue his career. Daru, the fictional teacher in Camus’s ‘L’Hôte’, could be seen as an in-between figure, with regard to ‘belonging’ and ease of departure, and in other ways too: he lives a rugged, isolated life, but is better off than the families whose children he teaches (the people around him are described as an ‘armée de fantômes haillonneux’, an ‘army of ragged ghosts’ (83, E44), a choice of words that in its context hints at potential menace as well as possible French responsibility for their hunger); he was born there, and feels exiled elsewhere; he drinks mint tea, knows the area very well, and is familiar with the customs of the nomads; and he speaks Arabic. The title of the story hints at these issues through the ambiguity of the word ‘hôte’, which can mean both host and guest. But in the context of the war, with its new and heightened forms of politicization of the population and the public sphere, his ambiguous position becomes untenable. The ‘Arab’ whom Daru is asked to deliver to a police station has nothing to do with the fight for independence, as far as Daru knows (he has been arrested for killing a relative in a family dispute), but this just makes it clearer that the conflict – already referred to as ‘war’ by the gendarme Balducci (86, E46) – has reached a point where others, whether aligned with the colonizers or the colonized, will assume that Daru has chosen sides, and is on the side of the ‘Europeans’, irrespective of his wish to remain impartial and detached. That central idea of compromised or impossible neutrality is preserved in David Oelhoffen’s 2014 film adaptation of ‘L’Hôte’, *Loin des hommes* (*Far from Men*), even though Daru, played by Viggo Mortensen, drifts into action hero territory. The film begins just as the war starts: its precise historical setting is not immediately obvious, but in an early scene Daru

sees a newspaper and is told that a teacher (whom we may take to be Monnerot, though he is not named) is among those to have been killed in a series of attacks. In both book and film Daru takes the prisoner only as far as a fork in the road, and, risking the wrath of the colonial authorities, leaves him to make his own decision about whether to turn himself in. In both book and film, that moment turns out to be the last at which he can think of himself as preserving a kind of non-alignment and non-involvement; and the end of the story marks the end of the teacher's exacting and perhaps artificial idyll. In an early scene in the film Daru was making his pupils memorize the rivers of France, helped by a map he has drawn in chalk on the blackboard – an evocative image in relation to (non-)‘adaptation’ and alienation, and one which also appears at the start of Camus's text. In the film's final scene, Daru announces that it will be his last day at school, to the evident distress of his pupils; he adds emotionally that he is proud to have been their *instituteur*, writes الأطلس then ‘L'Atlas’ on the board, and starts teaching them a new lesson about their own – and his – geographical home. The ending of the original story is bleaker: Daru stands in his empty classroom feeling utterly alone, his chalk drawing of the rivers of France untouched, but now accompanied by a threat to his life that someone has scrawled on the board: ‘Tu as livré notre frère. Tu paieras’ (99, ‘You turned in our brother. You will pay’, 55).<sup>42</sup>

More than once Feraoun, though constantly treated as a prospective enemy by the French authorities by virtue of his ethnicity, was accused of ingratitude by French officials and acquaintances, in light of his teacher's salary and because of his own education, which, he remarked acerbically, he was supposed to view as ‘un cadeau généreux’ (204, ‘a generous gift’, 185) – rather than, say, something the French/colonial authorities were obliged to provide, and/or might have provided in their own interests. In July 1956 his school was raided and searched; afterwards, having found nothing, the local army captain came to apologize and said, apparently

42 Feraoun discussed ‘L'Hôte’ in his essay ‘La Littérature algérienne’, which was published just after ‘L'Hôte’ in 1957. Feraoun used the image of the Arab prisoner rather awkwardly as a metaphor, and mixed criticism of Camus (again guilty, as in *L'Étranger*, of creating an anonymous ‘Arab’) with praise for his ‘prudente réserve’ (55, ‘sensibly reserved approach’). If one does consider Camus's story metaphorically, the obvious insinuation seems to be that Algerians were not yet in a position to exercise freedom. For exploration of this idea see Peter Cryle, *Bilan critique: L'Exil et le royaume d'Albert Camus, essai d'analyse* (Paris: Minard, 1973); cited in Camus, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4, 1350.

with a degree of self-satisfaction, that at least the ‘rebels’ would no longer think Feraoun was on the side of the French (141, E129). Later Feraoun started receiving threatening letters, and in January 1960 found a poster attached to his door accusing the *fellagha* of being ‘brûleurs d’écoles, égorgeurs de maîtres, poseurs de bombes’ (25 Jan 1960, 300, ‘people who burn schools, kill teachers and plant bombs’, 272). It was no surprise that some of his pupils stayed away from school.

All in all, the context in which Feraoun wrote his journal and continued, as far as possible, to work as a teacher, was confusing, full of violent conflict, and frightening. It was deeply, and increasingly, polarized. Inevitably he experienced moments of grave uncertainty about his continuing involvement in colonial education. Perhaps the most startling expression of his uncertainty came when his family played host to a friend’s daughter who had fled her home village to avoid being raped. On 1 May 1959 he wrote:

Une brave petite fille de 19 ans, totalement ignorante mais disposant de cet inestimable trésor qui s’appelle le bon sens et que les magisters de toute sorte s’acharnent à détruire chez l’enfant civilisé dont ils parviennent en fin de compte à faire un monstre à leur image. Ce sont ces monstres précisément, qui s’attaquent aux filles de chez nous. (294)

She is a good girl, nineteen years old and completely uneducated; but she has at her disposal that priceless treasure called common sense. There are all sorts of schoolmasters bent on destroying this quality in the civilized child and they manage eventually to create a monster in their own image. It is precisely such monsters who are assaulting our girls. (266)

Some of his other negative comments on education, though sombre, are more ambiguous. On 24 January 1957 he reported seeing a young man called Rezki whose schoolteacher father had been killed by some of his former pupils; he seemed to have been suspected of giving information to the French army, though the son thought that old village rivalries may also have come into play. Feraoun then commented:

Je suis de ces gens compliqués qui ont appris à l’école beaucoup de choses inutiles. Ces inutilités me rendent malade physiquement, de même que mes pareils et tous ensemble nous devenons étrangers sur notre terre. Tous ensemble ? Nous sommes une poignée peut-être. Pour les autres, il n’y a rien de compliqué. Le problème à résoudre n’a que deux issues : il faut vivre ou mourir. Vivre en tuant pour vaincre, mourir après avoir tué pour permettre à d’autres de vaincre et s’il nous advient de mourir tous, sans avoir vaincu, notre mort collective sera tout de même une victoire.

Ceux qui tirent sur leurs frères ou les égorgent ou les pendent ont bien cette impression de vaincre et cela les reconforte. Il est devenu de mode de ne pas plaindre « les traîtres », de vouer leur âme au diable quand on apprend leur mort, et d'accabler leur mémoire d'une haine rétrospective qui vous fait bien voir des gens, ce qui ne vous empêchera peut-être pas de finir vous-même dans une mort ignominieuse. À présent, il y a chez nous une grande place pour la peur, toute celle qu'occupait la pitié. (192)

I am one of those complicated people who learned a lot of useless things in school. These useless things make me, as well as others like me, physically ill, and all of us together become strangers in our own land. All of us together? There are only a handful of us. For the others, nothing is complicated. The problem to be solved has only two outcomes: one must live or die. Live by killing in order to win. Die after having killed to allow others to win, and if we all happen to die without having won, our collective death will still be a victory. Those who shoot their brothers, or cut their throats, or hang them, definitely have this feeling of having won, and this comforts them. It has become fashionable not to pity 'traitors' and to condemn their souls to the devil when one hears of their death, to blacken their name retrospectively with a hatred that, according to some people, makes you look good, but may not prevent you ending your own life in the same ignominious manner. Fear is everywhere now, leaving no space for pity. (173)

Learning useless things may not be as bad as becoming a monster; nonetheless, the first two sentences of this passage are critical of the effects of French schooling and communicate the sense of distress and alienation that Feraoun associated with his own education. As the passage continues, however, it starts to seem that Feraoun is uneasy about the lack of 'complexity' in his compatriots' view, and more specifically about a certain self-righteousness and lack of pity in their embrace of violence. This became an important theme for him, in relation to both education and his criticisms of the FLN.

During the FLN-organized general strike, which began a few days later, Feraoun was distressed to hear that some of his students had been pillaging. In his journal he wrote: 'Quelques instants après, je pouvais toujours leur expliquer les beautés classiques d'*Andromaque*. Voilà de quoi me faire douter de la valeur de mon enseignement' (193, 'A few minutes later in class, I could be explaining the classical niceties of *Andromaque* to them. All this makes me doubt the value of my teaching', 174). When he added, directly afterwards: 'Mais hélas n'ai-je que cela à me reprocher ?' ('But is this all that I have to reproach

myself with?’), quite what he had in mind is unclear. At moments in the diary he implies that self-interest could shape his behaviour (he had a large family to support), and he accuses himself of cowardice and even treachery. In a diary entry just a few weeks later, in March 1957, he quotes at length a bulletin issued by the secretary of a teachers’ union berating striking schoolteachers for having forgotten all they had gained from their own ‘*maîtres attentifs et affectueux*’ (‘attentive and caring schoolmasters’) and for having abandoned their ‘*magnifique mission*’ (212, ‘magnificent mission’, 191). But by the end of that entry, reflecting on his own relationship to the strike, it is unclear whether, when he speaks of treachery, he is thinking only in terms of his possible abandonment of his duties as a schoolteacher, or of his separation, by virtue of his socio-economic position and his profession, from the great majority of Algerians. His own education took him away from home as a child, and made him into a different person, distancing him from the people he had grown up with. Just after the comment on *Andromaque*, in the next paragraph of the same diary entry, he reports looking on with pity as ‘*un grand défilé de compatriotes*’ (193, ‘a large procession of compatriots’, 174) is marched back to the village. His partial detachment was in some senses a choice, as well as a function of his position, but as the blurb on *Le Fils du pauvre* had suggested, it must also have been a source of guilt.

### Doubts: the reaction to Amrouche

Feraoun’s doubts about his work as a teacher may, I think, help explain the ferocity of his reaction to an important text by Jean Amrouche that appeared in *Le Monde*, ‘*La France comme mythe et comme réalité: de quelques vérités amères*’ (‘The Myth of France, and France in Reality: Some Bitter Truths’).<sup>43</sup> Explaining that episode, and the trajectory followed by Amrouche to reach the point where he could write such an essay, will take some time, but the story will, I hope, cast more light not only on Feraoun’s notion of his work but on questions of education, assimilation and the sort of ‘neutrality’ sought by Feraoun.

43 Amrouche, ‘*La France comme mythe et comme réalité: de quelques vérités amères*’ (‘The Myth of France, and France in Reality: Some Bitter Truths’), first published in *Le Monde* on 11 January 1958; in Amrouche, *Un Algérien s’adresse aux Français*, 54–64.

Like Feraoun, Amrouche was a Kabyle, born in Algeria; but his family, who were Christian converts, moved to Tunisia when he was very young, and he obtained French citizenship. He was born in 1906, so was a few years older than Feraoun. (Feraoun was born in 1913, the same year as Jean's sister Taos.) Like Feraoun he did well at school and trained to become an *instituteur*, but he moved on to become a *professeur de lettres* in a lycée, first in Sousse, then in Tunis, at the Lycée Carnot. There he taught Albert Memmi, whose novel *La Statue de sel*, published in 1953 with a preface by Camus, I shall discuss later. Amrouche published his first collection of poems in 1934. Recalling the young Amrouche in April 1962, Memmi remarked that Amrouche 'avait commencé sa carrière littéraire comme poète français, et comme dandy ...' ('had begun his literary career as a French poet and a dandy').<sup>44</sup> To be fair, Amrouche's subsequent publication of the anthology *Chants berbères de Kabylie* of 1939 does not seem like the work of a 'dandy', but Memmi's choice of word was no doubt influenced by the glamorous turn in Amrouche's life that led him away from teaching and into the circles of the French cultural elite. This was another significant difference between Amrouche and Feraoun. Already in the late 1930s Amrouche had launched what was to become a very successful radio career, first in Tunis, then in post-Vichy Algiers, then in France. From 1944 he also worked as editor of a journal entitled *L'Arche*, in Algiers then in Paris, under the auspices of Edmond Charlot, who published many of the great French writers of the day, and for whom he was working when he rejected the manuscript of *Le Fils du pauvre*. Amrouche's radio programme became well known for hosting eminent writers and thinkers, including Gaston Bachelard, Roland Barthes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Kateb Yacine, and for initiating long series of interviews with other major figures, including Giuseppe Ungaretti, Jean Giono and André Gide, with whom he developed a long-lasting

44 Memmi, in an article in *France Observateur*, cited by Richard Serrano, *Against the Postcolonial: 'Francophone' Writers at the Ends of the French Empire* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2005), 89. Serrano's chapter on Amrouche is primarily about the way in which he has been positioned as an 'Arab' writer. For biographical information see the entry in Jeannine Verdès-Leroux (ed.), *L'Algérie et la France* (Paris: Laffont, 2009) or, for more detail, Le Baut, *Jean El-Mouhoub Amrouche*. For a discussion of Amrouche's work as poet-anthologist, see Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, 'Berber Poetry and the Issue of Derivation: Alternate Symbolist Trajectories', in Mark Wollaeger with Mark Eatough (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81–108.

friendship. Like Feraoun, Amrouche died just before Algeria won its independence. He also wrote a journal, beginning much earlier – in 1928 – but, unlike Feraoun, he did not intend to publish it, and it was published only long after his death.<sup>45</sup>

From the late 1920s through to the era of the Second World War, Amrouche occasionally used the journal to express spontaneous homilies to French civilization. On 15 August 1943, for instance, he wrote:

Le rôle de la France, réserve spirituelle du monde, est de faire, après la guerre[,] une Révolution exemplaire – d’inventer des formes politiques et sociales valables non seulement pour elle, mais, et c’est dans l’ordre même du génie français, valables pour tout l’univers. Synthèse de tous les efforts révolutionnaires y compris l’URSS. (110)

As the world’s spiritual heartland, France’s role is to create, after the war, an exemplary Revolution: to invent political and social forms – and this is the particular genius of France – valid not only in France but universally. A synthesis of all revolutionary efforts including the USSR.

In his next entry, two days later, he expanded on these ideas: France’s destiny, he said, was: ‘créer exemplairement dans tous les domaines de l’activité humaine’ (‘to pave the way in all areas of human activity’) – including revolution. Two days later again he described as ‘très justes’ (‘spot on’) some remarks by the English writer John Beverley Nichols: ‘Plus qu’aucun autre pays, la France avait « dépassé » le stade de la guerre. C’était là un signe d’extrême civilisation, stade auquel nous arriverons tous un jour. Le malheur de la France est d’y être parvenue alors qu’elle était entourée de barbares ...’ (110–11; Beverley Nichols, cited by Amrouche, ‘More than any other country, France had got beyond the point where wars seemed like a viable path. This clearly indicates how civilized French culture is, and where we will all be one day. France’s bad luck is to have got to that stage whilst surrounded by barbarians ...’). More strikingly still, in September 1943 he wrote (and this is the paragraph in its entirety): ‘Le sens de la qualité, le sens des valeurs. Sentiments aristocratiques. Ma France ne fut jamais celle de l’égalité en fait, mais celle de l’égalité dans les chances. Mais j’ai toujours cru à la race, aux valeurs innées. Me suis toujours assimilé aux Seigneurs’ (116, ‘A sense of quality, a sense of values. Aristocratic sentiments. My France was never about equality, actually, but rather equality of opportunity. But I’ve

<sup>45</sup> Amrouche, *Journal* 1928–62. The editor’s introduction and footnoting are very helpful.

always believed in breeding [*la race*], and innate values. I have always thought of myself as one of the *Seigneurs*'.<sup>46</sup>

It would be hard to find a more striking example of how others' views may be internalized – a certain sort of assimilation, in other words, a term that Amrouche echoes here with an apparent lack of self-consciousness, stunningly unconcerned by the self-contradictory nature of his own rhetoric. You do not need to liken or 'assimilate' yourself to the 'Seigneurs' if you have the breeding; and you cannot acquire the breeding if you do not have it. If you are of the wrong ethnic type, you cannot even 'pass'. In the Maghreb, Amrouche's 'France' would always be surrounded by 'barbarians' – a word whose etymological link to 'Berber' is hard to ignore in this context. It is very hard to believe that Amrouche truly thought France offered 'l'égalité dans les chances' to the colonized peoples of North Africa.

The massacres in Sétif and Guelma in 1945 were a turning point for Amrouche as for others. His vituperative journal entry for 13 November 1954, two weeks after the FLN's inaugural attacks, shows how radically his attitude had changed by that time. It begins with quotations from two French politicians. First, Jules Ferry: 'Les colons proclament les Arabes incorrigibles et non éducatibles sans avoir jamais rien tenté depuis trente ans pour les arracher à leur misère intellectuelle et morale. Le cri d'indignation universelle qui a accueilli, d'un bout à l'autre de la colonie, les projets d'écoles indigènes du parlement est un curieux témoignage de cet état d'opinion' (279, 'The *colons* declare the Arabs a lost cause and unteachable without really ever having tried anything in the last thirty years that might have lifted them out of a state of intellectual and moral poverty. The universal cry of indignation that greeted, from one end of the colony to the other, the government's proposals for schooling for the local population offers a curious illustration of this mentality').<sup>47</sup> This

46 I have not managed to locate the source of the quotation from Beverley Nichols, who was prolific. The editor cushions Amrouche's remarks about the *Seigneurs* with a footnote: 'Vision essentialiste en contradiction avec la perception développée dans les textes politiques' (116, 'An essentialist vision that contradicts the ideas set out in the political texts').

47 Amrouche's diary does not give a date or source, and adapts slightly Ferry's original remarks; I have quoted Amrouche's version. Ferry's comments were made in the 1892 book *Le Gouvernement de l'Algérie*, and are preceded by these sentences: 'Il est difficile de faire entendre au colon européen qu'il existe d'autres droits que les siens en pays arabe et que l'indigène n'est pas une race taillable et corvéable à merci [...] L'Arabe n'est pas un esclave qu'on mène par le bâton.'



is followed by a quotation from 1935 from Maurice Viollette, warning that if Algerians were not given a proper place in 'la patrie française' they would make a *patrie* of their own. Two years later the Projet Blum–Viollette attempted to extend French citizenship to a minority of Algerians – about 20,000 of them, including the highly educated – but was defeated, arguably a fatal blow to the project of assimilation, such as it was.<sup>48</sup> The gist of the remarks from both Ferry and Viollette was pro-colonial (if anti-*colon*), but Amrouche went on to talk about the incapacity of the French to recognize 'les crimes du colonialisme', and he said that the conflict between 'la Patrie' – meaning France, and a certain mythology – and 'la patrie', meaning Algeria, had to be resolved in favour of the latter.

Amrouche's political and cultural disappointment and violent change of heart are very evident at this point in the journal, and find expression in different forms. Parts of that same journal entry of 13 November 1954 hover between notes-to-self and a sort of raw philosophical and political poetry, steeped in anger and irony:

L'accession à l'humain.

L'accomplissement de l'homme, par la dignité.

Ne plus être un indigène – un objet à transformer, un sous-homme.

L'Européen, qui ne peut se passer de sa main-d'œuvre, la paye au prix débattu. Mais si la violence n'est pas dans les actes, elle est dans le langage et dans les sentiments. On sent qu'il gronde encore au fond des cœurs un flot mal apaisé de rancune, de dédain et de craintes. Bien rares sont les colons pénétrés de la mission éducatrice et civilisatrice qui appartient à la race supérieure ; plus rares encore ceux qui croient à une amélioration possible de la race vaincue' (79–81, 'It is difficult to make the European *colon* understand that it is not just *bis* rights that are at stake in Arab countries and that natives do not belong to a race that can simply be shaped at his will [...] The Arab is not a slave that you can beat into submission. The Europeans get the workforce that they need at a knockdown price. If their actions themselves are not violent, their language and feelings are. One senses, buried deep down, waves of anger, scorn and fear. Few and far between are the *colons* who believe in the educational and civilizing mission of the superior race; even rarer are those who believe that the defeated race has the potential for improvement').

48 Amrouche does not give a source for this quotation. Viollette was governor of Algeria from 1925 to 1927; the Projet Blum–Viollette was rejected because of fierce resistance from the *pièdes noirs*. In his book *L'Algérie vivra-t-elle? Notes d'un ancien gouverneur* (Paris: Alcan, 1931) Viollette was critical of the limited opportunities, including educational opportunities, on offer to Algeria's *indigènes*, and alluded to the humiliations suffered by those who were teachers (258–66).

Ne plus être un indigène assimilé.

« C'est bien, c'est extraordinaire pour un indigène. »

L'humiliation permanente de l'individu, et de ce qui, dans l'individu est la part intemporelle.

L'attentat.

L'offense.

La dérision.

La mystification volontaire ou inconsciente.

Être français : Dieu était français. (279–80)

To gain the status of a human.

To become a man through a state of dignity.

To cease being a native – an object in need of transformation, a subhuman.

To cease being an assimilated native.

'Gosh, that's really good – quite extraordinary, for a native.'

The permanent humiliation of the individual, and of the very essence of the individual.

Attacked.

Offended.

Derided.

Mystification, intended or otherwise.

Being French: God was French.

Amrouche's diary may have been private, but by this time he was a public intellectual and in that capacity too had become increasingly critical of French colonialism. His biographer Réjane Le Baut notes that as early as 1939 Amrouche had given a talk to a predominantly French audience at the lycée in Tunis, under the auspices of the Alliance française, where he spoke boldly of the Maghreb as a battlefield between cultures, involving many thousands of men not as spectators but as the very grounds (*siège*) of the battle.<sup>49</sup> In 1945 he published the *Figaro* article 'France d'Europe et France d'Afrique' which I mentioned earlier, whose title already pointed to the existence – and inconsistencies – of 'two Frances'.<sup>50</sup> All of this may still have been compatible with a belief in assimilation, but the articles that appeared during the war of independence, along with the journal entries of that period, became unequivocal about Algeria's

49 Le Baut, *Jean El-Mouhoub Amrouche*, 66. That talk has not been published.

50 Amrouche, *Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français*, 9. Le Baut points out (381) that the original version of the article contained the sentence: 'Si la France est l'esprit de mon âme, la Kabylie est l'âme de cet esprit' ('If France is the spirit of my soul, then Kabylie is the soul of that spirit'), but later he would replace 'Kabylie' with 'Algérie'.

need to cast off the French yoke.<sup>51</sup> In February 1955 he wrote: ‘J’écris ces lignes dans le déchirement, mais si faible que soit ma voix, j’estime que n’ai pas le droit de me taire. L’heure est venue de témoigner par des actes publics’ (284, ‘I write these lines in a state of anguish, rent in two [*dans le déchirement*], but however faint my voice may be, I believe that I am obliged to speak out. Now is the time to bear witness through public acts’). In an article in *Témoignage chrétien* in November 1957 he criticized Tillion’s *L’Algérie en 1957*, notably for Tillion’s willingness to speak on behalf of Algerians who would rather speak for themselves. The article ends: ‘Le devoir que la France prétend assumer comme une mission, eh bien, le peuple algérien l’en tient quitte. Qu’elle rende ses comptes de tutelle à un peuple désormais majeur’ (‘As for the task which France believes to be its mission, well, the Algerian people are happy to say: forget about it. France must now allow a people who have come of age to look after themselves’).<sup>52</sup>

Then, in January 1958, Amrouche published ‘La France comme mythe et comme réalité’. *Le Monde*’s patronizing introduction to the article mentioned his perfect French (the gist of such comments, as Amrouche had suggested, seemed to be: ‘Gosh, that’s really good – quite extraordinary, for a native’) and said it was ‘un réquisitoire d’autant plus violent qu’il est inspiré par l’amour déçu’ (‘an indictment all the more violent for being motivated by spurned love’) – which, in view of Amrouche’s ideological trajectory, seems about right. The essay spoke of the failings of the *mission civilisatrice* and the illusions of French universalist thought, but also held onto an idea of the value, and indeed the universality, of aspects of French culture. The distance Amrouche had travelled intellectually is brought home by the echoes of his 1945 rhetoric about France’s capacity to invent ‘political and social forms – and this is the particular genius of France – valid not only in France but universally’: in 1958, by contrast, he wrote:

Le comportement français en face de l’étranger n’a guère varié depuis Montesquieu. Certes, les Français mangent moins de pain, ils ignorent moins la géographie, et ils commencent à admettre qu’un Persan puisse

51 See also ‘Quelques remarques à propos du colonialisme et de la culture’, a speech of 1956, reprinted in *L’Atlas*, 12 April 1963, and reproduced in *Un Algérien s’adresse aux Français*, 16–22. Amrouche continued to believe that colonialism could be fought in the name of ‘Western values’.

52 Amrouche, ‘Algeria fara da se’, in *Un Algérien s’adresse aux Français*, 39–48: 48.

se vouloir Persan même s'il admire la France [...] Mais le Français pense l'universel comme une extension des caractères français, et par réduction à ces caractères de toute réalité étrangère. [...] La France est pour le Français en tous les domaines le modèle envié, toujours imité mais inimitable, de toute civilisation accomplie. [...] [T]out naïvement, les Français se pensent comme purs sujets, et [...] ne supportent pas d'être des objets pour les autres. (55)

French behaviour towards foreigners has barely changed since the time of Montesquieu. Of course, the French eat less bread, are less ignorant of geography, and are starting to admit that a Persian might wish to remain a Persian even if he admires France [...] But a Frenchman considers the universal only as an extension of French characteristics, and reduces any foreign reality to these selfsame characteristics. [...] In the Frenchman's mind, France is, in all areas, the model – often imitated but never equalled – of the consummate civilization to which others must necessarily aspire. [...] In naive fashion, the French think of themselves as pure subjects, and [...] cannot tolerate being taken as objects by others.<sup>53</sup>

French ethnocentricity and arrogance were conveyed, he suggested, even by the country's celebrated framing of the universal rights 'de l'homme et du citoyen' ('of man and of the citizen'): the phrase implied that real men were French citizens, and that people who had the misfortune not to be French (or, one might add, not to be men – women, for instance) were no more than 'des ébauches de l'homme'; rough drafts, not yet fully formed.

This powerful piece of writing elicited strong reactions.<sup>54</sup> *Le Monde* published several responses, some supportive of Amrouche, others

53 The Montesquieu text alluded to by Amrouche is *Lettres persanes*, first published in 1721. The history of French ethnocentrism and false universalism is the subject of Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres: la réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

54 Lia Brozgal makes this point: 'Amrouche's essay has garnered very little attention in general and none at all from specialists seeking the roots of current postcolonial theory in the anticolonial discourse of the 1950s. This is unfortunate given Amrouche's unique approach to the question: rather than focus on racism or the hegemony of Europe, he develops and analyzes the concept of a mythical France – a notion engendered and mobilized by France itself – and examines the ways in which a delusional national self-image contributed not only to imperialism and colonization, but to France's continuing difficulties in navigating its nascent postcolonial relationships (namely with Indochina and the recently independent Morocco and Tunisia) or, in a larger sense, its relationships with all that is foreign'. Brozgal, *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 121–22.

highly critical. Some correspondents were indignant that such an article could have been written by someone who had been taught to read and write by the French and had been embraced by French cultural institutions. Among Amrouche's critics was Jacques Heurgon, a distinguished classicist who knew Amrouche well and who thought that the essay was unfair to his former teachers. Heurgon added that people had been looking forward to the 'beau roman qu'il annonçait et dans lequel s'exprimerait la difficile éducation sentimentale d'un indigène assimilé, mais comme tout homme et tout poète, inassimilable' ('the fine novel that he had promised, which would convey the challenging sentimental education of an assimilated native, but one who, like all men and all poets, could never be fully assimilated'). Heurgon's tone suggested that his own angry response was also a case of 'spurned love', and Amrouche's published reply to the various correspondents showed his dismay at Heurgon's remarks.<sup>55</sup> Soon after this, on 27 January, a speech Amrouche delivered at an anti-colonial meeting alongside Aimé Césaire, Sartre and others earned him another hurtful rejection: a letter cutting him off from his wife's family, who were French pieds-noirs. (The fact that Amrouche married 'out' constituted another difference, incidentally, from Feraoun, who married one of his first cousins.) The letter from his in-laws, quoted in his journal, accused him again of ingratitude towards France and of siding with Arabs even though he wasn't an Arab. It ended:

Alors que nous sommes engagés dans une lutte désespérée pour sauver notre pays, notre liberté, notre vie et la vie de nos enfants, ce que vous faites constitue une ignoble trahison envers la France et envers nous-mêmes.

En conséquence, veuillez noter qu'à partir de ce jour, nous considérons que vous ne faites plus partie de notre famille.

Recevez, Monsieur, l'expression de notre profond mépris.

Pierre, Madeleine, Denise Molbert. (299)

55 The responses published in *Le Monde* are reproduced in Amrouche, *Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français*, 351–59. For more information on Heurgon see the obituary by James Kirkup in *The Independent*, 4 December 1995, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/obituary-professor-jacques-heurgon-1524101.html>, consulted 6 March 2017. Olivier Todd notes that Camus wrote to Heurgon on 18 March, saying he agreed with his response to Amrouche's essay (*Albert Camus: une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 711; *Albert Camus: A Life*, trans. Benjamin Ivry (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 386).

Whilst we are engaged in a desperate struggle to save our country, our freedom, our lives and the lives of our children, what you are doing amounts to a shameful betrayal of France and us.

As a result, please be informed that from this day forth we no longer consider you to be a member of our family.

Sincerely, and with profound contempt,

Pierre, Madeleine, & Denise Molbert

A little later, in November 1959, Amrouche was sacked from French radio by the prime minister, Michel Debré – even though at this time Amrouche was also working as an intermediary between the FLN and de Gaulle.<sup>56</sup> He carried on broadcasting on Swiss radio, and de Gaulle intervened on his behalf, but by then Amrouche had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. He died in April 1962, a month after Feraoun.<sup>57</sup>

In the end Feraoun and Amrouche, although different from one another in significant respects, had a good deal in common. Both writers were ‘assimilated’ to a degree, in their different ways, and were dedicated for much of their lives to a certain idea of France; yet in both the desire for Algerian independence had crystallized by the mid-1950s. Particularly because of that shared commitment to independence, one might have expected Feraoun to greet Amrouche’s major anti-colonial essay with a degree of enthusiasm. Instead, one finds this reaction in his journal entry for 17 January 1958:

Lu l’article de A. dans *Le Monde*. Rien de plus jésuite que ce déchirement qu’il simule, de plus faux que ce complexe d’infériorité qu’il s’avise

56 The record of Amrouche’s work with de Gaulle, including Amrouche’s thoughts on how to influence him, is an important element of the *Journal*. There were moments when Amrouche showed notable political prescience; he saw which way de Gaulle was leaning and tried, privately, then in print, to offer the FLN his insights. He commented: ‘Mes mérites et mes œuvres sont minces. Mais aux pays des aveugles, n’est-ce pas ?’ (June 1958, 315, ‘My virtues and my achievements don’t amount to much. But in the country of the blind, as they say ...’).

57 Kateb Yacine’s poem ‘C’est vivre’, published in *Jeune Afrique* 107 (November 1962), commemorated the lives and the work of Amrouche, Feraoun and Fanon (who had died of leukemia in 1961). He described them as: ‘Eux qui avaient appris | À lire dans les ténèbres’ (‘They who had learned | To read in the shadows’); the pun reflects on their education. The poem ends ‘Mourir ainsi c’est vivre’ (‘To die in this way is to live’). It is quoted by Djebbar in *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, 91, E80 and is discussed by Catherine Brun in ‘Mourir ainsi c’est vivre’, in Pierre-Louis Fort and Christiane Chaulet Achour (eds), *La France et l’Algérie en 1962: de l’histoire aux représentations textuelles d’une fin de guerre* (Paris: Karthala, 2013), 135–47.

aujourd'hui d'étaler à longueur de colonnes. Voilà un monsieur qui a tout renié du Kabyle, francisé jusqu'au bout des ongles, admis partout sans réticence, admiré et écouté dans les milieux littéraires parisiens, rédacteur en chef à la radiodiffusion nationale, qui brusquement se découvre une nature de bicot, de bicot brimé, d'homme inférieur qui ne peut être ni assimilé ni intégré. [...] Un tissu de lieux communs qui pue la trahison ! (262)

I read A.'s article in *Le Monde*. There is nothing more Jesuitical than his simulated heartbreak [*déchirement*], nothing so false as the inferiority complex that he now sees fit to parade in the newspaper. Here is a gentleman who has disowned his Kabyle background, Frenchified to the tips of his fingers, warmly welcomed everywhere he goes, admired and listened to in the literary circles of Paris, an editor-in-chief on national radio. Suddenly he is rediscovering his roots as a darkie [*bicot*], a mistreated underling who can neither be assimilated nor integrated. [...] A fabric of clichés that reeks of treason! (17 January 1958, 236)

If one bears in mind Amrouche's early work on *Chants berbères de Kabylie* and his pre-1958 stirrings of anti-colonialism, Feraoun's accusations of insincerity appear harsh. Certainly Amrouche had shown himself eager to mingle with the high society of French culture, and to propagate some of its myths, but Feraoun overstated how suddenly and how completely Amrouche's perception of himself and the world had changed. It is possible, of course, that Feraoun was not aware of the criticisms of colonialism that Amrouche had made by this time, and one needs to remember that he could not have seen Amrouche's diary. All the same, the force of Feraoun's outburst implies that there may have been further reasons for his vitriol.

The obvious way to explain Feraoun's reaction is in terms of the peculiar dynamics of rivalry and identification that seem to have marked their relationship from their first moment of indirect contact, Amrouche's rejection of *Le Fils du pauvre*. Feraoun must have been bruised by that experience, and may have felt some jealousy at the kind of elite cultural access and authority enjoyed by Amrouche. It is also tempting to speculate that Amrouche somehow embodied for Feraoun aspects of his own trajectory, or psyche, that he found uncomfortable, especially a kind of assimilation: a degree of alienation from his Kabyle background (heightened in Amrouche's case not only by his departure from Algeria but by his Christianity, which may have prompted Feraoun's use of 'jésuite'); an acquired 'Frenchness'; a relatively slow turn to anti-colonialism.

These similarities and differences no doubt shaped Amrouche's attitude, too. Armand Guibert, who worked with Amrouche, recalled:

Ce que décidait Amrouche ne passait forcément pas par la collégialité. Il avait de l'autorité une conception farouchement personnelle. Lorsque Mouloud Feraoun envoya à Edmond Charlot, qui était de ses amis, le manuscrit de son premier livre, « La maison du pauvre » [sic], il eut la surprise amère de le recevoir en retour, avec une lettre de refus signée LA DIRECTION, ce que Charlot n'apprit [que] bien plus tard, une fois le livre paru, chichement auto-édité. Sans doute Amrouche considéra-t-il que le lustre d'un deuxième Kabyle [...] pouvait ternir l'éclat de sa propre singularité : il court-circuita le rival possible.

Amrouche's decisions were not necessarily based on any sense of collegiality. He had a fiercely personal conception of authority. When Mouloud Feraoun sent Edmond Charlot, who was one of his friends, the manuscript of his first book, 'The Poor Man's House' [sic], he had the unpleasant surprise of having it returned to him with a letter of refusal signed 'THE EDITOR', something Charlot only learned of much later, after the book had come out, published on the cheap by the author himself. No doubt Amrouche thought that the brilliance of a second Kabyle writer [...] was liable to detract from his own singularity: he dealt with his possible rival accordingly.<sup>58</sup>

Le Baut rejects this version of the incident: she argues that Amrouche's editorial criteria were aesthetic, and on those grounds had doubts about a novel whose primary interest was as 'témoignage' (a form of 'witnessing' or a document). In support of that view she points out that Amrouche, whose tastes and writing style were different from Feraoun's, supported another writer he might have seen as a rival, Kateb Yacine.<sup>59</sup> Charlot himself, however, later explained Amrouche's decision as a 'un petit accès de jalousie littéraire' ('a little fit of literary jealousy'); Charlot was proud to have been the first publisher of Camus, Roblès and Roy, and regretted not having been the one to bring Feraoun's writing into the world. Later he recalled that it was only at the start of 1950s, with the emergence of Mohammed Dib, that he had first come across an

58 Armand Guibert, *Jean Amrouche (1906–1962) par un témoin de sa vie* (Paris: Gaston Lachurié, 1985), 44–45. In an article in *Le Monde* of 13 August 1994 Charlot confirmed that he found out only belatedly, 'du timide Feraoun lui-même' (18, 'from the timid Feraoun himself') that *Le Fils du pauvre* had been submitted; Amrouche had not told him.

59 Le Baut, *Jean El-Mouhoub Amrouche*, 173, 212.



Algerian writer; and of Feraoun he commented: 'Il s'est rendu compte que l'on pouvait écrire sur l'Algérie des œuvres où les Algériens n'étaient pas simplement des employés, des « *chaouchs* », mais avaient aussi une vie à eux, ce que l'on ne trouvait pas dans la littérature, coloniale ou pas, appelez-la comme vous voudrez, qui avait existé avant' ('He realized that it was possible to write books about Algeria in which Algerians did not figure simply as employees, as "*chaouchs*", but had their own lives. This was something that had not been seen in literature, colonial or otherwise, call it what you will, up to that point').<sup>60</sup> This echoes Feraoun's response (positive and negative) to Camus, and also puts the question of 'aesthetic' criteria in a slightly different light: what is being described here is a kind of aesthetic revelation, even if the idiom of Feraoun's novels is often – though not always, as we will see – rather flat and 'documentary'.<sup>61</sup> If these personal and perhaps aesthetic tensions between Feraoun and Amrouche have some interest for the purposes of this book, it is partly because they cast light on the conditions in which 'francophone' literature emerged in Algeria, late in the colonial era.

There is, however, another possible explanation for Feraoun's adverse reaction, linked with his struggles over the issue of pedagogical/political 'neutrality'. Nowhere in 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité' is French education a fully explicit topic, though one might have expected it to be, given the theme of the essay, and given too that the essay, with its account of dawning resistance to colonial indoctrination, has an autobiographical dimension. Nevertheless, educational imagery and questions of education do emerge, and they do so, I want to suggest, in ways that tainted with the suspicion of ideological delusion and political collaboration the sort of educational work that Feraoun continued to pursue.

Some of the allusions to education in 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité' are metaphorical, or partly metaphorical. Amrouche refers ironically to France as 'institutrice des peuples, fille aînée de l'Église (et Christ des nations)' (56, 'school teacher to all peoples, eldest daughter of

60 Charlot, *Souvenirs d'Edmond Charlot, entretiens avec Frédéric Jacques Temple* (Pézenas: Domens, 2007), 26.

61 I am not disputing that Kateb's work is more aesthetically sophisticated than Feraoun's; my point is that the distinction between aesthetic and political criteria is complicated and blurred by thematically pioneering work such as Feraoun's novels. If literature had not previously found much room for ordinary Algerian lives, that must have been partly for reasons that actual or prospective writers experienced as aesthetic, but whose origins were also political.

the church, and Christ to all nations'). He also states that the 'fascination' exerted over the colonized by a legendary France 'ne dure qu'un temps : celui d'une adolescence exaltée qui, sortie des forêts du songe et des illusions, débouche sur un âge adulte et sur une prise de conscience dramatique' (56, 'only lasts for a time: that of an impassioned adolescence that emerges from the forests of dream and illusions to arrive at adulthood and a dramatic moment of realization'). The image subverts the colonial conception of the colonized as perpetual minors ('peuples mineurs', 60) who might one day be lifted into adulthood by the civilizing mission; and, in its blurring of the literal and the metaphorical, it raises questions about the political role of French schools with regard to their pupils (some of them 'adolescent', of course). This connects with a remark he had just made about 'l'idée que le Français se forme de son pays, et qu'imprime en lui dès l'enfance l'histoire qu'on lui enseigne' ('the idea that the Frenchman has of his country, and which is instilled in him from childhood through the history that is taught to him') – that is, an image of France that was 'mythique et stéréotypée' (55). Still, Amrouche saw the possible emancipatory effects of colonial education: his essay makes the point that anti-colonial thought – including, now, his own – had taken root in French education ('Jusqu'à la fin de la guerre, presque tous les anticolonialistes puisaient leurs arguments dans la pensée française, qui était *leur seule ouverture sur le monde vivant*', 57, his italics; 'Up until the end of the war, nearly all of the anticolonialists based their arguments on French thought, which served as *their only way of accessing the wider world*'. 'The war' here is the Second World War, of course.) Later in the essay, continuing to talk about himself among others, he wrote: 'En appeler à la France d'Europe, à son esprit, à ses lois, contre l'inégalité, l'injustice, la misère, le mépris, c'était commettre un attentat sacrilège. Voyez-vous ces indigènes qui nous doivent tout, qui se mêlent de nous donner des leçons, qui se croient plus Français que nous ?' (62, 'Invoking the mindset and laws of European France to criticize inequality, injustice, destitution and disdain was to commit sacrilege. Have you seen those natives who owe us everything, who have the cheek to lecture us and who think they are more French than we are?'). The second sentence, in a kind of *style indirect libre*, not only captures colonial attitudes but conveys something of the young Amrouche's sense of his place in the world and his own 'Frenchness' ('I always thought of myself as one of the *Seigneurs*'). In this way, it suggests something of education's normative and assimilative power.

There is a moment in Feraoun's journal that touches on that same theme of 'Frenchness'. The day after he had been upset by the news

that the school in his home village had been torched, he discussed the deepening divisions between 'native' and European teachers, and reported that he had yelled at the most racist of his colleagues: 'Je suis aussi Français que vous et ne voudrais pas avoir à vous le redire !' ('I am as French as you are, and I should not have to remind you of the fact!'). In some ways Feraoun too was 'Frenchified to the tips of his fingers', to repeat the phrase he used in accusation of Amrouche, and accepted that he was. The diary entry continued: 'Pauvre petit Vichyste borné, je suis plus Français que toi, tu le sais bien pourtant et c'est la jalousie qui te dicte tes propos fielleux' (70, 'You shallow, narrow-minded Vichyist, I am more French than you are, and you're well aware of it. Your malevolent remarks are motivated by your jealousy', 65). But by this time, 'assimilated' though he may have been, Feraoun did not believe that the French would ever accept him fully. It was his education that made him 'French', but incompletely. The next day, 1 February 1956, he wrote: 'Quand je dis que suis Français, je me donne une étiquette que tous les Français me refusent ; je m'exprime en français, j'ai été formé à l'école française. J'en connais autant qu'un Français moyen. Mais que suis-je, bon Dieu ?' (70-71, 'When I say that I am French, I give myself a label that every French person refuses me. I speak French, and I got my education in a French school. I have learned as much as the average Frenchman. But dear God, what am I really?' 65).<sup>62</sup>

Amrouche's comments on the sacrilege of a 'native' using the French language and French concepts to criticize French culture and politics foreshadowed the negative reception of 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité' and indeed predicted more specifically the accusation of ingratitude. It was an accusation with which Amrouche, like Feraoun, was already familiar. 'On me reprochera de battre ma nourrice' ('They'll accuse me of attacking my nursemaid'), Amrouche had written in his journal in 1952 (253). In 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité' he challenged openly the expectation of gratitude weighing on the 'indigène', writing: 'Envers qui ? Envers ces maîtres français de la liberté qui lui ont révélé la gloire de l'homme [...] ? Que non pas ! Ces

62 The phrasing is reminiscent of Ferdinand Oyono's *Une vie de boy* (Paris: Julliard, 1956), a well-known novel reflecting on the effects of colonialism and colonial education. The dying man in the novel's opening scene makes the same disheartened use of 'que' where we might expect 'qui': 'que sommes-nous ? Que sont tous les nègres qu'on dit français ?' (13; *Houseboy*, trans. John Reed (London: Heinemann, 1966): 'what are we? What are we blackmen who are called French?' 7).

maîtres aussi, ignorés de l'adjudant et du sbire, sont propriété coloniale, *propriété privée*. L'hommage que l'indigène, éternel élève, leur rend ne saurait les toucher directement' (62, Amrouche's italics; 'Towards whom should we feel grateful? To these French masters, advocates of freedom, who have revealed man's glory to us [...]? Certainly not! Those masters, about whom the sergeant major and his henchman know precisely nothing, remain colonial property, *private property*. The allegiance pledged to them by the native, who remains forever a schoolboy, makes no difference to them').

Amrouche's refusal to feel or express gratitude is clear enough. What is less clear is the meaning of the word 'maître' (which covers largely the same range of meanings as English 'master', including schoolmaster); and I suspect that Amrouche's phrasing was one of the things that riled Feraoun.<sup>63</sup> In this instance and others it is difficult to discern Amrouche's perception of the role of the colonial teacher, not least because his journal, like Feraoun's, has less to say about education than one might expect, especially during the years when he was teaching. Amrouche's occasional memories of his work as a teacher seem positive; and as far as I know he never expressed regret for having done that work. Early in January 1945 – not long after his move away from teaching and from the Maghreb, as he immersed himself more deeply in the worlds of broadcasting, publishing and politics – Amrouche wrote in his journal that he had been tormented all day by the desire to leave Paris and go back to Tunisia and 'reprendre mon métier de professeur' (137, 'return to my work as a teacher'). Later, during the war of independence, a trip to Tunis for a meeting with FLN leaders in exile prompted a kind of nostalgia, and an unusual change of tone, though the memories of his own school days were less than idyllic:

Bonheur poignant, présent et illusoire. Je suis ici dans mon passé, que tout me restitue, où je me retrouve comme si en vivant je n'étais pas devenu un autre. J'avais onze ans. Petit Kabyle chrétien, j'étais roulé

63 Rey in the *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française* notes under 'maître' that the word was in use as early as 1155 to mean a teacher, though the Latin *magister* was used for a *maître d'école* from the 15th to the 18th century. Feraoun used 'magister' in remarks I quoted earlier: see above, 109. The *Robert* gives two meanings: a village schoolmaster (a usage that is now archaic), or a pedant. The first meaning of 'maître' given by Rey is 'Personne qui exerce une domination, qui dispose, en fait ou en droit, de certains pouvoirs sur des êtres ou des choses' ('Person who exercises mastery; who is in a position of power over people or things').

entre les puissantes masses que constituait mes condisciples : renégat pour les musulmans, *carne venduta* (putain, litt. viande vendue) pour les Italiens, *bicot* au regard des Français ...

Anciens élèves venant à moi : très émouvant. Un moment les a marqués à jamais, a gravé dans leur âme mon visage et mon nom. Devenus hommes, ils le savent enfin ; c'est comme s'ils n'avaient pas eu d'autre maître que moi. (18 Aug 1959, 330)

A poignant, immediate and illusory happiness. Everything around me returned me to the past, in which I found myself once more, as if in living I had not become another person. I was eleven. A little Kabyle Christian, swept up by the throng of my fellow students; seen as an apostate by the Muslims, as *carne venduta* (a whore, literally 'sold meat') by the Italians, a darkie [*bicot*] in the eyes of the French ...

Former students came up to me. It was very moving. A moment from the past had left an indelible mark on them, imprinting my face and name into their souls. Now they are men at last they understand; it is as if I were the only teacher (*maître*) they had ever had.

There may be something narcissistic in Amrouche's response to his former pupils, but the narcissism and nostalgia are tempered by the opening statement that his happiness back in Tunis is 'illusoire'. And here again 'maître' may resonate in more than one way: these pupils, mostly Tunisian and Jewish, have become 'men' also in the sense that Tunisia has now won its independence; and the authority of the colonial schoolteacher lingers after the authority of the colonial master has been rejected. There may even be an implication that the teacher helped to make them 'men'.

'La France comme mythe et comme réalité', by contrast, tends to convey the idea – without ever articulating it fully – that education in Algeria was fatally contaminated by its association with the country's colonial 'masters'. I imagine that is how it would have sounded to someone like Feraoun, and I think that is what Amrouche intended. As one reads the words 'Envers ces maîtres français ...' in the sentence about gratitude, one may first assume it means 'schoolmasters', as it did in that 1945 article where Amrouche referred to the uses an 'educated Algerian' might make of 'the weapons that his French masters have taught him to use'.<sup>64</sup> The addition of 'de la liberté' creates an odd phrase, moving

64 With regard to Amrouche's possible intentions in the essay it is worth noting that, according to Guibert (*Jean Amrouche*, 12), he stated that in his French schools 'il eut des professeurs, non des maîtres' ('he had teachers, not masters') – which,

the meaning away from, or beyond, schoolteachers. It recalls the uses of 'maître' earlier in the essay – for example, Amrouche's characterization of the colonial relationship as 'de maître à serviteur, de vainqueur à vaincu' (61, 'between master and servant, conquerer and conquered'); but then one may be brought back to the idea of the schoolmaster by Amrouche's statement that (some) 'maîtres' are 'colonial property'. Perhaps all this suggests a hesitation over how to place colonial education (a slightly different matter from seeing the political ambiguities of education's role), and how to place 'native' teachers in particular. Elsewhere in the essay, however, the negative assessments of the colonial *maître* are even closer to the surface. In his discussion of 'la collaboration indigène' ('native collaboration') Amrouche writes:

Il est advenu [...] que des hommes honorables, séduits par le mythe chevaleresque, s'employassent au service de l'administration coloniale. Ils se comportaient en féodaux, s'imaginant échapper à la servilité. Ils se croyaient libres, songeant que leur fidélité à un noble idéal, érigé en idéal universel, était appréciée à sa valeur. On les ménageait, comme instruments de domination indirecte et enseignes illustrant et glorifiant le système. (61–62)

It came about that some honourable men, seduced by a myth of chivalry, took jobs in the colonial administration. They acted as if they were feudal lords, imagining that they had escaped servility. They thought themselves free, imagining that their fidelity to a noble ideal, glorified as a universal ideal, was appreciated at its worth; but they were being used as tools of indirect domination and as emblems of the glory of the system.

It is hard *not* to read those remarks as being primarily about teachers, not least because we know that very few 'native' children received enough education to become emblems (*enseignes*) of the *mission civilisatrice* or to work 'au service de l'administration', and that, in that small group, most became teachers. Moreover, the ethos of teaching, more than that of pharmacy, say, could have been described in terms of 'a noble ideal, glorified as a universal ideal'.<sup>65</sup> The word 'enseignes' may

while suggesting a positive view of his education, may imply too an association between 'maîtres' and colonial domination.

65 The number of French-educated Muslim professionals practising in Algeria was very small. Teaching was the most common profession. Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, vol. II, 532–43 gives statistics regarding education and employment for this period.

also encourage the reader to think of teaching, resonating alongside the semi-metaphorical uses of 'institutrice', 'maîtres', 'leçons' and 'élève'; in this instance it means 'emblems' and does not come from *enseigner* (to teach), but the two words share etymology as well as spelling and sound.

In generalizing about deluded 'honourable men' Amrouche must have been mindful of the evolution of his own thought; but the negative assessment mainly concerned an earlier self. It would have been natural for Feraoun to experience these remarks less as any sort of self-criticism on Amrouche's part than as an attack on those still involved in colonial education. It should be remembered that when Amrouche wrote 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité' it was some years since he had given up work as a teacher (though not, it should be emphasized, for political reasons, whatever his political views later); Feraoun, by contrast, was still 'collaborating' with the work of colonial education. The fact that by this time he had been reluctantly removed from the educational work in which he most believed, that of the 'instituteur du bled', may have heightened his sensitivity to whatever aspersions Amrouche's text conveyed. (At this point he was a headteacher in the suburbs of Algiers; he had not yet started working for the CSEs, where he became more deeply mired in 'colonial administration', and would feel more politically compromised and less happy.) As we have already seen, he had plenty of doubts of his own about his work.

Because Feraoun's journal was published in September 1962, after both men's death, Amrouche never knew about Feraoun's diatribe against him. He was too ill to attend a commemorative event for Feraoun and his colleagues held on 23 March 1962, but composed a text for the occasion. About half of Amrouche's tribute was about Feraoun, particularly Feraoun as a writer, about whom he wrote:

Cette mort au moins devrait conférer à Feraoun l'humble dignité pour laquelle il a toujours témoigné et combattu : être soi-même sans orgueil, mais avec fierté. Être le fils des Aïeux et le frère des compagnons d'étude et de recherche. Demeurer selon la règle berbère du Rif, fidèle à un double lignage : celui du sang, de l'âme et de la terre, celui de l'esprit ; celui de la Tradition plasmatrice et rudement contraignante, celui de la révolution et la perpétuelle mise en question. (370)

This death should at least confer upon Feraoun the humble dignity to which he always bore witness and for which he fought: to be oneself, proudly and without vanity. He was the son of his forefathers and a brother to his fellow students, united in curiosity. He was faithful, in accordance with the Berber customs of the Rif, to a double lineage: a

lineage of the blood, the soul and the earth, and one of the mind; the lineage of Tradition, restrictive and formative, and that of revolution and incessant questioning.

Amrouche also spoke positively about the six men's work as teachers, in terms that reasserted some of the intended benefits of colonial education. He wrote: 'il s'agissait non seulement de six hommes vivant chacun pour soi, mais de six dispensateurs de vie autour d'eux, de donneurs de lumière, de porteurs d'espoir et de semeurs d'amitié' ('these six men lived not only for themselves but gave life to those around them, spreading light, hope and friendship').<sup>66</sup> And he went on:

Traîtres à la race des seigneurs étaient Max Marchand, Marcel Basset, Eymard, puisqu'ils se proposaient d'amener les populations du bled algérien au même degré de conscience humaine, de savoir technique et de capacité économique que leurs anciens dominateurs français. Criminels, présomptueux, Mouloud Feraoun, Ali Hammoutène, Salah Ould'Aoudia qui, s'étant rendus maîtres du langage et des modes de pensée du colonisateur, pensaient avoir effacé la marque infamante du raton, du bicot, de l'éternel péché originel de l'indigénat pour lequel le colonialisme fasciste n'admet aucun pardon. (369)

Max Marchand, Marcel Basset and Eymard were traitors to the lordly race because they took it upon themselves to guide Algerians from every corner of the *bled* towards the same levels of human consciousness, technical knowledge, and economic independence as those of their former oppressors from France. Mouloud Feraoun, Ali Hammoutène and Salah Ould'Aoudia were criminal and presumptuous men for imagining that mastering the colonizer's language and modes of thought could wash away the shameful mark of the dirty Arab and the darkie, the eternal, original sin of the native, which fascist colonialism can never forgive.<sup>67</sup>

66 Amrouche's tribute is reproduced in *Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français*, 368–70. It is also available at <https://max-marchand-mouloud-feraoun.fr/articles/hommage-de-jean-amrouche-aux-six-inspecteurs-des-centres-sociaux-assassines-par-oas> (consulted 8 March 2019).

67 Amrouche's tribute contained odd echoes of vocabulary we have heard before: his own use of 'race' and 'seigneur', Feraoun's use of 'trahison' (betrayal) to describe Amrouche, and Feraoun's ironic use of 'bicot' in his attack on Amrouche. Here and elsewhere I have translated *bicot* as 'darkie', thinking it is similarly offensive, and lexically appropriate to the era; but *bicot*, linked etymologically to 'Arab', is more specific in the (limited) sense that as a pejorative term in French it has been used especially in relation to North Africans, as has *raton*, literally 'little rat'.



### Doubts: the FLN

We have seen what courage it took for Feraoun to persist with his work as a teacher, and we have seen too that he was sometimes wracked with doubt and even guilt about that work. I now want to examine his relationship to anti-colonialism. It would be a mistake to assume, as might those who are familiar only with his novels, that his decision to keep working in colonial education and to maintain some idea of the would-be neutral classroom should be explained in terms of fundamental opposition to the nationalist cause.

In an early entry in the journal (12 December 1955) Feraoun wrote: ‘mes compatriotes attendent de moi ou auraient attendu des livres plus audacieux, des livres nationalistes, prêchant le divorce et rien d’autre’ (26, ‘my compatriots expect or would have expected my books to be bolder, to be nationalist works calling for nothing short of a divorce’, 24). Occasionally in the novels one can discern criticisms of colonialism, implicit and explicit; in *Les Chemins qui montent*, for example, a late passage on colonial history reads:

Les premiers Français arrivaient en conquérants, [...] s’installaient en maîtres, étaient protégés et aidés. Ils se mettaient au travail et se sentaient chez eux. Les Arabes de l’endroit prenaient à leurs yeux des allures d’indigènes, autant dire de perfides animaux sauvages dont il fallait se méfier, et que paternellement il était recommandé d’apprivoiser. « La mission civilisatrice » des conquérants n’était pas un vain mot. Et dans une certaine mesure cette mission a été remplie ... (207)

The first French people arrived as conquerers [...] and established themselves as the masters; they were given protection and support. They got down to work and felt at home. They came to regard the local Arabs as the natives, that is, as unpredictable wild animals who, in a paternalistic sense, it was advisable to tame. The conquerers’ ‘civilizing mission’ was not an empty phrase and was accomplished to a certain extent ...

The precise meaning of the last sentence, with its ellipsis, is unclear, but the remarks seems to imply that ‘civilization’ is deeply contaminated with racism, and that much if not all of colonialism’s ‘mission’ has been to make life comfortable for the settlers. Nevertheless, even that later novel was far from ‘calling for nothing short of a divorce’, and for such reasons some critics viewed Feraoun as ‘assimilated’ and politically toothless.<sup>68</sup>

68 Various critical reviews of Feraoun’s work are cited in Nacib, *Mouloud Feraoun* – for example (17) M. Maschino, ‘Les Chemins qui montent ou le roman

In a letter to Paul Flamand of 31 March 1956 Feraoun himself expressed the worry that the documentary aspect ('demi-témoignage') of his first two novels was fruitless because 'cruellement dépassé' by political events ('cruelly overtaken'), and he criticized himself for worrying about crafting his new novel amidst 'les balles qui sifflent, [...] le sang qui coule, la chair meurtrie, les corps mutilés' ('the whistle of bullets, [...] and bodies bleeding, bruised and mutilated'). 'Aux yeux de mes compatriotes,' he wrote, 'aux yeux de ceux qui souffrent et qui luttent, j'apparais comme quelqu'un de tiède qui a eu peur d'atteindre la vérité. Aux yeux des agitateurs politiques, je ne suis qu'un vulgaire « vendu »' ('In the eyes of my compatriots and all who are suffering and struggling, I look as if I lack passion and am frightened to see the truth. In the eyes of the political agitators, I am nothing more than a sell-out'). In that letter he drew a negative contrast between his work as a writer

d'un faux-monnayeur', *Démocratie*, 1 April 1957, which condemned Feraoun's espousal of non-violence. Abdelkébir Khatibi in *Le Roman maghrébin* ([1968] Rabat: SMER, 1979, 2nd edition) characterized Feraoun's generation of teacher-writers in terms of 'L'écriture par trop appliquée, un peu scolaire, la philosophie misérabiliste, le rêve d'assimilation dans certains cas' (36, 'Writing which is too careful and a bit redolent of the classroom, marked by a miserabilist philosophy and, in some cases, the dream of assimilation'); Charles Bonn took a similar view in his influential book *Le Roman algérien de langue française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), 136, as did Azzedine Haddour in *Colonial Myths: History and Narrative* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). Among historians, Colonna in *Instituteurs algériens* was among those to see Feraoun in that light, more generally viewing colonial education as a powerful tool of assimilation and repression. See also Réda Bensmaïa, 'The School of Independence', in Denis Hollier (ed.), *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1018–20. Debra Kelly argues against the 'assimilationist' interpretation of *Le Fils du pauvre* in *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), Chapter 2; and Robert Elbaz and Martine Mathieu-Job present their literary-critical analysis in *Mouloud Feraoun, ou l'émergence d'une littérature* (Paris: Karthala, 2001) as a corrective to some other commentators' condescending approaches. Berrichi chose as the epigraph for his volume *Mouloud Feraoun* a quotation from Tahar Djaout from *Algérie-Actualité* in 1982: 'Parce que son témoignage a refusé d'être manichéiste, d'aucuns y ont vu un témoignage hésitant ou timoré. C'est en réalité un témoignage profondément humain et humaniste par son poids de sensibilité, de scepticisme et de vérité' ('Because as a witness to his age he refused to be Manichean, some viewed his writing as hesitant or timid, when really it was profoundly human and humanistic through its sensitivity, its scepticism and its truthfulness').

and his job as a teacher ('Dans ce domaine, mes efforts n'ont jamais été stériles ou vains'; 'In the realm of teaching my efforts have never been fruitless, never been vain'); but in the eyes of his critics, the two domains were similarly compromised.<sup>69</sup> Some of the harshest criticisms, both political and literary, were expressed by Christiane Achour in her 1986 book *Mouloud Feraoun, une voix en contrepoint*, which built on her 1982 doctoral thesis *Langue française et colonialisme en Algérie – de l'abécédaire à la production littéraire*. His style, she said, was 'atone' (58, 'flat') and 'bon enfant' (61, 'naive'), falling back on the cadences and images of school textbooks; his work strove for pseudo-universality through its 'gommage des aspérités du réel, [et sa] modulation dans une langue normée sur des thèmes édulcorés, affadis et moralisés' (28–29, 'erasure of reality's harshness, and a mode of expression governed by themes that are sugarcoated, watered down and moralistic'). All of this was taken by Achour as an index of his assimilation: she talked of 'la double contamination linguistique et idéologique qu'a provoquée la formation scolaire' (58, 'a contamination through his schooling that was both linguistic and ideological').<sup>70</sup>

69 Feraoun, *Lettres à ses amis*, 125–27.

70 Achour returned to the issue in a more recent paper, 'Mouloud Feraoun, l'écriture émancipée du *Journal*', delivered to a conference, 'L'École comme lieu d'émancipation en Algérie', organized in Paris in 2011 by the Association Les amis de Max Marchand, de Mouloud Feraoun et de leurs Compagnons. I will quote from the version available at <https://max-marchand-mouloud-feraoun.fr/articles/mouloud-feraoun-ecriture-emancipee-du-journal> (consulted 8 March 2019): 'J'ai tenté de montrer auparavant combien l'écriture de ce classique algérien était étroitement liée aux modèles du français national transmis par l'école républicaine en Algérie : étroitement liée, mais inscrivante, en sourdine et en contrepoint, une énonciation affirmant une présence autre, sans revendication frontale ; d'où l'ambivalence qu'elle affiche – et qui fait son intérêt –, dans la mesure où il ne s'agit pas seulement de l'école républicaine mais aussi de l'école coloniale. Mouloud Feraoun fut [...] un élève modèle, un enseignant de référence et un écrivain « classicisé ». Cette dimension « scolaire » n'a jamais été perçue par moi comme une référence dévalorisante, mais simplement éclairante de l'action à double tranchant de cette école dans les littératures des colonies et dans tout texte littéraire français pour les non « héritiers », au sens où l'entend Pierre Bourdieu' ('In earlier work I tried to show that this classic Algerian author's writing was closely linked to the national model of the French language propagated by republican schooling in Algeria; closely linked, but accompanied somehow, in a sort of muted counterpoint, by an affirmation of difference, without articulating any sort of direct claim; whence its sense of ambivalence, which is what makes

The journal leaves us in no doubt, however, that Feraoun – whatever his feelings earlier in his life, and whatever the nature of his fiction – dearly wanted independence by the time the FLN launched the war. Reading back through the journal in August 1961 he asserted his determination to publish it in unexpurgated form, though he knew it was dangerous, and wrote: ‘Je suis effrayé par ma franchise, mon audace, ma cruauté et parfois mon aveuglement, mon parti-pris’ (325, ‘I am frightened by my candour, my boldness, my cruelty, and, at times, my blindness and prejudices’, 294). Those who, when reading his novels, wanted his books to be ‘bolder’ could not have been disappointed by his voice in this different genre. In January 1957, for example, even while expressing his basic suspicion of all forms of patriotism, he wrote: ‘je sais que j’appartiens à un peuple digne qui est grand et restera grand, je sais qu’il vient de secouer un siècle de sommeil où l’a plongé une injuste défaite, que rien désormais ne saurait l’y replonger, qu’il est prêt à aller de l’avant pour saisir à son tour ce flambeau que s’arrachent les peuples’ (189, ‘I know that I belong to a proud, great people who will remain so, I know that we have shaken off a century of sleep into which we were plunged by a wrongful defeat, that from now on nothing will plunge us back into that sleep again, that we are ready to go forward, to grasp in our turn the flame for which people struggle’, 171).

it interesting, insofar as the schooling in question was not just republican but colonial. Mouloud Feraoun was [...] a model student, an exemplary teacher, and a writer who gained the status of a “classic”. I never saw his affinity with schools and schoolbooks as something negative, but as an illustration of those schools’ double-edged effects on writers from the colonies and on all those who had not simply “inherited” French culture, in Bourdieu’s sense of the word’. Achour made similar arguments in ‘Mouloud Feraoun, l’instituteur écrivain’, in Dalila Morsly (ed.), *L’Enseignement du français en colonies – l’enseignement primaire: expériences inaugurales* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009), 89–107. Most of her remarks are astute, in my view. Saying that she ‘never saw his affinity with schools and schoolbooks as something negative’ seems to rewrite her own critical history; but it should be borne in mind that in 1986, when she published *Mouloud Feraoun, une voix en contrepoint*, she was teaching in Algeria, and wanted to argue against the uses made of Feraoun in the Algerian education system at the time. That book is very interesting on the history of the reception of Feraoun’s work; in that era, his fiction was treated as an example of militant nationalist literature (12) and valorized in terms of authenticity, truthfulness and simplicity. At the same time, it was discreetly edited – or censored – in school textbooks, to eliminate elements such as praise for France or for missionaries, and its hints of religious scepticism.

Less clear for Feraoun in 1957 was whether the FLN was the organization that would and should carry the torch of independence, and whether it deserved his support. To my mind his discussions of the FLN are another dimension of the diary that show his courage and clear-sightedness. Initially he had doubts about the FLN's ability to succeed. Subsequently, he was worried about the cost at which its success would come. It is worth underscoring a point made earlier, which is both obvious and easily forgotten: in the early years of the war of independence no-one knew that it *was* 'the war of independence'; no-one could be sure that the FLN, which emerged only in November 1954, would be the organization to end French colonialism in Algeria. It should also be remembered that much of the FLN's activity in the early years of the war consisted in establishing its authority, often violently, over other nationalist organizations and over the Algerian populace. According to John Ruedy, 'During the first two and one-half years of the war, the FLN killed only one European for every six Muslims it liquidated'.<sup>71</sup> It was under those circumstances, with less than complete information about what was happening and who was responsible for what, that Feraoun began to form his opinions of the FLN.

At moments in the diary Feraoun seems to be trying to talk himself into supporting the FLN, or at least approving of it. The remarks I quoted just now about belonging to 'a proud, great people' were made in relation to the general strike, which he described as sacred ('sacré', 189, E170). In a long retrospective entry – almost an essay – of November–December 1955 he did his best to offer a favourable description not only of the goals of the FLN but of aspects of its political culture.<sup>72</sup> Around the same time he wrote:

Pour en revenir aux écoles, chaque fois qu'on en incendie une, nous trouvons des explications. Force nous est d'admettre que les rebelles sont intelligents, qu'ils empêchent en y mettant le feu le soldat de s'installer à la place de l'élève, ou bien qu'ils répondent en agissant ainsi à ceux qui empêchent les enfants de s'instruire. De fil en aiguille nous déduisons qu'ils ne sont pas contre les instituteurs, qu'ils reconnaissent notre œuvre éducatrice, l'apprécient à sa juste valeur et voient en nous des alliés qui

<sup>71</sup> Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 164.

<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Feraoun seems to strain to make his point: he overstates the FLN's openness to different ideological positions and its egalitarianism, and comments positively on the fact that members of the maquis in his area 'se comportent en Kabyles' (44, 'behave like true Kabyles', 41).

luttons comme eux contre l'ignorance, la misère, tout ce qui entrave l'épanouissement de l'être. Bref, nous travaillons en vue d'un même idéal élevé, nous sommes descendants (réels ou spirituels) des sans-culottes et frères des hors-la-loi kabyles. (40)

Back on the subject of schools, each time one of them is burned down, we find explanations. We have to admit that the rebels are smart. By torching a school, they prevent the soldiers from taking the students' place. Or one could view it as a response to those who would prevent the children from learning. We are gradually realizing that the rebels are not against teachers. They recognize and appreciate the true value of our work as educators, and they consider us allies in the fight against ignorance, poverty, and everything that stands in the way of human growth. In other words, we are all working with the same high ideal in mind; we are the descendants, biological or spiritual, of the *sans-culottes* and the brothers of the outlaws of Kabylie. (38–39)

These remarks were another attempt to ally himself with the FLN, but also made it clear that he saw himself as working at a certain distance from it. On 12 January 1957 he noted that he had read an issue of *El Moudjahid* from cover to cover and that, besides 'beaucoup de foi et de désintéressement' ('a lot of faith and selflessness') there was a lot to provoke disillusionment: 'beaucoup de démagogie, de prétention, un peu de naïveté et d'inquiétude' ('a lot of demagoguery and pretentiousness, some naïveté, and some signs of concern as well'). The entry ended: 'Pauvres montagnards, pauvres étudiants, pauvres jeunes gens, vos ennemis de demain seront pires que ceux d'hier' (187, 'Poor mountain people, poor students, poor young men, your enemies of tomorrow will be worse than those of yesterday', 169). In August 1957 he wrote: 'Dussions-nous souffrir davantage, une fois arrachée l'indépendance, dussions-nous subir la dictature des ambitieux ou des fanatiques, nous sommes vraiment à bout, prêts à nous jeter dans les bras du tyran pourvu que ce tyran soit en même temps le libérateur ...' (242, 'Even if we were to suffer more after gaining our independence, even if we ended up ruled by self-serving dictators or fanatics, we are truly at the end of our tether, ready to throw ourselves into the arms of a tyrant, provided that he also brings freedom ...' 218–19). Here too both his commitment to independence and his scepticism about the FLN are wholly apparent.

From today's perspective we may think – I happen to think – that Feraoun was right both to believe in independence and to look critically at the FLN. His anxieties, and what we may now consider his foresight,

concerned not only the dictatorial tendencies within the organization. He was also critical of the way the FLN mobilized and manipulated religious energies for its political purposes. One of the journal's rare humorous moments comes when Feraoun gently mocks a man from his home village who has fallen for the FLN's Islamic rhetoric. Feraoun is told that the FLN combatants criticize the village women for being 'audacieuses' ('bold'), and he responds: 'C'est ce que disait Tartuffe' (72, 'That's what Tartuffe used to say', 67). The levity of the reference to Molière should not disguise the fact that Feraoun's point about religious hypocrisy was serious, and the stakes were high. Just after this, the journal reveals laconically that two of Feraoun's own family members had just recently been killed by the FLN, one for smoking, the other for drinking.<sup>73</sup>

In objecting to the FLN's uses of Islam and of violence Feraoun was particularly disturbed by what he saw as the sacralization of violence. When, in April 1958, one of Feraoun's students came to tell him proudly ('fièrement') that he was leaving school to join the combatants, Feraoun wrote:

Je lui ai dit que je suis contre la violence, même celle des fellagha et que je serais navré de voir qu'un ancien élève, qui connaît mes sentiments sur ce point, a le courage de tuer. [...]

Il m'a confessé aussi ses déceptions, ses désillusions devant l'attitude de certains maquisards qui se livrent, dans les villages, à toutes sortes d'excès, les plus inadmissibles. Il est temps, estime-t-il, d'aller y mettre un peu d'ordre. Le gars voit loin, apparemment. Toutefois il n'a pas compris que tous les combattants sont des hommes, et les nôtres, la plupart du temps, des hommes sans éducation ... (272)

I told him that I was against violence, even the fellagha's violence, and that I would be heartbroken to see one of my former students who was aware of my feelings on the subject being callous enough to kill. [...]

He also admitted his disappointment and disillusionment with the attitude of certain members of the maquis who indulge in all sorts of unacceptable and excessive behaviour in the villages. He believes that

73 On the relationship of the FLN to Islam, during the war and subsequently, see Gadant, *Islam et nationalisme en Algérie*; Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN*, 220–22; Kamel Chachoua, *L'Islam kabyle: religion, état et société en Algérie* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001), inc. 252–55; John Ruedy (ed.), *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1994); and Mohamed-Chérif Ferjani, *Islamisme, laïcité et droits de l'homme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991).

it is time to restore some sense of order. Apparently the boy has a deep understanding of the situation. Even so, he has not yet understood that all participants in the struggle are men, and that on our side, most of the men are uneducated ... (245)

Feraoun's phrase 'à le courage de tuer', is significant here, and is difficult to translate. The published translation settles on the idea of callousness, but had opted for a different word when Feraoun used the phrase earlier. That earlier passage, from March 1956, conveyed his sense of being threatened from both sides, and a sense of inner division that is familiar from the work of many writers made 'bicultural' by colonialism:

J'ai peur du Français, du Kabyle, du soldat, du fellagha. J'ai peur de moi. Il y a en moi le Français, il y a en moi le Kabyle. Mais j'ai horreur de ceux qui tuent, non parce qu'ils peuvent me tuer mais parce qu'ils ont le courage de tuer. Ensuite de part et d'autre on légitime le crime, on l'explique. Il devient nécessaire, un acte de foi, une bonne action. (97)

The French, the Kabyle, the soldier, and the fellagha frighten me. I am afraid of myself. Part of me is French, part of me is Kabyle. But I feel disgust for those who kill, not because they may end up killing me, but because they have the mettle [*courage*] to kill at all. Then, on both sides, one explains away the crime and legitimizes it. Crimes are rendered necessary, like acts of faith or worthy deeds. (90)

What Feraoun is suggesting is that to have it in you to kill someone is not to be admired. 'Mettle' captures something of the original by evoking hardened masculinity, in a way that now sounds slightly old-fashioned, but its connotations remain too positive. 'Callousness' may be an alternative, but is too negative and perhaps underplays the sense of active will, conveyed also by Feraoun's allusion to the student's sense of pride; 'zeal', however, would be too strong.<sup>74</sup> Still, it is clear that what Feraoun abhorred was the attitude behind the killing, and the slide towards a position where killing was an 'act of faith'. In the context of the FLN's uses of Islam, the

74 'Courage' sometimes works as a translation for 'courage', but not here. One of the meanings given in the *Robert* is 'dureté' (hardness) or 'la volonté plus ou moins cruelle' ('a will that is more or less cruel'). That links back to an archaic sense, 'force morale; dispositions du cœur' ('moral force; the heart's inclinations'). The etymological link of 'courage' to the heart (*cœur*) is more apparent in French than in English. It was only in examining this passage in French that I realized that the English idiom 'not to have the heart to do something' functions in a similar way; in that phrase, 'heart' comes to mean something like 'cruelty'. 'Stomach' might also work here.



phrase was not some loose metaphor. Regarding violence, Islam, and the channelling of Islamic energies into violence, Feraoun's concern was not only with the immediate cost of the fight for independence, but with the kind of mentality or culture the FLN would bequeath to the future.

It was also with the longer view in mind that Feraoun tended, on balance, to oppose the FLN's actions against French schools. He recognized that the boycott might serve a short-term purpose, writing:

Le régime de brutalité qui pèse sur nous tout en nous faisant souffrir dans notre chair arrivera paradoxalement à s'imposer à nous et nous l'accepterons de gaieté de cœur car il apparaîtra seul capable de mettre un terme à nos maux, dans son implacable confrontation avec cette autre force brutale que M. Lacoste appelle « de pacification ».

The brutal regime we are now subjected to weighs on us, and makes us suffer physically. But paradoxically, we will be won over by this brutality, and we will accept it gladly in our hearts, because it will seem that there is no other way to put a stop to our pain, to confront another form of brutality, the one Monsieur Lacoste calls 'pacification'.

In the same breath, however, Feraoun described the boycott as 'néfaste', meaning seriously harmful (I5I, E158). The arson attacks on schools must have appeared all the more damaging, and his misgivings must have deepened, when he heard that the school in his home village had been burned down. 'Pauvre école, pauvre village, pauvres gosses de Tizi-Hibel' ('How sad for the school, how sad for the village, how sad for the kids of Tizi-Hibel'), he wrote on 29 January 1956; 'Je n'en ai pas dormi de la nuit' (68, 'I could not sleep at all because of it', 63). Behind the immediate sense of loss lay one of his principal criticisms of the FLN: its failure to consider adequately how anti-colonialism, as well as colonialism, might shape the country after independence.

Some FLN leaders had similar concerns about long-term strategy regarding education; not all of them agreed that taking young people out of school and into the armed fight was the best policy. Recalling a conversation with Colonel Amirouche in October 1956 about the future of Algeria, the doctor and member of the maquis Djamel-Eddine Bensalem remarked:

En soi, l'islam propose à tout homme un commandement sacré : lire et s'instruire à tout prix et n'impose pas de dogme : donc, en conséquence, il nous faudra construire les véritables mosquées de l'islam ; pas simplement des mosquées ou des Zaouïas ; mais des écoles, des lycées et surtout des universités.

Islam essentially lays down a sacred commandment for all men: read and educate yourself at any cost whilst avoiding dogma. As a result, we will be obliged to build Islam's true mosques; not only mosques or zaouias, but also primary and secondary schools and above all universities.<sup>75</sup>

The invocation of Islam might not have appealed to Feraoun, and the rhetoric was risky: might not 'the real mosques' have been mosques alone? But these remarks were clearly meant to valorize education in general, including secular education. The boycott, which had never been universally observed, was allowed to lapse from the start of the school year 1957–58.<sup>76</sup> To Feraoun, and to some of the FLN leaders but not all, it was clear that education is always a long-term project, for the individual and for society.

In my earlier discussions of the history of debates and struggles over education in Algeria in the colonial era, I emphasized that the specific nature of the teaching on offer was an important question for all parties concerned. (By that, I mean the question of what was taught, and how – as distinct from the question of general support for, or opposition to, education for *indigènes*, or questions about who had political and

75 Djamel-Eddine Bensalem, *Voyez nos armes, voyez nos médecins* (Algiers: ENAL, 1984), 156. Meynier quotes these remarks, taking them (though the attribution is not clear-cut) to be a recollection of what Amirouche said (*Histoire intérieure du FLN*, 504).

76 'La fin de la grève des écoliers est très significative' ('The end of the student strike is very important') wrote Feraoun on 21 October 1957; 'le pays est las d'être saigné' (251, 'the country is tired of bloodshed', 227). As Meynier notes, some FLN *wilayas* started looking for new educational opportunities for their students, and offered bursaries allowing them to study in Tunis or Morocco – in the Zitouna, in lycées or in a modern university. In 1960–61 Boumediene arranged for students to spend time with the 'armée des frontières' ('frontier army'), believing this would be of mutual benefit. Meynier argues that: 'Dans toutes les *wilâya(s)* exista une œuvre scolaire qui ne fut pas négligeable, compte tenu des circonstances difficiles et des faibles moyens mis en œuvre' (*Histoire intérieure du FLN*, 502; 'Considerable educational work was going on in the *wilâyas* if one takes into account the challenging circumstances and the lack of available resources'). Of *wilâya* 3, which encompassed Feraoun's home village, Meynier writes: 'Dans ce bastion de la scolarisation française, les campagnes de boycott contre l'école coloniale donnèrent d'incontestables résultats. Et les incitations à fréquenter les écoles coraniques rénovées, instituées sous l'égide de la *wilâya*, portèrent leurs fruits' (502, 'Boycotting colonial schools in this bastion of French schooling was unquestionably effective, as were encouragements to attend the Quranic schools, renovated under the aegis of the *wilâyas*').

administrative responsibility for schools.) But when the FLN called for a boycott of all French schools, or set fire to a school, it was not really about what was taught, or about the outcomes, intended or unintended, of that teaching. It was about exerting control over the 'native' population, and demonstrating that control; and it was about asserting the primacy of the anti-colonial struggle in all spaces, ahead of all other practices and considerations.<sup>77</sup> On the other side, the French military forces evidently played the same game. Feraoun's diary entry of 22 March 1957 records a sudden decision by a French army captain to install a six-metre flagpole in Feraoun's school and to have the children salute the *tricolore*. The entry for the next day, after the flag had gone up, is one of the shortest in the diary: 'Dix heures. Nous n'avons aucun élève ...' (214, '10 o'clock. There are no students', 193).<sup>78</sup> At such moments, the struggle over schools had little to do with education.

### 'Rendre justice à l'instituteur'

At an early stage of this project when I read Feraoun's journal I was half-hoping that in one of the longer entries I would stumble across an impassioned and eloquent disquisition on education's value. I was scarcely surprised, though, not to find one. For reasons that are not hard to imagine, on the basis of what I have already described of Feraoun's life and work, the evidence of his deeper commitments to education often emerges only by implication and in irresolute forms. We have seen that his feelings about continuing to teach were complex and sometimes negative, and that among his motivations for continuing we can perhaps count his mixed and somewhat negative assessments of the FLN: he saw good reasons to keep his distance, although he shared the organization's

77 Comparable issues around the perception of 'French' medicine were raised, with a hint of frustration, by Fanon in his essay 'Médecine et colonialisme', *L'Année V de la Révolution algérienne/A Dying Colonialism*, Chapter 4. See also Turin, *Affrontements dans l'Algérie coloniale*, and William Gallois, *The Administration of Sickness: Medicine and Ethics in Nineteenth-Century Algeria* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

78 A few weeks later, Feraoun's diary talks about a terrible massacre by French forces in a tiny village; the schoolteacher was saved, but was then marched to his school and told he would not be allowed to bury his father and his brother, who had been killed in front of him and whose corpses were still in his house, until his pupils returned to school (230, E208).

all-consuming political goal. We have had only glimpses, then, of his positive motivations for continuing to work in education, even during the war, and of his conception of that work. To conclude this chapter, I will try to draw out some of those views more fully.

As was suggested by Feraoun's description of the CSEs in his letter to Roblès of August 1961 – in which he said that the CSEs were like primary schools, and (therefore) a good thing, but had arrived too late – primary schools were the educational institution in which he had the greatest and most constant faith. In another letter to Roblès, when he was at a low ebb for personal as well as professional reasons, he wrote:

Aux centres sociaux, je fais un travail assommant dont je me fiche éperdument et qui n'intéressera jamais personne. C'est du bla-bla-bla le plus stérile mais aussi je me rends compte que toute l'Académie est du bla-bla-bla. Il n'y a de vrai que le travail de l'instituteur. Tous les autres, qui se disent ses patrons, sont en réalité des parasites qui n'existent que par lui et passent leur temps à le presser comme un citron.

Si jamais il y avait un beau livre à écrire, ce serait celui-là : rendre justice à l'instituteur. (8 April 1961, 84)<sup>79</sup>

My work at the CSEs is so tedious, and will be of such little interest to anyone, that I really couldn't give a damn about it. It's all sterile waffle, but then again, I've noticed that waffle is what characterizes the Education Authority. The only real work is the work that the teachers do. The others, the 'bosses', are in fact parasites whose jobs depend on the people who they spend their time heaping pressure on.

If there were ever a worthwhile book to write it would be one that did justice to primary school teachers.

Feraoun was never to write that book, but in *Le Fils du pauvre* he had already written about the *instituteur du bled*. The novel, as I mentioned earlier, was given the subtitle 'Menrad, instituteur kabyle' in its first edition, which perhaps added a faint promise of autobiographical or even anthropological material, backed up by notes explaining terms such as *aid*, *akoufi*, *cadi*, *fellah* and *mechmel* ('Les ikoufan sont un

79 'Académie' means the education authority; the main contrast being drawn here is between the daily work of teaching in primary schools and the work of administrators, inspectors and so on. The Algerian Académie came into being in 1848, although the overall number of Académies was being reduced at that point (to the cost of Corsica, among other regions). See République française, *Université d'Alger: Cinquantenaire, 1909–1959* (Algiers: Imprimerie officielle, n.d. [1959?]), published as a supplement to *Bulletin de l'Académie d'Alger*, 19.

signe d'aisance dans les maisons kabyles', and so on, 204; '*ikoufan* are a sign of wealth in Kabyle houses'). The Seuil version dropped the notes but the back cover of its first edition went further in encouraging a biographical approach: 'L'enfance que Mouloud Feraoun nous rapporte dans ce livre est authentique. C'est la sienne. Pas un trait n'est imaginé' ('The childhood that Mouloud Feraoun depicts in the book is authentic. It is his childhood and not a single aspect of it is made up').

To a degree, *Le Fils du pauvre* fulfils those promises of authentic testimony and quasi-objective description of the life of the Kabyle primary school teacher – but only to a degree, and in ways that give more insight into Feraoun's complicated feelings about education. It begins oddly:

Menrad, modeste instituteur du bled kabyle, vit « au milieu des aveugles ». Mais il ne veut pas se considérer comme roi. D'abord, il est pour la Démocratie ; ensuite, il a la ferme conviction qu'il n'est pas un génie.

Pour aboutir à une opinion aussi désastreuse de lui-même, il lui a fallu plusieurs années. (9)

Menrad, a humble rural Kabyle schoolteacher, lives 'among the blind'. But he does not wish to be a king. First, he is for Democracy; second, he is firmly convinced he is not a genius.

It took him several years to settle on such a disastrous opinion of himself. (3)<sup>80</sup>

This seems designed to disorientate the reader. (Literary critics always say that sort of thing, but in this case, I think it would be hard to disagree.) The narrative voice is tinged with irony, but the object of the irony is not clear; it is unclear whether the teacher Fouroulou Menrad does or not does not think of himself as superior to those around him, and whether the lack of clarity is Fouroulou's own; and it is unclear why the opinion that you are not a genius should count as 'disastrous'. We are then told: 'Menrad est ambitieux. Il se moquait de son ambition' (9, 'Menrad is ambitious. He made fun of (/couldn't care less about) his own ambition', 3), and the switch of tense exacerbates the confusion.<sup>81</sup> There are a couple more pages of that sort of thing, all in italics. The narrator tells us that Fouroulou 'resigned' himself to becoming a teacher, living with

80 I will refer to the widely available Seuil paperback edition of *Le Fils du pauvre* unless making a specific point about the original version, or about the first (1954) Seuil edition.

81 In the 1950 version, the first verb in this second sentence is also in the present

'les paysans ses frères' ('his peasant brothers'), 'supportant avec eux les tourments de l'existence, l'âme parfaitement calme et attendant, comme eux, avec un fatalisme indifférent et une certitude absolue – il le dit – le jour où il entrera au paradis de Mahomet' (10 (the 1950 text is identical here), 'shouldering with them life's torments, his soul perfectly at peace, and waiting, like them, with an indifferent fatalism and an absolute certainty – so he claims – for the day when he will enter Muhammad's paradise', 3). But the ideas of calmness and fatalism are belied by 'so he claims', by the unsettling comments on Fouroulou's troubled and frustrated ambitions, and more fundamentally by the way that in this text the authorial persona seems to be divided between the somewhat antagonistic figures of the narrator and the protagonist. The narrator's descriptions of Fouroulou and his writing are quite derogatory: he says his writing is inelegant, that he has no imagination, and that he is incapable of thinking philosophically. After all this, the text moves into the main story, which begins with some sardonic remarks on what tourists – who may stand for the book's readers – tend to expect from their visit, real or novelistic, to Kabylie.<sup>82</sup> After a while, in subsequent chapters, Fouroulou emerges as a first-person narrator. Then, about two-thirds of the way through the text, we get a section break and another page of italicized text from an outside voice, which among other things criticizes Fouroulou for his tendency to look down on those around him.<sup>83</sup> When the story continues, it has switched to the third person.

One's first impression, then, once one has got past the subtitle and the blurb, is that the text is unwilling to offer a stable, reliable

tense. This may imply that the second version is deliberately more disorientating for the reader.

82 Hiddleston reads this passage as a kind of pastiche of the classic opening gambits of nineteenth-century novels: in her words, 'The "reality" of the community he depicts is that its perception of itself and its members is necessarily constantly subject to re-evaluation' (*Decolonising the Intellectual*, 200).

83 One might compare a remark made by Feraoun in his *Journal* (November–December 1955): 'Il est superficiel de parler comme font les journaux d'un réveil de la conscience algérienne. C'est là une expression vide de sens. Un homme n'a pas besoin d'avoir été à l'école pour être un homme. Les Algériens n'ont pas attendu le XXe siècle pour se savoir Algériens' (46, 'To talk, as the press do, about an awakening of the Algerian consciousness is frivolous. That is a completely meaningless statement. A man does not have to have gone to school to be a man. The Algerians did not wait for the twentieth century to realize that they were Algerians', 43).

account, still less an inspiring one, of the work of a representative ‘instituteur kabyle’, or even of a particular teacher’s self-conception. The subsequent interjections and switches of voice prolong our uncertainties. Nevertheless, the novel seems to settle down to tell us a certain amount about Fouroulou’s – and no doubt Feraoun’s – experiences of being a pupil, about his family’s attitudes to education, and about his experiences as a teacher; and much of this is favourable. His father is initially reluctant for him to continue his studies after primary school, believing that ‘les études, c’est réservé aux riches’ (128, ‘education is for the rich’, 99), and aware that the family will miss his help and his prospective earnings when he is away. Once a bursary is in the bag, Fouroulou’s father appears heartened that his son will be relatively well fed in his lodgings, but remains less than optimistic that more education will lead Fouroulou to a better job. (‘Le père Menrad n’était pas dupe. Il savait très bien que son fils n’aboutirait à rien. Mais, en ville, Fouroulou serait nourri mieux que chez lui ...’, 130; ‘Old Menrad was no dupe. He knew very well that his son would get nowhere. But in town, Fouroulou would be better fed than at home ...’, 100.) Fouroulou is more sanguine; the next paragraph switches to his perspective and the chapter ends: ‘Il allait candidement au collège dans l’intention d’obtenir son brevet, puis d’entrer à l’école normale pour devenir instituteur’ (130, ‘He was going to secondary school with the honest intention of obtaining his diploma, and then entering the École Normale to become a teacher’). The first edition of the novel is strikingly more upbeat: ‘Il allait candidement à l’E.P.S. [*École primaire supérieure*] dans l’intention d’obtenir son brevet, puis d’entrer à l’École Normale pour devenir instituteur. Instituteur ! la plus belle de toutes les carrières, la mieux payée, la moins pénible, la plus noble’ (139, ‘He was going to the middle school with the honest intention of obtaining his diploma, and then entering the École Normale to become a teacher. A teacher! The best of all careers, the highest paid, the least harsh, the noblest’, 100).

Both versions of the text strike a positive note about education at the novel’s end. The coincidence seems significant, given that the ending of the original version is otherwise quite different, extending the story (as explained earlier) over many years through Fouroulou’s time at Bouzaréah and through the Second World War. The *Seuil* version closes with Fouroulou heading off to take the entrance exam for the *école normale* and getting a pep talk from his father, who says he will head back to the village and tell Fouroulou’s mother that Fouroulou is not afraid: to which Fouroulou responds – and these are the last words of

the novel in the revised version – ‘Oui, tu diras là-haut que je n’ai pas peur’ (146, ‘Yes, go up and tell them that I am not afraid’). Just before this, Fouroulou’s father had reassured him that he was loved and that it would not matter if he failed the exam, and had added: ‘Et puis, ton instruction, on ne te l’enlèvera pas, hein ? Elle est à toi’ (‘After all, they can’t take your education away from you, can they? It belongs to you now’). The remark constitutes a final affirmation, albeit a fleeting one, that the benefits of education amount to more than the prospect of a relatively comfortable job.

The ending of the first, self-published edition of the novel is also suggestive of a certain commitment to education, but revives some of the strange tensions that characterized the novel’s opening. The voice is that of the narrator, addressing Fouroulou:

Veille sur les derniers jours des vieux, élève tes enfants, prépare leur avenir et ne fais pas pour eux des rêves qui dépassent les possibilités d’un Menrad. Fais un peu de bien autour de toi si tu peux et sache que c’est la seule chose qu’on ne se reproche jamais.

En attendant la mort, cultive ton jardin afin de mieux cultiver celui de tes enfants et des autres enfants qui sont aussi les tiens. Tu n’es pas maître d’école pour rien.

Ainsi, tu ne vivras pas sans soucis, mais tu mourras sans remords et tu seras bien reçu dans l’Au-Delà. (201)

Watch over the final days of the older generation, raise your children, prepare their future, and do not offer them dreams that exceed the possibilities of someone like Menrad. If you can, do a bit of good around you and know that this is the only thing one never regrets.

While awaiting death, cultivate your garden, the better to cultivate the garden of your children and the other children, who are also yours. Not for nothing are you a schoolmaster.

That way you will not live without worries, but you will die without remorse, and you will be well received in the Beyond. (150)<sup>84</sup>

Not everything here is positive, clearly. The remark ‘do not offer them dreams that exceed the possibilities of someone like Menrad’ suggests a certain scepticism, though perhaps less about education as such than about the contingent constraints faced in colonial Algeria by pupils from a Kabyle village background. It also recalls the early allusions to

84 The end of the main body of the 1950 version is dated October 1944. It is followed by an epilogue, with an epigraph from Camus, added in 1948; the words I have quoted are the final words of the epilogue.



Fouroulou's ambitions as a writer, where the implication seemed to be that more education, and/or higher ambitions, do not necessarily make you happier, and may do the opposite. (We may think back to the journal entry I quoted earlier, where Feraoun said that the 'useless things' he had learned in school made him 'physically ill'.) Nonetheless the emphasis on raising children and preparing their future suggests some sort of confidence in education's ability to improve people's lives. The theme is extended and deepened, in some small way, by the sentence 'cultivate your garden, the better to cultivate the garden of your children and the other children, who are also yours'. The allusion to Voltaire is suggestive of the sort of thinking that a certain sort of French education might encourage – and appears to have encouraged in the narrator/Feraoun. More specifically, by invoking *Candide*, it implies a commitment to working for your own benefit and the benefit of others around you, and a rejection of the metaphysics of blind fatalism, or blind optimism, in a harsh world.<sup>85</sup> 'Not for nothing are you a schoolmaster' indicates that this worldview comes with the territory, or should do.

Feraoun's most focused and affirmative account of the work of the primary school teacher came not in a work of fiction but in an essay, 'L'Instituteur du bled'.<sup>86</sup> Like *Le Fils du pauvre* it is autobiographical to a significant degree, but, unlike the novel, it presents itself as a general characterization of the Algerian rural schoolteacher, especially the 'native' teacher. It offers real insights into Feraoun's attitudes towards

85 The closing reference to the Beyond arguably stands in tension with this analysis, and is surprising in the wider context of Feraoun's scepticism about religion and fatalism. (For a striking example see *Journal* 148, E135.) I mentioned earlier the preface's mixed messages about Fouroulou's possible fatalism; the preface ends by telling us that Fouroulou had decided to leave his 'chef-d'œuvre avorté' ('aborted masterpiece') in the drawer of his desk; yet, within the fiction, that is precisely what we will start reading in the next chapter, and the narrator explains: 'Nul n'est maître de sa destinée, ô Dieu clément ! S'il est décidé là-haut que l'histoire de Menrad Fouroulou sera connue de tous, qui peut enfreindre ta loi ? Tirons du tiroir de gauche le cahier d'écolier. Ouvrons-le, Fouroulou Menrad, nous t'écoutons' (II, 'No one is master of his destiny, Oh merciful God! If it is destined on high that the story of Menrad Fouroulou should be known to all, who can oppose your law? Pull out the schoolboy's notebook from the left-hand drawer. Open it. Fouroulou Menrad, we are listening to you', 4). This can only be read ironically: it is clear that the decision to make public or to publish lay not with God but fictionally with the narrator and in reality with Feraoun.

86 As I mentioned earlier, there are two essays by Feraoun called 'L'Instituteur du bled'. The one I am referring to in this section is from *Jours de Kabylie* (Paris:

education, including some that now appear discredibly colonialist, and others that help justify his view that education under the auspices of colonialism did not simply serve French interests.

'L'Instituteur du bled' is in some senses a snapshot both of colonial schools and – less deliberately – of a certain mentality, but also has an explicitly historical dimension. The job has gradually become a little easier, Feraoun says: schools may still lack some creature comforts, including, in some cases, electricity and water, but some teachers now have cars; and even the dustiest, bumpiest road serves as 'le lien tangible qui unit au monde, rend possibles les améliorations et sensés tous les espoirs' (135, 'the tangible link to the world, making improvements possible and hopes realistic'). In earlier times, he wrote, 'Il fallait vaincre l'hostilité des gens et surmonter d'innombrables difficultés matérielles dont on commence maintenant à perdre le souvenir. Les premiers instituteurs fabriquèrent de la bonne terre dans leur jardin et, dans leur classe, ils cultivèrent les petits esprits éveillés mais absolument sauvages' (130, 'We had to overcome people's hostility, as well as countless material challenges that tend to be forgotten these days. The first school-teachers made the earth in their garden fertile and, in their classes, they cultivated young minds that were alert but completely feral (*sauvages*)'). Feraoun's use of *sauvages* is offensive to modern ears (even if its meaning here may be closer to 'uncultivated' than 'savage'), and there can be little doubt that it was a sign of Feraoun's self-division, and of the way he had internalized some of the European condescension towards his own ethnic group. The choice of word may also seem anomalous when compared with the critical comment in *Les Chemins qui montent* about the colonizers' treatment of 'natives' as 'animaux sauvages'. But 'L'Instituteur du bled' first appeared in 1954, *Les Chemins qui montent* in 1957; although the gap in time was quite small, it was in the intervening years that the war had started, and that Feraoun had decided to write and eventually publish his diary, with its vocal anti-colonialism. Circumstances had changed, in other words, and Feraoun with them, in ways that this rhetoric may help us discern.

The later Feraoun too, however, would have stood by the essay's account of the daily work of the teacher, and what in it was viewed approvingly by the colonized. In this context, another echo of Voltaire's famous phrase 'il faut cultiver notre jardin' brings out how its metaphorical dimension

extends from its literal dimension: cultivating one's garden was the norm for teachers who needed to grow some of their own food and for whom agricultural technique was an educational matter too. If, as Feraoun suggested, *instituteurs du bled* had gradually won high status in many communities (including, in his case, the community where he grew up – his own backyard), and if they could now feel confident that their work was welcomed, many had helped their case simply by planting trees. Like roads, then, trees and gardens had both practical and symbolic value, and helped win acceptance for teachers within the community, linking the school, the village and the wider (or the 'modern') world. Ideas such as 'modernity' and 'progress', which Feraoun is invoking implicitly here, also invite scepticism, of course, as they often functioned as alibis for imperialism; yet Feraoun himself reached a point where he could embrace the benefits of a 'modern', 'French' notion of 'éducation sanitaire', say (one of the positive roles he attributed to the CSEs), without accepting the premises or policies of colonialism as such.

As confidence in teachers grew, Feraoun wrote, or at least confidence in particular teachers, people turned to them for help with a variety of tasks – some merely practical, but some a matter of reflection and judgement – for which they were equipped, or considered to be equipped, by virtue of their literacy and wider education: writing letters, helping care for the sick, acting as advisors, serving as arbitrators in conflicts. In that situation, with such wide-ranging authority, teachers ran the risk of self-importance, he pointed out. (Perhaps, in fact, teachers always run that risk.) 'Est-ce notre faute', he asks, 'si cette habitude de servir d'exemple, de décider, de trancher sans hésitation nous déforme un peu à la longue?' (136, 'Is it our fault if always serving as an example to others, making decisions and having the final say, deforms us a little bit in the long run?'). He went on: 'S'il se donne de l'importance, c'est qu'il en a bien au village. Il a toute celle d'un missionnaire. Voilà pourquoi on l'appelle « cheikh »' ('His self-important air results from the respect in which he is held in the village, as if he were a missionary. That is why people call him "cheikh"'). Feraoun explained that teachers aimed to inspire the sort of confidence that would earn them that title, or allow them to be seen as a 'guide éclairé' (136, 'an enlightened guide') by the community in general and treated as a father figure or older brother by his pupils.

The implicitly positive allusion to the 'importance' of missionaries is another turn of phrase that may now jar for some of us, along with the gendering of the rhetoric, strengthening the web of associations

connecting colonialism, education, patriarchy and the church. The same goes for Feraoun's use of phrases such as 'austérité quasi sacerdotale' ('almost priestly austerity') and 'apôtres' ('apostles') to describe early, 'pioneering' teachers in rural areas. The slide between (Christian) missionary and 'cheikh' (a term usually if not always associated with Islam) makes the imagery a little less conventional, however, and Feraoun noted too that Kabyles thought of teachers not as apostles or saints but as 'honnêtes gens, toujours prêts à rendre service, des savants qui avaient bien vite gagné l'admiration, l'estime et le respect' (131, 'honourable men who were always willing to help, people of learning who had quickly earned admiration, esteem and respect'). This move in his analysis, in recognizing a possible sense of rivalry between school and religion, pulls away from the *mission civilisatrice*, then, in the sense that it helps dissociate the secular from the religious, the teacher from the missionary. 'Nos anciens réussirent ce prodige de faire de l'école du village un haut lieu où l'on envoie les enfants pour qu'ils deviennent meilleurs, le temple d'une religion nouvelle qui n'exclut pas l'ancienne', wrote Feraoun, 'car elle s'adresse au cœur et à la raison, se sert du langage humain et enseigne la vérité humaine' (131, 'Our predecessors achieved the remarkable feat of turning the village school into a hallowed place to which children are sent in order to improve themselves, the temple of a new religion that can co-exist with the old one because it speaks to one's heart and one's reason, using human language and teaching human truth'). Perhaps the 'new religion' did not exclude the old one, and was not really a religion; but wherever alternatives emerge to the certainties, mysteries and strictures of established religions, those religions have lost some of their authority.

At certain points, then, Feraoun's account of the positive work of the *instituteur*, and of education, extended beyond technical knowledge and beyond basic *alphabétisation*. We might recall here the anonymous letter that Feraoun wrote to Camus in September 1958; in it he quoted Camus's words, 'The Kabyles want schools, then, just as they want bread [...] I am under no illusions about the powers of education. But those who speak so easily about the uselessness of teaching have nevertheless benefited from it themselves'. It is clear by now that these words must have resonated with Feraoun for more than one reason. He echoed them again in *La Cité des Roses*:

l'instituteur fut longtemps de ceux qui crurent à leur mission, tentèrent de la remplir avec une bonne volonté louable et bâtirent là-dessus précisément ce bel édifice qui avait craqué.

Toutes les écoles où il avait semé ce savoir de base aussi indispensable que le pain quotidien et qui pourtant continuait d'être un luxe dans ce pays avaient brûlé l'une après l'autre.

[...] [L]e pain parut du pain amer, un aliment empoisonné qu'on se mit à cracher avec rage. L'école devint un lieu prohibé, le français une langue maudite, l'instituteur un suspect qu'il fallait surveiller de très près. L'instituteur n'était pas un traître mais un hybride. Personne n'en voulait plus. (107-13)

For a long time the schoolteacher was amongst those who believed in their mission, and who, laudably, tried to accomplish it as best they could, building a fine edifice that had now started to crumble.

The schools where children had received a basic schooling, as indispensable to them as their daily bread but which continued to be a luxury in this country, had burned down, one after another.

[...] The bread took on a bitter taste and was now a poisonous substance to be spat out with rage. The school became a forbidden space, French a cursed language and the schoolteacher a suspect individual who had to be watched closely. The schoolteacher was not a traitor but a hybrid. And he was now to be avoided.

As Camus, like Feraoun, was certainly aware, and as was suggested by the phrasing of the FLN tract about the boycott of schools, one of the main reasons Kabyle pupils attended school was to get qualifications, and to get jobs. Another reason, as Feraoun had implied in *Le Fils du pauvre* and as he mentioned in the journal, was simply to get 'bread', a free meal, and to relieve families of some of the burden of feeding their children, especially when they were too young to help much at home or on the land. Those motivations were reasonable enough from the point of view of many families, and no doubt from the perspective of many teachers too. Moreover, as we have also seen, Feraoun was among those who fell into talking of his own education as 'inutile' (useless). Yet ultimately Feraoun shared something of Camus's view that education was a 'tool of emancipation' in a broader sense, with a capacity to go beyond pupils' motivations for enrolling and, indeed, beyond colonial governors' reasons for setting up schools in the first place.

As I noted when discussing Camus's 'L'Enseignement', 'emancipation' can mean different things. On one level, the argument at stake here might be termed fully and directly political. As Amrouche noted in 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité', some of the most articulate critics of colonialism in the Maghreb and elsewhere went through French schools (Césaire, Memmi and Fanon are obvious examples), as did a good

number of FLN leaders in Algeria.<sup>87</sup> That suggests one meaningful sense in which one can talk of Feraoun's own education, and the education he offered his pupils, as having an emancipatory aspect, and perhaps one could even argue that his education became more emancipatory the further it went. Feraoun's attachment to a certain idea of France, like that of Amrouche, ran deep, and was shaped through prolonged exposure to French education; and it preceded and arguably delayed his commitment to independence. But none of his acquired 'Frenchness' undermined his profound attachment to his native Kabyle culture; and if his attachment to some idea of, or some aspects of, French culture also survived his intellectual and emotional embrace of anti-colonialism, it was partly because a certain idea of France was also one of the things that came to underpin his anti-colonial politics. His French education made him think about the idea of universal values and allowed him to see the gap between France's universalist rhetoric and its actual treatment of the 'native' population in Algeria. It also gave him a certain sense of affiliation with the *sans culottes*, as we have seen, and a certain belief in the possibility of revolution (a belief that came across in Amrouche's case too). All of these ideas will be explored further in the next two chapters, where I will examine in more detail the inspiration that colonial pupils could draw from the political concepts they encountered in colonial teaching, including freedom, equality and the 'fatherland'. One of the points I want to emphasize is that to criticize Europe for its hypocrisy or inconsistency with regard to its declared values did not necessarily imply fundamental criticism of those values;<sup>88</sup> indeed, it could imply the opposite.

Other senses of 'emancipation' in circulation in Feraoun's writing, as in Camus's, were perhaps less political or, at least, not closely related to anything like organized anti-colonial politics. Feraoun's varying use of the idea of 'épanouissement' is indicative here. It sometimes referred to Algerians collectively:

je souhaite à mon peuple, à mon pays, tout le bonheur dont on l'a privé,  
toute la gloire qu'il est capable de conquérir ; lorsque j'aurai été témoin de

87 The annexes in Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN* give information on the background of FLN leaders, including their education and the languages they spoke. For examples of colonially educated anti-colonialists from a much wider geographical range, see Young, *Postcolonialism*.

88 I addressed this issue with particular reference to Fanon, and in terms of the concept of relativism, in the final chapter of *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

son épanouissement, de sa joie et de son orgueil, je pourrai mépriser mon patriotisme comme je méprise les autres patriotismes. Comme M. Mollet, ce disciple de Marx, déteste le sien, au nom de quoi il massacre fraternellement l'Algérien. (16 January 1957, 189–90)

I wish my people – my country – all the happiness of which it has been deprived and all the glory it is capable of achieving; once I have witnessed its blossoming (*épanouissement*) and seen it swell with joy and pride, I will be able to despise my patriotism just as I despise other examples of patriotism. Just as Monsieur Mollet, a disciple of Marx, detests his own, in the name of which he massacres Algerians in a brotherly manner. (171)<sup>89</sup>

This 'épanouissement', referring to Algerian political development, cannot, in the end, be solely individual or 'cultural'. Like Fanon, Feraoun saw nationalism as a necessary step on the path to national self-determination. But, as with Fanon, it is clear that his fundamental values – and those he saw as fundamental to his teaching – were not nationalistic; and some of those values were not political, or not in any narrow sense. In other instances Feraoun, like Amrouche, drew on classic humanist vocabulary when describing the aims and benefits of education. We have seen him describe school as a place 'to which children are sent in order to improve themselves, the temple of a new religion that can co-exist with the old one because it speaks to one's heart and one's reason, using human language and teaching human truth', and we saw him express the hope (in 1955) that FLN leaders 'recognize and appreciate the true value of our work as educators, and consider us allies in the fight against ignorance, poverty, and everything that stands in the way of human growth' (*'tout ce qui entrave l'épanouissement de l'être'*, my italics). In this example 'épanouissement' appears to be humanistic, and could be individualistic.<sup>90</sup>

89 'Fraternellement' here is, of course, a deliberate, ironic echo of the last element of the *devise républicaine*, 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité'; I return to this in Chapter 5.

90 In these quotations I have translated *épanouissement* as 'human growth' and 'blossoming'; I think the French is more evocative than either. *Épanouissement* too is slightly vague but does a better job of capturing different aspects of education – the collective and the individual, the practical and the 'inutile' (to echo another of Feraoun's words), and their varied politics – with some openness as to what a 'fulfilled' life might look like. On the notion of 'utility' (and wider issues about how to describe humanities education) see Bérubé, 'The Utility of the Arts and Humanities', in *Rhetorical Occasions*, 71–89.

Viewing his home village and the world around him from his position of social isolation as an Algerian teacher in a French school, Feraoun must have seen plainly that education and greater material comfort for the few – and even emancipation for the few – did not lead automatically to emancipation for the many, even in the long run. One issue, as we have seen, was lack of access – a problem of colonial inconsistency or half-heartedness, of which Feraoun evidently disapproved. Another issue, to which I will return later, was the complex role of ‘meritocracy’ in the relationship between education and social inequality. And another issue, which may best explain Feraoun’s situation and attitude, was that not all education and not all justifications for education could or should be tied directly to specifiable political goals such as Algerian independence (a ‘measurable outcome’, to use another lexicon), whatever timescale one allowed. By the same token, when in the coming chapters I examine the impact of notions such as fraternity and the fatherland, I will try to avoid overstating the sometimes positive politicizing effects of colonial education, by which I mean among other things its capacity to stimulate anti-colonial critique; after all, not all former colonial pupils became critics of colonialism, any more than all became colonial stooges.

Feraoun’s education equipped him with the intellectual and material means to do various things, other than criticizing colonialism, that he found fulfilling and for which we may admire him now – notably, writing novels and anthologizing Kabyle poetry. The fundamental justifications for those activities were not political – or, again, not in any narrow or straightforward sense; not in his case and not, I would suggest, more generally. I argued earlier that Said’s involvement in political activism neither justified nor undermined his work as an academic, and the same sort of point goes for Feraoun; it is not coherent to think that the time Feraoun spent writing largely apolitical novels when he could have been fighting for independence can be justified by the time he spent writing about politics in his journal. And there would be something perverse about taking the time now to condemn him for choosing to put his efforts where he did, given that it is primarily thanks to his novels that he is still remembered, especially if we ourselves are literary critics/teachers.

One of the points I have tried to illuminate in this chapter is how different values, spaces and timescales always coexist in and around education (and indeed around literature), and how their coexistence inevitably creates friction. That friction may manifest itself in many



ways, among them the self-doubt most teachers sometimes feel, albeit in most cases less drastically than did Feraoun. Feeling justified in lingering over 'les beautés classiques d'*Andromaque*' seems harder than finding justifications for the fundamental work of primary schools, or for sorts of teaching that more obviously foster the values and vocabularies that allowed critics of colonialism to express their arguments. I would not want to argue, and I cannot imagine anyone arguing, that Feraoun was wrong to ask himself sceptical questions about his work in education in the context of colonialism and anti-colonial war, or that he needed to believe that teaching *Andromaque* was the most important thing to do at that moment. But anyone in education has to be wary of any argument that education, along with lesser political concerns, should give way to the most urgent political issues, until the crisis is over.<sup>91</sup> As I suggested at the start of this chapter, you never have to travel far to find a crisis; and if your main concern is to alter the political situation as quickly as possible, teaching of any sort, let alone teaching *Andromaque*, is never likely to seem the most compelling of demands. To see Feraoun's course of action as legitimate, he needed to believe, as do we, that different notions of importance and different criteria of legitimacy can and should coexist, supporting and feeding on different orders of activity, with different timescales and different goals – not all of them immediately political, and some not political at all. It is on that sort of basis, I think, that we can talk about the validity or importance of education, including a literary or so-called 'humanities' education, even in a time of crisis.

Most teachers, maybe all, are interested in shaping the way their pupils think. Feraoun certainly was; his reaction of disappointment when one of his pupils joined the maquis was one sign of this. Nevertheless, it seems that his conception of his job meant that he tried, in general, to keep his political opinions out of the classroom. On 10 November 1955, looking back over the previous month ('La vie scolaire allait son petit train'; 'Life at school continued at a slow pace'), he noted that his older pupils, although working well for their exams, were preoccupied with political events, and expected him to take a political stand. He wrote: 'Je sentais, moi, qu'ils n'allaient plus admettre aucune de mes abdications

91 My point here concerns above all the relationship between the 'political' and the 'apolitical' (or less political), but it can be extended to the sort of hierarchy of political concerns that has meant that women's rights have often been treated as a secondary issue by nationalists, in Algeria and elsewhere.

habituelles, qu'ils voudraient me voir prendre position, manifester un certain attachement à certain idéal qui doit être obligatoirement le mien. Je serai prudent pour ne pas trop les décevoir. C'est tout' (10 November 1955, 15; 'I felt that they would no longer accept my habitual noninvolvement (*abdications*); they wanted to see me take a position, show some kind of commitment to an ideal that must be mine. I will be careful not to disappoint them too much. That is all', 14). The word 'abdications' may be another signal of Feraoun's sense of guilt, linked to the strength of the pressures to take a position and to his self-doubt about resisting those pressures and persisting with the syllabus. But he did persist; and the journal shows that if Feraoun's political positions were not made apparent in the classroom it was not because he lacked opinions or the courage to make his opinions explicit. As we have seen, the journal itself made his powerful anti-colonial feelings explicit and, though written clandestinely, was always intended for publication, and indeed for publication before the end of the war. Even writing the diary required bravery, and his firm plans to publish it required a lot more. All of this gives a poignant resonance to his comment the day before he died, in his still-private but soon-to-be-public diary, 'one can no longer distinguish between the courageous and the cowardly' (314). Coming out earlier as a nationalist would have required courage, it is true; but continuing to teach required courage too, and incurred comparable mortal risks.

All in all, it is clear that there must have been reasons other than reticence or timidity for Feraoun's partial or pretended neutrality in the classroom. In 'L'Instituteur du bled' Feraoun asserted that, to keep people's trust in him, the teacher needed to display 'la sagesse de ne pas sortir de son rôle' (130, 'the wisdom not to step outside his role'). And he had to be fully committed to his *métier*: 'il faut se donner entièrement à sa profession. L'instituteur du bled ne se donne pas. Il est pris. Il lui faut être tout le temps instituteur ou s'en aller' ('a total commitment to the profession is required. The *instituteur du bled* does not choose this commitment; he is consumed by it. Either you give yourself over wholly to the job, or you leave'). We may think again of Camus's 'L'Hôte'. Daru found, as did Feraoun, that people outside the school were keen to assign him to a side in the war. But to understand Feraoun's enduring commitment to education in the context of the war, and indeed against the backdrop of his own anti-colonial sentiments, it seems we need to understand this dual conception of teaching as at once a vocation (to use another only partly secularized term) – in which respect it is intimately

involving of the teacher as an individual, and may involve his or her conception of the political role of education, among other things – and as a kind of role play, involving a certain distance both from one’s pupils and from one’s self. That distance, which I would associate with the compromised and in some senses impossible neutrality that I spoke of earlier, was meant to make a certain ‘learning environment’ possible, to create a partially protected space, something akin to the ‘sacrosanct’ classroom mentioned by Said.

One of the points emphasized in Chapter 2 was that the civilizing mission put less effort into education than is often assumed; and one of the obvious criticisms of the civilizing mission is that it was patchy, inconsistent and often hypocritical. Feraoun himself made these criticisms, as we have seen. French colonialism’s failings in the areas of literacy, gender equality and educational secularism, all of which were particular concerns of Feraoun’s (and all of which I shall discuss further in Chapter 4), are shocking examples. But with all that in mind, I want to ask again whether, hypothetically, we think it would have been better, and whose interests would have been served, if, in the colonial era, more Algerians or fewer had been offered, or subjected to, the educational projects of the ‘civilizing mission’. That question is linked to one that has been central to this chapter: whether Feraoun’s decision to work in education, and not to abandon it during the war, was justifiable.

Despite the broadly positive views of Feraoun that I have offered, some readers may still feel that he should have thrown himself more openly and more fully into anti-colonial criticism, and perhaps activism. I said at the start that his journal was a heroic project, and have suggested that the way Feraoun continued teaching in his situation was, in some senses, heroic too. I hope I have added some weight, however, to my initial assertion that what may be more important about the example he gives us is the strain of anti-heroism in his work: that is, the explicit anti-heroism that can be found in the journal (for example, in the entry for 25 December 1957) and the implicit, paradoxical anti-heroism of continuing to teach *Andromaque*, or continuing to teach at all, in such gruelling circumstances. Today, according to his son, Ali Feraoun, ‘au niveau du Ministère des Moudjahidines, Mouloud Feraoun est chahid, membre de l’ALN, tombé au champ d’honneur. C’est ce qui figure sur l’attestation délivrée par le ministère des anciens Moudjahidines’ (‘as far as the Ministry for War Veterans (*Moudjahidines*) is concerned, Mouloud Feraoun is a martyr (*chahid*), a member of the National Liberation Army who was

killed in action’).<sup>92</sup> On one level this official recognition of his bravery may be well meant. But it also represents a distortion and an appropriation of a figure who ran risks not least through his unwillingness to join the ALN; who disapproved of the sort of politicized religiosity and sacralized violence that were associated, in his era as today, with the terms *chahid* and *moudjahiddin*;<sup>93</sup> and who chose to put most of his energies into work – both literary and educational – whose value lay outside the immediate goals of anti-colonial nationalism.

A final way to bring some of these issues into focus might be to think once more about the moment when Feraoun’s student came to tell him that he was leaving school in order to joined the armed fight. Feraoun reported the incident, it will be remembered, like this:

I told him that I was against violence, even the fellagha’s violence, and that I would be heartbroken to see one of my former students who was aware of my feelings on the subject being callous enough to kill. [...]

He also admitted his disappointment and disillusionment with the attitude of certain members of the maquis who indulge in all sorts of unacceptable and excessive behaviour in the villages. He believes that it is time to restore some sense of order. Apparently the boy has a deep

92 Ali Feraoun, cited by Ouerdia Yermèche, ‘Mouloud Feraoun et la guerre de libération nationale: sa réflexion et sa position à travers son *Journal*’, in Berrichi, *Mouloud Feraoun*, 73–79: 79.

93 The continuing existence of the ‘Ministère des Moudjahidines’ is one sign of the perpetuation of a somewhat mythopoeic version of the war of independence, and the continuing attempt to draw political capital from that era. For a parodic article see <https://el-manchar.com/2015/10/22/le-ministere-des-moudjahidines-se-felicite-du-rajeunissement-35-des-moudjahidines-sont-nes-apres-1962/>, consulted 20 November 2015, which ends with the following quotation, attributed to Tayeb Zitouni (who was born in 1956 and became Ministre des Moudjahidine in 2014): ‘il n’est pas important d’être né avant ou après 1962, ça, c’est juste un détail [...] le plus important maintenant c’est de maîtriser parfaitement et chanter à tue-tête le one two three viva l’Algérie, d’acheter tous les jours le quotidien el moudjahid et de faire semblant de détester la France’ (‘it doesn’t matter whether you were born before or after 1962 – that’s just a detail [...] The most important thing now is to learn the “one two three viva Algeria” off by heart and sing it as loudly as you can, to buy *El Moudjahid* every day and to give the impression that you hate France’). Online one can find the ‘Quotidien National d’Information’ at <http://www.elmoudjahid.com>; one can also find images of the Martyrs’ Memorial (*Maqam E’chahid*) opened in Algiers in 1982, a massive structure which, while incorporating elements of Islamic architecture and Eastern bloc-style military iconography, remains reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower.

understanding of the situation. Even so, he has not yet understood that all participants in the struggle are men, and that on our side, most of the men are uneducated ... (272, E245)

In some respects, this description suggests that the two of them were not so far apart. They shared a certain sense of disappointment in the excesses of the *maquisards*; both seem to have believed that guidance from someone with more education might help (so both believed in education, in some sense; and the student's intentions also seemed teacherly); and when Feraoun said '*even* the *fellagha's* violence', he indicated his basic sympathy for their cause. It is notable that, despite Feraoun's declared determination not to 'step outside his role', the student felt able to have this conversation with him. It may be that he had confidence in Feraoun's commitment to some sort of neutrality, which meant Feraoun would not to betray him. It is more likely that the student thought it obvious that Feraoun was sympathetic to the nationalist cause; the student knew Feraoun's 'feelings', or assumed he did, before this conversation outside school took place.<sup>94</sup>

In other respects, nevertheless, despite what the two had in common, the main point about the scene from Feraoun's perspective was that different orders of value were in play. I have asked myself where my sympathies lie at that moment – with Feraoun or with his student – and others may ask themselves the same question. If you are a pacifist, the choice is easy. If, however, you believe that Algeria would not have achieved independence without violent struggle, it is more difficult. It is quite easy to sympathize with both Feraoun and his student: I find myself thinking simultaneously that Feraoun's student had good reasons to join

94 The teacher–narrator in *La Cité des Roses* remarks: 'Chaque jour, la guerre s'infiltrait à l'intérieur de l'école comme une encre rouge et boueuse dans laquelle il fallait patauger constamment' (loc. 460, 'Every day, the war seeped into the school like a viscous red ink that clogged our every move'), and comments later that an antagonistic French colleague is trying to get him to reveal his political opinions ('mes véritables opinions politiques'), 'à un moment pourtant où il n'était pas nécessaire d'être grand clerc pour deviner les opinions de son voisin et où il suffisait de connaître ses origines pour savoir à coup sûr ce qu'il pensait. Bien entendu, dans ce domaine, j'ai montré à maintes reprises que je n'étais pas cachottier et qu'il ne devait pas confondre discrétion avec lâcheté' (1243–47, 'yet by that time you didn't need to be a genius to work out someone's opinions; if you knew their background, you knew for sure what they thought. In that respect, of course, I was not especially secretive and I had repeatedly made it clear that discretion and cowardice were not the same thing').

the fight, and that Feraoun had good reasons to differ, among them his belief that education should work against violence (and did work against violence: that is one of the implications of his final remark about men who lacked education).<sup>95</sup> With our historical and cultural distance, we can make all of this a matter for academic debate among researchers and readers, or in the classroom, where we are not forced to choose, not forced to settle on an opinion. But on another level, as teachers, we have already chosen; we are already on Feraoun's side, at a distance from the realm of heroism and the revolutionary act. As I suggested earlier, if, in postcolonial studies and other politicized fields of criticism, we are looking for role models, it is tempting to turn to intellectual activists who have adopted clear and radical political positions, which is one of the reasons, I suppose, why everyone in postcolonial studies has heard of Fanon, and relatively few have heard of Feraoun. My purpose here has not been to criticize figures such as Fanon for having taken the other path, or someone like Said for having divided his time between activism and his academic discipline. But if we are looking for points of comparison with our collective work as teacher-critics, and an understanding of its fundamental justifications, the work of Feraoun as a teacher and writer seems a better place to start.

95 One finds a similar idea elsewhere in Feraoun's writing – for example, *La Terre et le sang*, where the 'moins instruits' ('less educated') are described as more inclined to rivalry and violence on an ethnic basis (64; but see also 73, and 165). There is sociological research on this topic, of course; a useful survey is Gudrun Østby and Henrik Urdal, 'Education and Civil Conflict: A Review of the Quantitative, Empirical Literature' 2010, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001907/190777e.pdf>, consulted 21 December 2018.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Unfamiliar Worlds

Les paisants simples, sont honnestes gents : et honnestes gents les Philosophes : ou, selon que nostre temps les nomme, des natures fortes et claires, enrichies d'une large instruction de sciences utiles. Les mestis, qui ont dedaigné le premier siege de l'ignorance des lettres, et n'ont peu joindre l'autre (le cul entre-deux selles : desquels je suis, et tant d'autres) sont dangereux, ineptes, importuns : ceux-cy troublent le monde.

Montaigne<sup>1</sup>

In earlier chapters we saw that formal education in colonial Algeria was highly varied in nature: academic and practical, secular (or secularish) and religious, Christian and Islamic, 'adapted' to native children or not, 'integrated' to some degree across the colonizer/colonized division, or not. We have seen that some historians, with illiteracy statistics to hand, have emphasized that there just wasn't that much formal education in colonial Algeria for the colonized, especially

1 'The simple peasants are honourable men, and honourable men the philosophers too, at least what passes for philosophers in our time, with strong and clear natures, enriched by a broad education in useful knowledge. The half-breeds who have turned with contempt from the first state (illiterate ignorance) and who are incapable of reaching the other (their arsens between two stools, like me and lots of others) are dangerous, absurd and awkward: such men trouble the world.'

Montaigne, 'Des vaines subtilitez', *Les Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), I:liv, 330–33: 332; 'On Vain Cunning Devices', *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), 348–51: 350. In adapting the translation I have also drawn on 'Of Vain Subtleties', *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 273–76: 276, and the expertise of my colleague Emily Butterworth.

not 'French' education, contrary to what the rhetoric of the *mission civilisatrice* might have implied. And we have also seen something of the diversity of colonial-era perspectives on colonial education, especially among policy makers and educationalists: a diversity also evident, as will become clearer in this chapter, among the families to whom colonial education was offered.

All of this suggests that the place of education in colonialism is misunderstood if one assumes that colonial education simply worked as a tool of colonialism, even if that was part of the story. Evidently some proponents of colonialism saw education as a way of establishing and maintaining French colonial domination, as did some opponents of colonialism, but many pro-colonial voices, from the beginning of colonization to the end, expressed anxiety about the risks that education posed to colonialism. Part of the interest of Feraoun in that historical and intellectual context is that a single figure, as diffracted through his writing in various genres, could pass through and express such divergent attitudes: an 'assimilated' mentality, including enthusiasm for assimilation; persistent attachment to, and active promotion of, Kabyle culture; a fierce desire for national independence that did not dispel, and was not undermined by, some lucid anxieties about what independence would bring; and a powerful sense that his time in French schools had brought him both losses and gains.

In telling Feraoun's story it would be possible, of course, to insist on all that was inconsistent and contradictory in his attitudes. But in the last chapter I suggested that the peculiar position in which Feraoun found himself during his later years – a position that could be characterized as anti-colonial and pro-colonial-education – was coherent in important respects, and had something to teach us. The formulation 'anti-colonial and pro-colonial-education' raises the question of what in 'colonial education', or, to be more precise, in colonial-era education financed by the colonizer, was 'colonial', and what in it was not, and so remained acceptable to the anti-colonialist that Feraoun became. Further questions suggest themselves: what in that education was political, in intention and/or in effect? And what might be imagined to have been outside politics, and/or to have stood in a relation to politics that was not fundamentally 'colonial' or coercive or otherwise culpable? What, in the end, did that education do to, or for, its pupils; and what did they make of it? Again, such questions may have implications for our understanding not just of colonial education but of education more generally.



The remainder of this book will pursue some of those questions, and I will loop back through historical moments and debates that have already appeared, drawing more deeply on ‘francophone’ texts that reflect on the experience of going through French schools. These are also texts on which my own work as a teacher is often based, and my discussions will bring into play two sets of assumptions – and prospective arguments – around literature: first, that literary texts offer their own distinctive forms of evidence about life under colonialism and the work of education; second, that literary texts lend themselves to a particular educational climate and form of pedagogical work.

Although I am interested in what it was in colonial education that allowed the French/francophone writers in question to emerge as such and, in many cases, as public critics of colonialism, and although there is a sense in which I, given the nature of my work, am bound to view those outcomes positively, I do not want to downplay all that was negative in their experiences. It is perhaps worth reiterating that any revisionist aspect of my project has significant limits, and not only because of my restricted geographical focus. I have said already that I am not trying to offer an overall assessment of the impact of colonial education, even in Algeria, let alone a generally positive assessment. Rather, I have dwelt on certain details, quirks and inconsistencies in the history of colonial education, and in particular writers’ accounts of it, where those provide food for thought. Among other things, that has meant paying attention to ways in which colonial education could produce positive experiences for some pupils, especially through certain aspects of the curriculum – a theme that will be central to Chapter 5. The tone in the current chapter will often be bleaker, however, and in that sense it may contribute to a more rounded view of the impact and legacies of colonialism, in education and beyond.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first will say more about the unfamiliarity of French culture to many Algerians, including the minority who came into contact with French schools; about families’ expectations of French schools; and about the feelings of deracination to which French schools gave rise in their colonial pupils. Again and again, ‘native’ children entering French schools found the experience disorientating and distressing. The second will examine in more detail a particular example of how French schools could alienate – and politicize – their ‘native’ pupils. That example, I will suggest, raises wider issues around the relationship between educational *laïcité*, Islam and French republicanism, in the past and today.

## Parallel universes

Even if one has taken on board the lesson from Kadri and others that colonial schooling never reached most Algerians, one may expect the influence of the *mission civilisatrice* to be immediately apparent in Algeria's francophone literature. Of course, it *is* apparent, even before one starts reading, to the extent that the use of the French language in Algerian writing testifies to the impact on certain individuals of French colonialism and more specifically of French schools. What is more, this literature frequently places significant weight on the experience of attending a French school. Yet, even in these 'francophone' works, readers' first impression will often be that many Algerians in colonial Algeria felt that they lived in a parallel universe – parallel, that is, to the French/colonial world already conjured up by the use of the French language, and by the very existence of such texts. Feraoun, it may be remembered, spoke about this in his introduction to *Les Poèmes de Si Mohand*, saying that whereas he himself had been greatly changed by French culture, others – women, *paysans*, people in villages – had not.

*Le Fils du pauvre* also invites that sort of reflection, insofar as there is little reason to think of the French until well into the novel. (Not the French colonizers, anyway; as I mentioned earlier, a general allusion to tourists right at the start serves to place the novel's French or French-speaking readers uncomfortably in the position of voyeuristic outsiders, whose comprehension, rather like that of Said's Orientalists, is seemingly limited by the preconceptions of the outsider.) The first time the French presence is invoked explicitly is when, after a fight between rival groups in Fouroulou's home village, his mother says of his injuries: 'Il faut les laisser tels qu'ils sont et les roumis les voient ainsi' (39, 'We should leave them as they are and let the Roumis see them like this', 26; 'roumis', derived from 'Roman', is a colloquial term for Europeans/Christians). It is rapidly agreed among those involved in the dispute that 'Il est inutile d'aller à la justice française qui compliquerait tout' (45; the 1950 edition had 'qui nous éplucherait', 45; 'It is useless to go to the French judiciary, who would only complicate things', 30). Instead they approach the *caïd*, who involves a team of local leaders – the *amin*, two marabouts and the *tamens* (terms that were all explained in the original glossary). That course of action and the words Feraoun uses to describe it are reminders that, before the French arrived, the Algerians already had their own systems of formal justice, and this precolonial culture persisted, at least to some degree, alongside colonial structures. This is not to say that in

*Le Fils du pauvre* the ‘indigenous’ system is idealized; there is little sign that the older structure offers true justice, and it too has alien aspects for the villagers. There is a moment when we are told: ‘L’un [des cheikhs] sort un vieux livre en arabe [...] Il lit quelque chose d’incompréhensible ...’ (44–45; ‘One of them [the sheiks] takes out an old book in Arabic [...] He reads something incomprehensible’, 30). The momentary sense of distance from the ‘old book’, and proximity to the villagers, is quickly followed by the realization that it is the ‘livre saint’, the Quran. The episode presents the French as alien in this context, but implies that Arab–Muslim culture may be described as colonial too: it arrived from elsewhere and never assimilated fully the Maghreb’s earlier inhabitants.

One finds a comparable sense of how external cultures have impinged on the Berber world without fully transforming it in the Prologue of Dib’s *L’Incendie* (1954). ‘Les dernières vagues des cultures qui accourent de l’horizon viennent mourir ici, sur les contreforts de Bni Boublen’ (7, ‘The ripples of the cultures that come speeding over the horizon peter out here, as they hit the foothills of Bni Boublen’), we are told, then: ‘La civilisation n’a jamais existé [...] Les fantômes d’Abd el-Kader et de ses hommes rôdent sur ces terres insatisfaites’ (8, ‘Civilization has never existed [...] and the ghosts of Abdelkader and his men prowl this vexed landscape’). As in *Le Fils du pauvre*, the initial emphasis is on rugged isolation and the resistance to outside influence, although Bni Boublen is just a few kilometres from the town of Tlemcen. The sense of cultural separateness, however, is less complete than in Feraoun’s village: the presence and the pressures of French colonialism are felt in the allusions to waves of incoming cultures and to Abdelkader, and one is soon made aware of how the inhabitants of Bni Boublen have suffered at the hands of the *colons* who have appropriated their land. The phrase ‘Civilization has never existed’ is disconcerting, and erroneous, if taken to mean that the people of Bni Boublen have no culture of their own; it seems to imply scepticism about the very idea of civilization, and must in any case imply both that French culture has had limited impact, and that its impact has not been ‘civilizing’.<sup>2</sup>

2 Another text that gives a sense of how isolated and how untouched by ‘modernization’ Algerian villages could be is Alexis Sempé (ed.), *Un instituteur communiste en Algérie: l’engagement et le combat (1936–1965). Carnets, correspondance, discours et photographies de Gaston Revel* (Cahors: La Louve, 2013). Revel, who was born in 1915 in France, went to Bouzaréah in 1936, seemingly because of an idealistic attraction to the ‘civilizing mission’. He was very shocked by the poverty

Those two examples have the distinctive flavour of the *bled*. There is a striking contrast between the settings of *L'Incendie*, which takes place in the countryside, and *La Grande Maison*, which preceded it in Dib's 'Algerian trilogy', and takes place in a town; and, in another text, the autobiographical 'Rencontres', Dib – who was born in the town of Tlemcen in 1920 – mentioned that for him as a young child the countryside was a 'monde à part' ('a separate world'). (He added: 'Mais nous serions instruits à son sujet quelques années après, durant le conflit mondial, quand nous verrions de nos yeux incroyables ces files de paysans venus mourir dans nos rues si propres, si bien entretenues. Eux n'avaient pour ennemis que la faim'; 'But a few years later we would be taught about it, during the world conflict, when with our disbelieving eyes we would see lines of peasants who had come to die in our very clean, very well-maintained streets. For them the only enemy was hunger'.<sup>3</sup>) Nonetheless, the sense of separateness from the colonizer was not limited to those living in the mountains and the countryside. In towns too – especially in the casbah – some aspects of daily life remained little changed by colonialism. Comandar in *L'Incendie*, a character who voices the need for political organization and change, casts this in a negative light: 'À la vérité, si on s'isole complètement dans sa campagne, ça ne vaut rien. Mais si on s'enferme trop entre les murs d'une ville, ça ne vaut guère mieux. Le plus important est de savoir ce qu'on veut faire' (30, 'To tell the truth, cutting yourself off completely in your corner of the countryside is pointless. But it's not much better staying cooped up in town. The main thing is to know what you want to achieve'). In towns there is a risk, he says, that people stay in their houses and rot. In *La Grande Maison*, this sense of stagnation is manifest within the titular 'big house', where the women squabble and everyone is oppressed by hunger.<sup>4</sup> All the same, when threatened from the outside by French

of the isolated village, Aïn-Tabia, to which he was posted; and, though it had a school, it had no road, no electricity, no telephone, no post office, and no water supply (98). The experience turned him against colonialism. He was forced to leave Algeria early in the war of independence, but returned to teach for three more years from 1962 to 1965.

3 Dib, 'Rencontres', in Sebbar (ed.), *Une enfance algérienne*, 107–17: 116–17; 'Encounters', in *An Algerian Childhood*, 103–13: 113. For a useful summary of Dib's early life see Naget Khadda, *Mohammed Dib: cette intempestive voix recluse* (Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 2003), 11–15.

4 Pertinent again here is Feraoun's comment that women collectively were among the sections of society little touched by colonialism; this corresponds to

forces, the community in and around the house pulls together across divisions of gender and socio-economic status, showing itself to have the glimmerings of political purpose. In such environments, as Lacheraf insisted, a way of life, and a sense of identity, persisted through the endurance of buildings, clothes, food, music, ‘les mille petits riens de l’organisation domestique’ (‘a thousand trivial details of domestic life’); in Lacheraf’s eyes, ‘une civilisation entière cantonnée sur les hauts de la cité et notamment dans les cours intérieures, les patios, les ruelles, résistait comme un dernier carré sur le champ de bataille de la défaite’ (‘a whole civilization lived on between the walls of the casbah, in houses’ courtyards and patios, and in the alleyways; it held on like an indomitable corner of the battlefield’). He goes on: ‘En gros, toute cette culture, contrairement à celle des ruraux qui subissait davantage les atteintes du colonialisme et de l’aliénation agraire’ (‘Basically, this whole culture, unlike rural culture which was damaged more deeply by colonialism and agrarian appropriation’) – which is the implied backdrop to the scene of starving *paysans* evoked by Dib – ‘avait des traits élaborés, une physionomie nationale classique due à l’action presque ininterrompue des artisans, des architectes, des musiciens’ (‘was well-developed and had a classic national complexion thanks to the almost uninterrupted activities of artisans, architects and musicians’).<sup>5</sup>

In town and country alike, then, certain pockets and strands of Algerian culture passed through the French colonial period relatively untouched. Dib notes in ‘Rencontres’ that when he was a small child in Tlemcen his lack of familiarity with the countryside was matched by his lack of awareness of the other ‘other world’ alongside his – the ‘European’ world. ‘Ma mémoire de cette époque reste vierge de tout souvenir d’étrangers’ (109, ‘My memory of that period remains a blank where any recollections of foreigners are concerned’, 105), he says. The first European he met was a doctor, Dr Photiadis, and he comments ironically: ‘Celui-ci ne descendait pas de ces Gaulois dont je saurais plus tard, à l’école, qu’ils étaient mes ancêtres’ (110, ‘He was not a descendant

another contrast between *La Grande Maison* and *L’Incendie*, as the former centres on a more feminine and less ‘political’ world. Omar, as a young boy (and narrative device), is able to move between these different worlds more readily than a young girl, or any adult, could have done.

5 Lacheraf, *Des noms et des lieux*, 247, his italics. Lacheraf may overstate his point (not for the first time) and overgeneralize, but his remarks capture something about the persistence of a pre-colonial identity.

of the Gauls who, as I later learned at school, were my ancestors', 106). School it was, then, that provided Dib's first meaningful contact with French culture. It also offered his first encounter with a 'real' Frenchman, Monsieur Souquet: 'Enfants, nous avons très peur des Français [...] Monsieur Souquet était un instituteur *français* venu enseigner dans l'école laïque et publique indigène de la ville. Une assez grande école, où nous étions entre nous avec nos maîtres algériens, à l'exception de quelques deux ou trois qui nous venaient de *là-bas*' (112, Dib's italics; 'As children we were very afraid of the French [...] Monsieur Souquet was a *French* teacher who had come to teach in the local public school for native Algerians. It was a rather large school, where we were among ourselves with our Algerian teachers, with the exception of the two or three teachers who came from *over there*', 108). In other 'French' schools the teachers were not necessarily French, of course; in *Le Fils du pauvre*, both teachers in Fouroulou's village were Kabyles who wore a European suit under a white burnous – which he thought tremendously smart. Dib himself was an *instituteur* between 1939 and 1942.

Another short autobiographical text published alongside Dib's 'Rencontres' in the collection *Une enfance algérienne*, Mohamed Kacimi-El-Hassani's charming 'À la claire indépendance' ('By Independence Clear'), resembles *Le Fils du pauvre* in conveying the sense that day-to-day life in many communities was not much affected by colonialism, and thereby raising questions about the role of the French school. Both stories communicate a certain sense of political naivety associated with childhood, but imply too that the child's perspective, seen by an adult from considerable retrospective distance, captured something important about the political climate – something to do with a gap between daily experience, including but not limited to French schooling, and wider political and historical forces, which clearly bore upon their lives but also felt somehow exterior to them.

Kacimi-El-Hassani, who was born in 1955, explains in his story that as a child he had a double education, Quranic and French – an experience, as he remarks, that was commonplace. We have already come across examples in Harbi's *Une vie debout*, in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* by Djebar (who also talks about it in *L'Amour, la fantasia*), and in Lacheraf's memoir. Lacheraf offers positive memories of the work of his village *taleb*, who had to put up with being treated as the poor relation and working around the French school day, which suited neither him nor his pupils: the children would get up at dawn and go and study the Quran with him, then leave just before 8 o'clock to run across to the

French school. They returned occasionally for more Islamic education at lunchtime, and more often in the afternoon, after their French teachers had finished for the day.

In Kacimi-El-Hassani's story, what is especially noteworthy about this demanding rhythm, and explicitly so, is that it continues to structure the children's daily lives in September 1962. Celebrations in the village had marked the end of the war and the arrival of independence, but the celebrations were soon over. To the young boy's surprise and disappointment, life seems to carry on as before. He and his friends are told the French have left, but to them it does not seem the French had ever really been present in the first place. 'Nous on ne l'a jamais vue ici la France' (154, 'we never ever saw France here', 153), they say to the adults. He hears an old woman complaining about her hunger and saying that 'colonialisme' has still not left her stomach. And he continues shuttling between the two schools. When he asks his parents why he needs to attend Quranic school, they say: 'Ça c'est pour avoir une place au paradis' ('That's so you'll get a place in Paradise'); and when he asks: 'Mais pourquoi retourner à l'école de la France?' ('But why do we have to go back to the French school?'), they answer: 'C'est pour avoir une place dans l'administration!' (153, 'That's so you'll get a place in the administration!' 152). The children start to wonder if, by an unfortunate accident, history has somehow bypassed their village, and they set off on foot for a neighbouring town to see if the country's newfound independence is more evident there. Their mission fails: they are sidetracked by an opportunity to swim in a lake, and their parents soon catch up with them and drag them back to the French school. The story ends on an ambiguous note: one of the children explains fearfully to their teacher why they ran off, and the teacher responds that they have misunderstood, that 'c'est maintenant que tout va commencer' (160, 'everything is just getting started now', 159). To some this may imply that the school's work could now be pursued without being contaminated by its colonial associations, and without colonialism's political or socio-cultural constraints on the prospects of colonized pupils. To others it may sound threatening, as if the school were already being reimagined as a conduit for neocolonialist influence.

Kacimi-El-Hassani's story raises the question of what 'indigenous' parents and their children wanted from French schools, when school places were on offer at all. Some, as we have seen, avoided or boycotted French schools on religious or political grounds, disapproving of the values the schools channelled, or were believed to channel, and fearing

the influence the schools would have (a fear no doubt diminished if the children also attended Quranic school). Recalling his experiences of studying French, Ameer Khider wrote: ‘Pour les gens de la campagne, c’était un blasphème, parce que, pour eux, apprendre le français c’était abandonner sa race, sa langue et même sa religion’ (‘In rural areas it was seen as blasphemous, because it was thought that learning French meant abandoning people of your own race, giving up your language and even your religion’).<sup>6</sup> People expressed the same sentiment in other colonies: in the celebrated Senegalese novel by Cheikh Amadou Kane, *L’Aventure ambiguë*, published in 1961, the head of the Diallobé people says: ‘Nous refusons l’école pour demeurer nous-mêmes et pour conserver à Dieu sa place dans nos cœurs’ (21, ‘We rejected the foreign school in order to remain ourselves, and to preserve for God the place he holds in our hearts’, 10). Parents’ aversion to French schooling was often stronger in the case of girls: families traditionally allowed boys greater contact with and freedom in the wider world, and vested in girls and women a role as guardians of tradition. Women’s work as cultural conservators had positive aspects, of course, as praised by Feraoun in his volume on *Si Mohand*, but Harbi offers a different angle, describing ‘le monde des femmes, nos éducatrices’ (‘the world of women, who raised us and were our first teachers’) as ‘le principal conservatoire des préjugés’ (‘the most influential “conservatory” of prejudices’) – meaning religious and racial prejudices, but also, implicitly, prejudices around gender roles.<sup>7</sup>

I have emphasized already that in practice colonial schools, irrespective of any ambitions on the part of teachers and administrators to push fidelity to France or even Christianity, or indeed to remain apolitical, sometimes served – as many colonists always feared they would – to encourage anti-colonial thinking in their pupils.<sup>8</sup> All the

6 Khider, *La Vie d’un orphelin: mémoires d’un grand militant* (Algiers: Ihaddaden, 2006), cited by Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 192.

7 Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 37. He adds a colourful detail: ‘Admis dans la section classique, j’ai commencé avant la rentrée mon initiation au latin avec le curé du village. Lors de mon premier cours, il m’a reproché de ne jamais le saluer et de cracher sur son passage. Je suivais, en cela, un conseil de ma tante Fatima’ (48, ‘I won entry into the classical section and before the new school year began, I started studying Latin with the village priest. In my first lesson he told me off because whenever I saw him in the street I refused to greet him and spat on the floor. I was simply doing what my aunt Fatima had told me to do’).

8 In Kane’s *L’Aventure ambiguë* ([1961] Paris: Julliard, 2011) the protagonist’s



same, it seems safe to assume that no parents ever chose to send their children to a French school on the basis that they were attracted to its perverse, inadvertent programme of anti-colonialism. A few appear to have embraced the colonial agenda as such, though that was relatively rare. In trying to understand other cases, one must remember that there were moments, and places, where schooling was indeed compulsory, as Fadhma Amrouche remarked, even if not widely available; Hadjerès recounts that when the French opened a school in his family's village around 1880, his great-grandfather initially refused to send his son, then made excuses, but was threatened insistently with a fine or even prison ('Qui ne se méfierait de ce qui est présenté à la pointe de baïonnettes?', wrote Hadjerès; 'Who could fail to distrust something offered to you with a bayonet in your ribs?').<sup>9</sup> It became increasingly common, however, for families to accept colonial schooling, or opt for it, on pragmatic grounds. A significant number of parents, even if they did not share all of the schools' values, set aside whatever worries they had about schools' prospective influence on beliefs and identity if they thought a French education would make their life easier or better in other ways.<sup>10</sup> In *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* Djebbar

aunt convinces people to embrace French school as part of a long-term anti-colonial strategy: her argument is that 'L'école étrangère est la forme nouvelle de la guerre que nous font ceux qui sont venus' (48, 'The foreign school is the new form of war which those who come here are waging on us', 37) and that 'il faut aller apprendre chez eux l'art de vaincre sans avoir raison' (48, 'we must go to learn from them the art of winning without being in the right', 37). She also believes, however, that the colonial schools will kill things within their culture that they have wanted to preserve (58, E46). For more on colonial education in Senegal see Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa*, and Kelly M. Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics: Colonial Schooling and Political Debate in Senegal, 1850s–1914* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), which includes extensive discussion of parents' reactions to colonial schools.

9 Hadjerès, 'Quatre générations, deux cultures', 20.

10 Comparable issues are discussed by Sanjay Seth in *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Chapter 1 dwells on colonial administrators' disappointment at the way Indians seemed to value education only for its instrumental worth as a path into employment, especially government service. Later he quotes Haridas Goswamy, headmaster of East India Railway High School, Asanol, from 1919: 'The effect of this indiscriminate imparting of high western education to our girls has had the unfortunate result of unsexing our educated women and of denationalizing them – a result bad enough in the case of boys, but infinitely worse in the case of our future

indicates that her father, a ‘« fils de pauvre »’ (her inverted commas nodding towards Feraoun’s novel), managed to marry ‘up’ because he brought with him ‘en guise de dot [...] [son] savoir français garant d’un avenir assuré’ (93, ‘by way of a dowry [...] his education in French, which guaranteed a secure future’). This pragmatism was a source of humour in Kacimi-El-Hassani’s story (‘you’ll get a place in the administration!’), though his parents’ fundamental attitude to education may be hidden behind his playful rhetoric, and though he may be implying more seriously that his parents demonstrated a degree of prescience about the world of post-independence. For other parents, as we have seen, the decision to send children to French school was more pragmatic still, since the most enticing thing was simply the prospect of a free meal; and, conversely, some were deterred by the prospect of spending money on school supplies or new clothing, or by the need to have their children work at home or on the land.

Against this backdrop, when Omar’s aunt in *La Grande Maison* says that French school is not for the likes of him (82), the reasons seem characteristically mixed and muddy. It is partly because of his immediate family’s poverty, and the practical demands that poverty placed on them; partly because she has some sense, ideological but not fully articulated, that to attend the school would be a betrayal of cultural and familial tradition; and perhaps, given that she appears to take selfish pleasure in her relatively advantaged social position, partly because she feels something of the *colon*-type anxiety that education might facilitate social mobility. *Le Fils du pauvre* captures similarly mixed feelings around French schools, as we saw in Chapter 3. Although Fouroulou says: ‘Je me souviens, comme si cela datait d’hier, de mon entrée à l’école’ (57, ‘I recall starting school as if it were yesterday’, 41), he adds shortly afterwards that he can remember little of the first day, the first week or even the first year (58, E42). He gives the impression he was on auto-pilot, and was fuelled only by his family’s general notion that attending school was what other children in the village were doing. He did not expect school to excite him, and he did not worry that it would change him; he did not really expect to engage with it, or expect that his teachers would have any real interest in him. When he found out, after

mothers’ (*Subject Lessons*, 142–43). Kumar notes that worries about cultural and religious discrepancies in the Indian colonial context did not stop families sending their sons to school, but did stop them sending their daughters, and may still do so (*Political Agenda Of Education*, 62–63).

he had been there for over a year, that his teacher knew who he was and had spoken to his father, he was astonished. The gist of the teacher's comments was that Fouroulou was a bit lazy; and from that point on, he started working harder. This was partly a matter of wounded pride, and of not wanting to damage his family's reputation, but Fouroulou also responded to his new awareness that the teacher had some sort of interest and investment in him. If the teacher had any political motivations, they remained invisible.

In due course Fouroulou, with his teacher's encouragement, takes the *concours des bourses*, aiming to win a bursary to move on from his primary school, although he is needed at home as a shepherd. There are more signs of mixed emotions and conflicting pressures. He remains envious of old friends who are still wandering around the countryside laying snares. By this time his father has been forced by the family's poverty to seek work in France, and has found himself in the embarrassing position of needing a scribe to write letters home. Fouroulou does brilliantly in the exam, perhaps because the topic seems to be made for him (and children like him), albeit in a rather brutal way: 'Votre père, ouvrier en France, est ignorant. Il vous parle des difficultés qu'y rencontrent ceux qui ne savent ni lire ni écrire, de ses regrets de n'être pas instruit, de l'utilité de l'instruction' (119; 'Your father, a labourer in France, is illiterate. He tells you of the difficulties encountered by those who cannot read or write, of his own regrets that he is uneducated, of the practical need for schooling', 91). Initially, as we saw in the last chapter, Fouroulou's father had assumed he should not go beyond primary school, believing that 'education is for the rich' (128, E99); but once Fouroulou has landed a bursary, his father sees the advantages for his son in moving away from home and being properly fed, though he still doubts that more education will lead to a better position. It turns out the father is mistaken: the *concours* is something of a turning point for Fouroulou. The same was true, of course, of Feraoun himself and others like him who followed an educational path away from home, and away from poverty (at least by the standards of his village).

It is easy to see why these episodes from *Le Fils du pauvre* were among those selected by Feraoun and his co-authors, Louis Groisard and Henri Combelles, for inclusion in a series of four primary-school textbooks entitled *L'Ami fidèle* that they edited and published between 1960 and 1963. The series was crafted with Algerian schools in mind. As the volumes' prefaces made clear, they were based on a strong assumption

that ‘adaptation’ of teaching materials was necessary and beneficial. Each volume opens with a short text or extract describing the *rentrée* (three of them set in Algeria: two by Feraoun, one by Taos Amrouche); and these chapters and others repeatedly steer pupils towards the view that they should attend school assiduously, work hard, treat their school books with care and respect, and generally make the most of their educational opportunities. The succession of extracts concerning Fouroulou’s transition to secondary education forms the conclusion to Volume 1: in the first extract pupils read about the difficulty and humiliation caused to Fouroulou’s father by his illiteracy; next, about how Fouroulou himself feels slightly humiliated so long as he is unable to write his own reply, and duly feels empowered when he can; and, after that, about how much pride Fouroulou takes in telling his father about his ‘succès scolaires’. All this educationally encouraging reflexivity reaches a kind of apotheosis in the third volume of *L’Ami fidèle* when, in another extract, Fouroulou writes his father a letter telling him he has passed his ‘certificat’ – the sort of letter that he has been obliged to practise writing in exercises preparing him for the certificate, that he now has cause actually to write (within the novel), and that recirculates in semi-fictional form, accompanied with exercises, in Feraoun’s textbook.

*L’Ami fidèle* was manifestly intended to be inspirational in relation to the prospective benefits of education, and reassuring to families who had pragmatic worries about the value or cost of French schooling for their children. The unsubtle emphasis on the blessings of education now looks quite clunky and patronizing, however, and if one reconsiders *Le Fils du pauvre* in the context of the textbooks, the novel itself may start to look more didactic, more like a textbook: the tone may at moments appear pious, bland, ‘school-teacherly’ in a negative sense, in ways that Christiane Achour once criticized with great vehemence, as we saw earlier. At a certain point, perhaps in that chapter on Fouroulou’s letter, when the school book promotes school as part of the preparation for school exams, *L’Ami fidèle* risks creating a kind of short-circuit, making educational institutions seem deadening in their tendencies to self-reinforcement and self-regard.

If, in the end, *Le Fils du pauvre* deserves to be treated as something more than a kind of assimilationist propaganda, it is for contrasting reasons. On the one hand, as we have already seen, it offers occasional glimmers of more inspiring conceptions of education’s work, which might take it beyond the passing of exams, and beyond bland acceptance of colonial values. The ‘certificat’ episode is among those that hint at

education's ability to change individuals (rather than just help them succeed in education itself, or fit them out for employment), when we are told: 'ce n'est plus le même' (116, 'he is no longer the same person', 89). This sentence, in the extract in *L'Ami fidèle* as in the original text, is at once blunt and intriguingly reticent about whatever transformation has taken place; nonetheless, it seems to be positively connoted. Something similar happens when Fouroulou's father comments to him, late in the novel (late in the 1954 version, that is), 'no-one can take your education away from you, can they? It's yours now' (146). This indicates a change of heart on the part of his father and, as I noted when I quoted the remarks earlier, it implies a broadening of horizons, or a kind of deepening commitment to education – although the idea is not greatly developed, unless one counts the novel itself as a development. On the other hand, as we also saw earlier, Feraoun's text can be perturbingly ironic and equivocal about the role of the 'native' teacher and of French education, and especially about the way education may distance someone – an 'indigenous' teacher such as Feraoun, say – from his home culture. The disorientating first chapter (discussed in my Chapter 3) sets the tone from that point of view. And when Fouroulou goes off, dressed in a European suit, to live away from his village and pursue his education, we are told that 'il ne se reconnaît plus' (133, 'He does not recognize himself any more', 103). The idea is not so far from 'he is no longer the same person', but this time the phrase seems to imply not an exciting transformation but something much more uncomfortable.

This is an important theme in many of the literary and autobiographical texts I am discussing. So far in this chapter I have laid stress on the sense of distance from French schools and French culture that many 'native' families continued to feel; and we have seen the pragmatic nature of the assessments many of them made when considering what those schools had to offer. We have seen too, however, that schools were also inevitably associated with deeper changes; that such changes were often feared, especially because of the prospect of assimilation into French culture; and that the changes were distressing to those who lived through them. The texts I will turn to now cast more light on the anxieties, as well as the hopes, associated with (colonial) education, and also on the disappointments of those who realized that 'assimilation' was not what they thought, and perhaps was not truly on offer in the first place.

The behaviour of Djébar's father, especially as described or reimagined in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, offers another illustration of

how tangled the emotions around colonial schooling could be. The fact that he himself had been through a French education, and worked in a colonial school, evidently did not make him immune to worries about his child's prospective metamorphosis – which is perhaps ironic, but is unsurprising. The celebrated opening image of *L'Amour, la fantasia* recalls the moment when Djébar's father first took her to French school. The novel dwells on colonial violence, in ways that may seem characteristic of postcolonial fiction, but its opening image, more upbeat and quotidian, is also characteristically 'postcolonial' in another way, with its image of cultures intermingling. The first sentences read:

Fillette arabe allant pour la première fois à l'école, un matin d'automne, main dans la main du père. Celui-ci, un fez sur la tête, la silhouette haute et droite dans son costume européen, porte un cartable, il est instituteur à l'école française. Fillette arabe dans un village du Sahel algérien. (11)

A little Arab girl going to school for the first time, one autumn morning, walking hand in hand with her father. A tall erect figure in a fez and a European suit, carrying a bag of school books. He is a teacher at the French primary school. A little Arab girl in a village in the Algerian Sahel. (3)

This is the beginning of Djébar's story in more than one sense, the beginning of the journey that made her into a celebrated French writer, or a celebrated writer of French. Yet in the second paragraph it is already clear that this entry into the world of education, especially for a girl, is fraught:

Villes ou villages aux ruelles blanches, aux maisons aveugles. Dès le premier jour où une fillette « sort » pour apprendre l'alphabet, les voisins prennent le regard matois de ceux qui s'apitoient, dix ou quinze ans à l'avance : sur le père audacieux, sur le frère inconséquent. Le malheur fondra inmanquablement sur eux. (11)

Towns or villages of narrow white alleyways and windowless houses. From the very first day that a little girl leaves her home to learn the ABC, the neighbours adopt that knowing look of those who in ten or fifteen years' time will be able to say 'I told you so!' while commiserating with the foolhardy father, the irresponsible brother. For misfortune will inexorably befall them. (3)

The father himself, as described here, is evidently a 'hybrid' figure, or, to look at it another way, a divided one. His residual conservatism, as revealed by, for example, his angry reaction to the sight of his daughter

riding a bike, certainly needs to be understood in terms of Algerian patriarchal tradition; but less, perhaps, in terms of straightforward inheritance than of the inner conflict he felt as he took his daughter's hand and led her towards a future whose precise contours neither he nor anyone else could foresee.

In Tahar Djaout's *Les Chercheurs d'os* an outsider in the narrator's village, a builder named Saïd who is working on the new French school, delivers a sibylline speech about the changes it will wreak in its pupils: 'Le monde va changer pour vous [...] Oh non, il ne deviendra pas meilleur. Seulement les choses dans votre tête épouseront d'autres contours, vos rêves n'auront plus la même géométrie. La lympe violette des enciers falsifiera votre sang' (87, 'Your world is going to change [...] But not for the better. The contents of your head will get shaken up, and your dreams will change. Your bloodstream will be contaminated with their ink'). Their experience turns out not to be as violent as he suggests (the children have a likeable *instituteur*), but the remarks convey dramatically some of the fear that colonial schooling could inspire, and the sense of disorientation and transformation associated with it. Zohra Drif thought that Algerians in her generation who had been to French school had been alienated from their past and their sense of self (or their 'racines' (roots), as Djaout's builder put it, 88): in her words, 'Nous flottons; aucune société n'est vraiment nôtre' ('We are adrift; there is nowhere we are truly at home').<sup>11</sup> Jean Amrouche too vented strong feelings about schools' role in an 'opération de déracinement' ('a process of uprooting') carried out with 'la plus pure et naïve intention civilisatrice' ('the purest and most naïve intention to civilize'). Among other things the whole situation implied, he said, that a child's parents could not be trusted as guides, and came to be seen with indulgence, pity and disdain. A child such as him was obliged to:

se mettre à l'école de ses maîtres, apprendre leur langue, leurs sciences, leur techniques, et, si possible : devenir semblable à eux [...] En somme se convertir, lentement, patiemment, difficilement, à la France. Grandir à partir de ce qui le nie et dans ce qui le nie.

Je ne fais pas allusion – je voudrais qu'il n'y ait pas d'ambiguïté sur ce point – à une volonté délibérée du corps enseignant français, de déraciner les autochtones. Je dis – et c'est peut-être plus grave et plus dur – que

<sup>11</sup> Zohra Drif, letter of December 1957, cited in Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli, *Le Peuple algérien et la guerre: lettres et témoignages* ([1963] Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 176.

l'enseignement exclusivement français et laïque en pays colonisés a pour effet de provoquer le déracinement.

agree to become the pupil of their masters, to learn their language, study their sciences, their techniques, and if possible, start to resemble them [...] In other words, to become a French convert, slowly, patiently and painfully. To grow up on the basis of having been repudiated, and in the culture that repudiates you.

I don't want to be misunderstood: I am not talking about some deliberate attempt by members of the teaching profession to cut native children off from their roots. What I am saying – and perhaps it is even harsher and more serious – is that in the colonies the effect of wholly French and secular education is to leave people rootless.<sup>12</sup>

The use of 'convert' and the reference to *laïcité* are particularly striking coming from Amrouche, a member of a small Christianized minority whom one might have expected to be relatively positive about both the Christian and secular aspects of French schooling. He struck a similarly bleak chord in another entry in his diary from the same year (1955): 'Le piège du laïcisme apatride. On ne peut pas être Français musulman. [...] Les Algériens agnostiques ne sont plus rien, ils sont vidés de tout contenu spirituel réel' (283, 'The trap of stateless secularism. It is impossible to be a French Muslim. [...] And agnostic Algerians are nothing, devoid of any real spiritual dimension').

Amrouche's point about pupils' sense of alienation from themselves and from their parents is echoed in Memmi's *La Statue de sel*. Memmi was another non-Muslim 'native', who, as mentioned earlier, was Amrouche's pupil at the Lycée Carnot in Tunis. If colonial education was alienating, Amrouche, like Djebbar's father and other figures I have already discussed, was, as a teacher, an agent of alienation and deracination as well as a victim, inducting other children into the French culture into which he himself had been drawn. Amrouche, or someone very like him, appears in *La Statue de sel* in the guise of Marrou, one of two teachers, in literature and philosophy respectively, who have a great influence on the protagonist–narrator, Alexandre. In a chapter titled 'Le Choix' ('The Choice') Alexandre explains that the two men helped him decide what or who he wanted to be. Marrou was a role model because he had changed his identity and mastered French (237,

12 Amrouche, 'Aspects psychologiques du problème algérien', notes for a paper given on 5 December 1955 in Paris; in Amrouche, *Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français*, 287–92: 289, 290–91.



E219). Later, however, Alexandre comes to think that Marrou ‘n’était jamais sorti de ses problèmes’ (242, ‘had never managed to solve his own problems’, 224), implying that Alexandre’s hopes of overcoming his own problems may have been illusory; and that what one is, and becomes through education, goes beyond the realm of personal choice.

Memmi was born in 1920 into a poor Tunisian Jewish family. French school seemed to hold out the promise of a way, perhaps the only way, to escape a set of cultural circumstances that might otherwise have constrained him. In a chapter entitled ‘L’Élu’ (‘The Chosen’, a term with a clear, perhaps ironic religious resonance), Memmi describes the moment when Alexandre learns from the headmaster that he has been nominated for a bursary that will allow him to attend the lycée. His parents welcome the news, though his mother is worried that his clothes will not be up to scratch. He explains:

Pour eux, comme pour moi, l’entrée au lycée prenait l’allure d’une entrée dans le monde. Et elle le fut plus que je ne le pensais. L’Impasse et l’Alliance appartenaient à une société, le quartier européen et le lycée à une autre. Surtout je commençai l’aventure de la connaissance. Quelquefois, je pense avec effroi aux ténèbres dans lesquelles j’aurais pu vivre, aux aspects si nombreux de l’univers que j’aurais pu méconnaître. Et je ne m’en serais même pas douté ! comme certains poissons des grandes profondeurs doivent ignorer jusqu’à l’existence de la lumière.

Certes, la connaissance fut peut-être à l’origine de tous les déchirements, de toutes les impossibilités qui surgirent dans ma vie. Peut-être aurais-je été plus heureux dans le rôle d’un juif du ghetto, confiant en son Dieu et ses livres inspirés [...] Alors, je ne voyais que l’aventure nouvelle, je l’abordais avec confiance et violence, sûr d’avoir tout à gagner. Mes déboires familiaux me parurent, désormais, de toutes petites misères. J’avais le monde à conquérir.

In their eyes, as in my own, the chance to go to the lycée represented my chance to enter the wider world – which it actually turned out to be, even more than I had guessed. The cul-de-sac where we lived and the Jewish Alliance belonged to one society, the European district and the lycée to another. Above all, I was now setting forth on the adventure of knowledge and understanding. I sometimes think, with horror, about the darkness in which I might otherwise have lived, the many aspects of the universe I might otherwise never have come to know. And I would not even have realized! Like those fish that live in the deepest sea and remain ignorant of the very existence of light.

Of course, the knowledge I was to gain may have been behind all the rifts and frustrations that have become apparent in my life, all the

impossible situations in which I have found myself. Perhaps I would have been happier if my role had been that of the Jew in the ghetto, still believing confidently in his God and his sacred books [...] Yet at that time I saw only the prospect of a new adventure, and I embarked on it violently and full of confidence, sure that I had everything to gain. [...] I was out to conquer the world.<sup>13</sup>

This passage may begin and end with a sense of optimism, but the optimistic tone wavers. There is no doubt that the opportunity to get out of the ‘ghetto’ was real. But the narrator signals too that he would later experience not only ‘déchirements’ (heartbreak, or rifts) but ‘impossibilités’. The world would open to him, but incompletely. The word ‘monde’ – used later as the title for the third of the book’s three sections, the one describing the war (‘Le monde, brusquement, faisait irruption dans ma vie’, 291; ‘Suddenly, the world irrupted into my life’, 270) – starts to hover unsettlingly between the world as such and (perhaps in a more ‘literary’ register) European bourgeois society. At the same time, Memmi’s description of the benefits of education may imply that he, or at least his autobiographically inspired character–narrator, had imbibed colonial values among others. There are indications in the final three sentences that something in Alexandre is attracted to the idea of violent conquest, and it is clear that, when he looks back at his small corner of the Dark Continent, he is afraid of the ‘darkness’ in which he might otherwise have lived, and the person he might otherwise have been. He is condescending towards his fellow Jews in the ghetto, and starts to think of his compatriots, including his own family, as bottom-dwelling sea creatures ‘unaware that light [or “the light”] even exists’.

13 Memmi, *La Statue de sel* ([1953] Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 97–98; *The Pillar of Salt*, trans. Édouard Roditi (London: Elek, 1956), 82. ‘L’Impasse’ is where the narrator lives; ‘L’Alliance’ refers to the Alliance israélite universelle, an international network of Jewish schools which, as Lia Brozgal puts it, ‘viewed the acquisition of French culture as an essential conduit to modernity and as a tool for combating hatred and prejudice’ (64; she is drawing on the AIU’s website (<http://www.aiu.org/fr/alliance-israelite-universelle>) and on David Bensoussan and Edmond Elbaz (eds), *Témoignages: souvenirs et réflexions sur l’œuvre de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle* (Montreal: Lys, 2002)). See also Aron Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition: The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860–1939* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1993); and Memmi’s interview with Nicolas Morvan, *L’Université syndicaliste* magazine, supplement to no. 706, 5 March 2011, 44–46.

A strikingly similar image occurs late in Kateb Yacine's *Le Polygone étoilé* of 1966. In the final pages of the text Kateb, who was born in 1929, recalls that his attraction to literature and writing was apparent when he was very young, and that his first love was Arabic, which he honed while studying the Quran. He goes on:

Et j'aurais pu m'en tenir là, ne rien savoir de plus, en docte personnage, ou en barde local, mais égal à lui-même, heureux comme un poisson, dans un étang peut-être sombre, mais où tout lui sourit. Hélas, il me fallut obéir au destin torrentiel de ces truites fameuses qui finissent tôt ou tard dans l'aquarium ou dans la poêle.

Mais je n'étais encore qu'un têtard, heureux dans sa rivière, et des accents nocturnes de sa gent batracienne, bref ne doutant de rien ni de personne. (180)

And I could have left things at that, not learning any more and not knowing any different, seen as an erudite figure or a local bard, doing my thing, happy as a fish in its pond – perhaps a slightly murky pond, but swimming along quite happily. Alas, my destiny was more like that of a trout swept along in a stream in spate, ending up in either an aquarium or a frying pan.

But I was still only a tadpole, quite content in my river, living the nocturnal life of my batrachian kind, quite unquestioning and unsuspecting.

Again the self-description conveys a sense that the author/narrator seemed destined for a kind of religiously tinted ignorance and complacency, and that he ended up moving towards greater knowledge, but perhaps also greater suffering; and his writing puts all this on display – offering it up for others to gawp at, or consume, as the images of the aquarium and the frying pan may suggest.

For Kateb, as for Memmi, then, everything changed when his father decided to send him to French school. The paragraph continues:

mon père prit soudain la décision irrévocable de me fourrer sans plus tarder dans la « gueule du loup », c'est-à-dire à l'école française. Il le faisait le cœur serré :

– Laisse l'arabe pour l'instant. Je ne veux pas que, comme moi, tu sois assis entre deux chaises. Non, par ma volonté, tu ne seras jamais une victime de Medersa. En temps normal, j'aurais pu être moi-même ton professeur de lettres, et ta mère aurait fait le reste. Mais où pourrait conduire une pareille éducation ? La langue française domine. Il te faudra la dominer, et laisser en arrière tout ce que nous t'avons inculqué dans ta plus tendre enfance. Mais une fois passé maître dans la langue française, tu pourras sans danger revenir avec nous à ton point de départ. (180)

my father suddenly took the irreversible decision to toss me into the 'lion's den' without further ado, in other words send me to the French school. He did it with a heavy heart: 'drop Arabic for now. I don't want you to fall between two stools, like I do. I'm not going to let you end up as a casualty of the Médersa. Under normal circumstances I could have been your literature teacher, and your mother could have done the rest. But where can that sort of education lead? French is all-conquering, so you have to conquer French, and leave behind everything we have instilled in you since you were tiny. But once you're a master of the French language, it will be safe for you to come back with us to where you started.

His mother immediately fears the implications of the decision, and even his father may not truly believe that the path back home will simply remain open. Quite quickly the child's bond with his mother is weakened, as he falls in love with French, and also with his *institutrice*. Wanting to understand his 'autre monde' his mother decides to learn French too, but the whole experience is a 'seconde rupture du lien ombilical' (181, 'like having your umbilical cord severed for the second time'). The final words of the text are: 'Ainsi, avais-je perdu tout à la fois ma mère et son langage, les seuls trésors inaliénables – et pourtant aliénés !' (182, 'So it was that I lost both my mother and my language, the two precious things that everyone is supposed to have and to hold onto, but that I had lost').

Kateb's attachment to his mother is very clear here, but he also refers to himself in this passage as a 'cruel écolier' ('cruel schoolboy') filled with stupid pride, and implies that he did not always treat her with the respect she deserved. Like Memmi and Amrouche, he indicates that, for a child such as him, colonial education encouraged disdain towards one's parents. Elsewhere in *La Statue de sel* Alexandre, like Kateb, appears to direct his hostility towards his mother in particular: he alludes to her as a 'femme primitive' (41, 'a primitive and unsophisticated woman', 27), and is traumatized by the sight of her dancing in a trance, in a state of abandon (180, E159). Later he remarks that women were divided into two sorts, the ones he dreamed of but would never approach, and those he knew. About the latter he writes: 'Femelles à destinée ménagère, leur ignorance, leur inculture me coupaient définitivement d'elles' (195, 'females destined only to be housewives, they were so ignorant and lacking in any culture that they were completely cut off from me', 177). As with Kateb, the adult writer's perspective seems to be somewhat different: all – or most – of these expressions of incomprehension and distaste, with their unpleasant intermingling of misogyny and colonial condescension, also imply self-criticism, and criticism of the values he has internalized,

or at least a sense of the conflict those values have engendered in him. It may seem ironic that Alexandre calls his mother ‘primitive’, in a context where her ethical superiority over him is apparent: she confronts him for being nasty to a boy called Fraji, telling him it is no shame to be poor; and he explains (to us) that he had learned that poverty was shameful, and identified with Fraji even as he tried to distance himself from him. The same happens when he watches his mother dancing: his disgust is partly self-disgust, fuelled by the realization that he too is moved by African (or ‘negro’ or ‘savage’) music, in a way that he is not moved by ‘Western’ music (171, 180, 184; E152, 161, 165): ‘Elle m’était étrangère, ma mère, étrange partie de moi-même, plongée au sein des continents primitifs’ (181, ‘She was a stranger to me now, my mother, a part of myself become alien to me and thrust into the heart of a primitive continent’, 162). And the same goes for the moment when he reacts negatively to the ‘refus de lui-même’ by the pharmacist, Bismuth (104, ‘his rejection of his whole identity’, 89).<sup>14</sup> Alexandre is perhaps right to bridle at the limits that others expect him to set on his ambitions (limits perhaps implied by the recommendation that he take Bismuth as a role model), but when he rejects Bismuth it entails some level of rejection of his own Jewishness, and of himself. The chapter ends: ‘Ah ! Je suis irrémédiablement barbare !’ (184, ‘Yes, I am an incurable barbarian!’ 165).

One can see why, under similar pressures and in similar circumstances, Drif or Amrouche spoke of veering rootlessly between cultures, no longer at home anywhere. Mocked at school for his accent and his clothes (which, incidentally, makes his mother’s reaction to the news of his bursary seem less naive), Memmi’s narratorial figure, like Kateb’s father, uses the image of ‘falling between two stools’: ‘je vis bien que si je me coupais inévitablement de mon milieu d’origine, je n’entrais pas dans un autre. À cheval sur deux civilisations, j’allais me trouver également à cheval sur deux classes et à vouloir s’asseoir sur deux chaises, on n’est assis

14 There is an echo of this phrase in Memmi’s *La Terre intérieure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), a book of interviews with Victor Malka. Discussing the relationship between Jews and Arabs in the Maghreb, and the senses in which the Jews themselves were and were not Arabs, he remarked: ‘ils étaient alors colonisés et se refusaient beaucoup. Nous nous refusions également’ (54, ‘they were a colonized people at that time and had a strong urge to reject themselves. We did the same’). This passage is discussed by Olivia Harrison in *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 98, where she links Memmi’s thought on colonialism with his positions on Israel.

nulle part' (123, 'I could see that I was inevitably cutting myself off from my own background, but that did not mean I was gaining entry to any other group. Straddling two civilizations, I would also end up straddling two social classes; and when you do that, you end up falling between two stools', 107–08). The image is an old one, as my epigraph from Montaigne suggests, and in Montaigne's usage too it was linked with education – and with the idea of the *métis*, and so with *kinds* of people.<sup>15</sup> Memmi's image itself is divided and doubled; it suggests he was falling between two civilizations, but also between two social classes. (Just before this he had stated categorically: 'La séparation des classes est aussi profonde que celle des religions et je n'étais pas des leurs', 121; 'Social distinctions are as entrenched as religious differences, and I was not a member of their class', 106.) On one level, this undermines the very idea of civilizations and classes as discrete, countable entities; and revealing this is one way in which 'les mestis [...] troublent le monde' ('half-breeds [...] trouble the world'), to appropriate Montaigne's phrase. All the same, the image of failing ever to settle is poignant; there is a sense of incompleteness, blockage and disunity as well as mixity or hybridity. The 'dualness' is imperfect and painful. As we will see later, this is not Memmi's final word on his experience of transformation through education. But at moments such as this, his writing not only makes it clear that transformation can be upsetting and even harmful, but also implies that, in a context of deep social inequalities, education's powers of transformation are limited.

### *Laïcité* at lunch and at large

The title of Assia Djebar's final, strongly autobiographical novel, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* of 2007, suggests that in her text, as in Memmi's novel, an experience of unbelonging will have a certain prominence.<sup>16</sup> Near the start of *Les Damnés de la terre* Fanon, just after mentioning the divisions between colonial and indigenous towns,

15 The Robert dictionary gives 1615 (two decades after Montaigne's death) as the first usage of 'métis' in a racial sense. I am grateful for the suggestion made to me by Eric MacPhail in a seminar at IUB that, in talking of falling between chairs, Memmi may have been alluding to Montaigne, which led me to this passage. The expression has such a long history, however, that it cannot be clear-cut that Memmi had Montaigne in mind.

16 The obvious/most literal translation of the title would be 'Nowhere in my father's house', but *part* can also mean a stake or a share in something.

and colonial and indigenous schools, wrote: ‘Le monde colonisé est un monde coupé en deux’ (68, ‘The colonized world is a world divided in two’, 3). Djébar (or her narrator figure) indicates that her first school, where she studied alongside children from European backgrounds, was ‘coupé en deux, plus profondément encore que la société du dehors’ (132, ‘split in two, even more deeply than the society outside’). She was made to feel marginalized as different worlds and different values came into contact, or were kept apart. Her school, it seems, did not merely manifest social division, but reproduced and sometimes entrenched it. And it turns out that her colonial schools were divided in more ways than one.

In colonial Algeria certain inconsistencies in republican/colonial educational policy and practice were mundane, impossible to miss, and all but impossible for ‘native’ pupils not to resent. Djamel Amrani remembered how the Arab children at his school were always made to sit at the back, and given the most worn-out copies of books.<sup>17</sup> Mohammed Harbi recalls in *Une vie debout* (27–31) that in the separate French and ‘indigène’ sections in his primary school in El-Arouch the Muslim boys had to accept worse facilities in all respects, starting with the desks – and he remembers objecting to the fact that the *classes indigènes* had to work in the garden every Thursday, whereas the ‘European’ children did not. (He also reveals that in the French section there were a few Muslim boys with well-connected fathers, and some Muslim girls.) But other inconsistencies were more subtle, and politically more complex, and I will examine an example that I think may be especially instructive now. It concerns the still-contentious notion of *laïcité*, which we have already encountered several times in passing. (I will keep using the French word, as there is no exact equivalent in English, not least because in French the term, though it has various applications, is so strongly associated with education.) *Laïcité* had a peculiar history in Algeria, perhaps relevant to its peculiar ongoing history in France, and one could describe it both as a markedly French value and as a framework through which potential conflicts between different cultural values might have been – and may be – mediated.

In works I have quoted so far we have seen a spectrum of responses to *laïcité*. We saw how Denis Guénoun’s father embraced it as a liberating concept, and a universal one, when he entered Bouzaréah in 1929,

<sup>17</sup> Amrani, *Le Témoin* (Paris: Minuit, 1960), 14–15; cited in Pervillé, *Les Étudiants algériens*, 251.

aged 17 ('What revealed itself to him at the Teaching College was the human, *le cosmos laïque*', and so on). When Dib, striking a more sober tone, recalled that 'Monsieur Souquet was a *French* teacher who had come to teach in the local public school [*dans l'école laïque et publique indigène de la ville*]', the emphasis was on the exoticism – the Frenchness – of the institution, and there may have been a hint of criticism in the juxtaposition of the official rhetoric of 'laïcité' with the sense of segregation carried by 'indigène'. A more patently critical perspective was expressed by Amrouche (surprisingly), with his bleak assessment of 'laïcisme apatride'.

An anecdote in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* casts light on some of the incongruous dynamics around *laïcité* in the colonial situation, and helps us see how even those Algerians who entered a French school with an open mind about its capacity to accommodate and nurture them were likely to end up with a heightened sense of a conflict between their 'Muslim' identity and the school environment. Djébar writes:

À cette époque, et même dans un collège de la République qui s'affirmait « laïc », environ un jour par semaine, souvent pour quelque fête du calendrier chrétien, le déjeuner célébrait l'événement par un plat exceptionnel. Alors, le menu prévu pour le repas de midi comportait de la charcuterie (choucroute ou autre plat de viande avec jambon, porc cuisiné, etc.).

À peine arrivions-nous à la porte du réfectoire que le bruit courait, assez vite dans les rangs, que les musulmanes devaient s'installer aux « tables-pour-musulmanes », par observance de l'interdit islamique. (155–56)

At that time, even in a school under the auspices of the Republic, which declared itself to be 'secular' ['laïc', in inverted commas], about once a week, often to mark some significant date in the Christian calendar, something out of the ordinary would appear on the lunchtime menu. On these occasions, ham would be served, or pork with sauerkraut.

We would just be coming into the refectory when word would go rapidly through our ranks: the Muslim girls, subject to Islam's dietary laws, had to sit at the 'Muslim tables'.

Djébar presents the customs of the refectory as an important example of colonial splitting and separation: 'la division coloniale entre les deux mondes (européen et musulman) s'y accentuait de plus belle' (156, 'there, the colonial division between two different worlds, European and Muslim, was reinforced'). She goes on to explain that one day the 20 or 30 'Muslim' girls (the girls from Muslim or 'Islamicate' backgrounds) decided that they were being treated unfairly: they kept getting fried



eggs when 'les Françaises' got meat.<sup>18</sup> Gradually they built up a head of steam, deciding to 'strike' (a response which could be seen as admirably French) and demanding to see the headteacher. They also decided they needed a spokesperson, and Djebbar was thrust forward. The headmistress arrived and simply asked the girls what they would like to eat instead. The girls had not discussed that, so Djebbar, in her role as spokesperson, had to improvise:

Soudain, je trouve ! Sur un ton presque victorieux, je propose à voix forte :

– Je ne sais pas, moi.

Je mime faussement l'hésitation, puis lance presque joyeusement :

– Par exemple, on pourrait nous servir ... des vol-au-vent !

Le plat appelé « vol-au-vent » était en effet un plat d'exception ; il apparaissait une ou deux fois l'an et était sans doute jugé d'une valeur aussi exceptionnelle que, par exemple, la bûche de Noël.

La directrice – ex-persécutée par le régime de Vichy – a eu un haut-le-corps. Elle me dévisage, stupéfaite, n'en revenant pas de ma proposition. (163)

Suddenly, I've got it! Sounding almost triumphant, I say loudly, as if I were still hesitating: 'I don't know'. Then, almost with a sense of joy, I say: 'Why not give us some vol-au-vent?'

The dish called 'vol-au-vent' was certainly out of the ordinary; it appeared once or twice a year and had the same sort of exceptional value as, say, the Christmas log.

18 Lacheraf mentions similar arrangements at the refectory at the Lycée Ben Aknoun (*Des noms et des lieux*, 302). A different example comes from Alain Caratini, who remembers that at Bouzaréah, to which he was admitted in 1952, meat was always served on Fridays. He was not religious, but queried the policy: 'Je trouvais normal que les menus proposés à nos camarades musulmans respectent leurs pratiques (par exemple ces couscous nocturnes que nous partagions volontiers durant le mois de Ramadan), pourquoi pas le même respect pour nos camarades catholiques ?' (cited in Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 127, 'It seemed natural to me that the food on offer to our Muslim classmates took account of their dietary practices. They were served a late-night couscous during Ramadan, for example, which we were very glad to share. So why not show the same consideration to our Catholic classmates?'). He recalls that the trainee teachers were committed to 'le credo de « l'école laïque, gratuite, obligatoire » !' ('the credo of "compulsory, free, secular education for all"!'), and glosses 'laïque' as follows: 'une préoccupation unique, que l'école ne soit pas utilisée par l'armée ou autre pour une quelconque propagande' (137, 'we were particularly concerned that schools should never be used for propaganda by the army or anyone else').

My request made the headmistress – a woman who had been persecuted under the Vichy regime – jump. She stared at me in amazement, completely bamboozled by my suggestion.

In its entirety this anecdote is quite long, and quite funny. Djébar makes it clear that in many ways the stakes in the confrontation were low: she goes on to say that she cannot actually remember whether they ever got their *vol-au-vent*, and mentions with relief that never in the rest of her life did she have to speak up on a matter of such narrowly symbolic importance. Some of the humour comes from bathos, from a sense of anti-climax, the story ending up in the wrong place. This, after all, is colonial Algeria, whose violence, during the extended conquest and during the war of independence, is evoked repeatedly in Djébar's work. And the young Djébar, in her proto-political *prise de conscience*, ends up making a request for puff pastry.

Nevertheless, a couple of important political/educational issues come into focus. In the build-up to her exchange with the headmistress, the young Djébar suddenly thought of her father's books about the French revolution, and mentally likened her friend Messaouda, who (we are told) would die later as a nurse in the Algerian *maquis*, to Mirabeau in the *états généraux*. The moment is reminiscent of all the debates about whether exposure to a French education would inspire Algerians to rebellion; after all, however mundane the issue immediately and explicitly at hand, the episode is presented as a transformative one, both for Djébar and for Messaouda. It may also be pertinent that the headmistress was persecuted under Vichy, and so may herself have been a *maquisarde* not so long before; in that way too, sources of political inspiration could be found within French history and within the school. One finds the same motif in other writers: Hayat writes of the politicizing use of history as a deliberate dimension of her father's work in his 'poste déshérité' (a phrase suggesting both that his school was under-resourced and that it lay in a deprived area), which she describes thus:

C'était un sacerdoce. C'était avant tout un combat.

Tu leur racontais la Commune et la Révolution Française à ces mioches en guenilles ! Tu leur lisais Jules Vallès, Maxime Gorki, Makarenko ... Et tu leur apprenais le français, leur récitais Victor Hugo et du Chateaubriand, du Verlaine et du Rimbaud ... Eux aussi s'en allaient, les mains dans leurs poches crevées, mais pour d'autres raisons ...

It was like a religious vocation; and above all it was a form of combat.

You told these little kids dressed in rags about the Commune and the French Revolution! You read to them from Jules Vallès, Gorky and Makarenko ... And you taught them French, you recited Hugo and Chateaubriand, Verlaine and Rimbaud ... They too went away, with their hands shoved through the holes in their pockets, but for other reasons ...<sup>19</sup>

Other teachers were no doubt more circumspect, but the standard French pedagogical approach to the revolution of 1789 was positive, and inherently politicizing in that sense.

Of course, not all teachers followed the same political line; in *La Statue de sel* Alexandre comments: 'Bizarre le nombre de professeurs d'histoire royalistes, comme si leurs études les enchaînaient à l'existence d'un monde révolu' (282, 'It is odd how many history teachers are royalists, as though their studies committed them to a world gone by', 262). He notes that his history teacher – who stood out as particularly prejudiced even in a lycée where the general tone was highly anti-Semitic – 'refusait toute discussion' ('allowed no discussion'), and treated the revolution as 'la période la plus honteuse de l'histoire de France' (281, 283, 'the most shameful period in the history of France', 260, 263). Nonetheless, Alexandre joined one of his Muslim classmates, Ben Smaan, in speaking up for the revolution and, on that basis, although both boys had the sense there was a conflict between Jewish and Muslim identities, was invited by Ben Smaan to join a youth movement for 'fils du pays' (284, 'sons of the country', or 'native Africans' as the published translation has it, 263).

There are numerous other examples of how the French revolution offered that sort of inspiration. The character Ali in Maïssa Bey's novel *Bleu, blanc, vert*, who started his education under French rule but finished it after independence, notes, while still young, 'C'est à l'école que j'ai appris qu'il y avait des Français misérables en France. C'est même pour cette raison qu'ils ont fait la Révolution' (49, 'It was at school that I learned that there were poor people in France. In fact, that's why they had their Revolution'). In the autobiographical essay *L'Une et l'autre* Bey comments: 'De fait, les idéaux de la Révolution

19 Hayat, *L'Indigène aux semelles de vent*, 58–59. The image of students going away with their hands in their pockets is an allusion to a line in Rimbaud's sonnet 'Ma Bohème', 'Je m'en allais, les poings [fists] dans mes poches crevées' (Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. André Guyaux and Aurélia Cervoni (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 106).

française de 1789 s'enracinèrent si bien dans les esprits qu'ils furent, à peu de choses près, ceux qui allumèrent les feux de 1954' ('In fact, the ideals of the 1789 French Revolution took root so firmly in people's minds that they were also more or less responsible for sparking things off in 1954').<sup>20</sup> That was one reason, besides the influence of Marxism, that in the era when Bey, or her character Ali, were growing up, the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria was very often referred to as the Algerian Revolution. Later on, as a young man in newly independent Algeria, Ali noted that there were political militants from all over the world – Eldridge Cleaver, for instance, and members of the PLO – in Algiers, 'le phare du Tiers-Monde ou La Mecque de la Révolution' (131, 'beacon of the Third World and the Mecca of Revolution').<sup>21</sup> Frantz Fanon was celebrated at that time, and he too was a product of French schooling who turned the rhetoric and political energies of the French revolution back on the French colonizers: the title of his 1959 collection *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* is just one example, with its reference to the revolutionary calendar (not captured in the English translation, *A Dying Colonialism*).<sup>22</sup> Even Feraoun, as we saw in Chapter 3, not by nature a revolutionary, proclaimed himself a descendant of the 'sans-culottes' (*Journal*, 40, E38–39). We also saw the claims made by Amrouche in 1943 for France's powers of universal revolutionary inspiration ('As the world's spiritual heartland, France's role is to create, after the war, an exemplary Revolution: to invent political and social forms – and this is the particular genius of France – valid not only in France but universally'). These claims were hyperbolic but to

20 Bey, *L'Une et l'autre*, 31, cited by Siobhán McIlvanney, 'Education and Exile in the Writings of Maïssa Bey and Malika Mokeddem', in Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré (eds), *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds: Rethinking Mobility in Francophone Women's Writing* (Cardiff: University Of Wales Press, 2016), 131–52: 136. McIlvanney makes a strong argument for the liberating force of French education and French literature for Bey and Mokeddem.

21 The way Algeria acquired this status is examined at length by Jeffrey James Byrne in *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). On Cleaver's time in Algiers see Elaine Mokhtefi, 'Diary: Panthers in Algiers', *London Review of Books* 39:11 (1 June 2017), 34–35, and her subsequent book *Algiers, Third World Capital: Freedom Fighters, Revolutionaries, Black Panthers* (London: Verso, 2018).

22 For detailed discussion of the revolutionary calendar see Sanja Perovic, *The Calendar in Revolutionary France: Perceptions of Time in Literature, Culture, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

some small degree self-fulfilling, insofar as versions of this rhetoric had currency in French schools and across the French-speaking world.

For the young Djébar and her peers in the story about the refectory, however, revolutionary dreams and actions were still distant; and even if the passage in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* indicates that school could provide sources of political inspiration – history books on the revolution of 1789, and a headteacher who served in the French *maquis* – the main significance of the reference to the headteacher's *maquisarde* background surely lies elsewhere. It indicates that if the pupils have successfully identified a problem, it is not that the school is an especially conservative one. Instead, one is looking at wider inconsistencies or disturbances within French/republican/colonial culture. And, in particular, one is dealing with problems around *laïcité*, as the first sentence of the extract already suggests in its reference to 'a school under the auspices of the Republic, which declared itself to be "laïc"'. At the end of the passage, Djébar describes the shocked – and in the case of her 'coreligionnaires' (156, 'coreligionists'), delighted – reactions to her suggested 'plat de résistance' ('main course' or 'dish *de résistance*'): 'Il semble que j'aie émis devant la directrice une proposition sacrilège !' (164, 'Apparently my suggestion to the headteacher was sacrilegious!'). The pun on 'résistance' is striking: here too the tone is humorous, and somewhat bathetic, but not entirely so.<sup>23</sup> The same goes for the semi-metaphorical use of 'sacrilège'. In its small way, the request for vol-au-vent really was an act of resistance; and it revealed something of the supposedly secular institution's muddled investments in religious identities.

Whereas a certain contemporary discourse in France and beyond tends to hold that Islam, as compared with Christianity, is incapable of adapting to *laïcité*, Djébar's anecdote implies almost the opposite: that historically *laïcité* as a policy and set of practices has adapted more readily to Christianity than to Islam, and indeed has always

23 The metaphor was used differently in an article of 1922 that criticized Muslim leaders' preoccupation with the question of suffrage: 'Ils discutent sur la nature du dessert à donner aux Indigènes et négligent de leur servir le plat de résistance. Le plat essentiel c'est l'instruction' ('They keep talking about what sort of dessert to give the Natives but fail to serve the *plat de résistance*. The nourishment we really need is education'). Quoted by Rigaud in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 45. The article appeared in *La Voix des humbles*, the journal of indigenous teachers in Algeria. It was published from 1919 to 1939 and is discussed at length by Colonna in *Instituteurs algériens*.

accommodated aspects of (post-Reformation) Christian practice and custom – an issue foregrounded by Jean Baubérot, among others.<sup>24</sup> The fact that the school canteen marked Christian festivals is one example; the general rhythm of the school week and school year was and is another. In colonial Algeria some account was taken of Muslim festivals too, but this was less systematic; Kateb Yacine draws attention to this in *Nedjma*, when the character Mustapha confronts his teacher by saying: ‘Cher Maître, je ne remettrai pas la copie ... c’est aujourd’hui le Mouloud ... Nos fêtes ne sont pas prévues dans vos calendriers’ (‘Today I will not be handing in my work ... Today is Mawlid, when we celebrate the birthday of the prophet Mohammed ... Our holidays are not provided for in your calendars’).<sup>25</sup> In his short story about the French *école communale* of his childhood, Malek Alloula remarks: ‘Des trois périodes officielles que l’école laïque retenait pour [les] vacances, celles de Pâques nous étaient les plus chères’ (‘Of the three official periods the secular school reserved for vacations, the Easter break was the one most dear to us’): and we are invited to see irony here, both by the introduction of the adjective *laïque* and by the allusion, just after this, to children who did not attend school: ‘congénères libres, eux, des

24 I am not denying that secularism is in some senses, or versions, antithetical to Christianity and Islam alike. The point I am emphasizing, following Djebbar, is that historically *laïcité* has been entangled with Christianity in particular ways; and recognizing this offers a chance not to establish the ‘true meaning’ of *laïcité* but to reintroduce notions of history and mutability into debates that too often rely on crude notions of the ‘true nature’ of *laïcité*, Islam and the rest. Baubérot has pursued this broader historicizing project in numerous books, including *La Laïcité, quel héritage? De 1789 à nos jours* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1990) and *Laïcité 1905–2005, entre passion et raison* (Paris: Seuil, 2004); it is also central to Maurice Samuels, *The Right to Difference: French Universalism and the Jews* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), and to Jean Cohen and Cécile Laborde (eds), *Religion, Secularism, and Constitutional Democracy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), where Laborde calls for ‘an alternative secularism, one less intimately bound up with Western Christianity’, 432. Laborde has pursued the issue further in *Liberalism’s Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), which discusses in general terms the place accorded to religion in liberalism (and espouses a relatively broad, ‘thin’ notion of secularism marked off from the ‘substantive secularism’ of *laïcité*, 40; see also 125 and 142).

25 Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma*, 221, E295; in the original French edition, a footnote explains the meaning of Mouloud/Mawlid. Hadjerès in ‘Quatre générations, deux cultures’ (47) recalls that when a racist teacher set a deadline for Aïd, the Muslim students decided to hand in blank sheets of paper.

entraves de l'obligatoire et gratuite laïcité' ('those who were free from the shackles of obligatory and free *laïcité*').<sup>26</sup>

Historically, *laïcité*'s incorporation of elements of Christian culture was partly about political compromise, and about creating space for certain practices from that particular religion, but it was and is also a matter of allowing Christianity to function as a diffuse cultural tradition. In Djébar's refectory, the marking of religious festivals was indeed secular in the sense that having *charcuterie* or a Christmas log for lunch was not actually a sacred ritual, and was based on assumptions about the cultural background of the majority of students more than on speculations about their religious beliefs or practices; conversely, however, it was assumed, effectively, that all 'Muslim' girls observed Islamic dietary laws. The cultural latitude allowed to Christianity was not attributed so readily or so frequently to Islam. One reason was that Islam was perceived in colonial Algeria, as it is in contemporary France, as more purely and inflexibly 'religious'; another reason was and is a certain level of colonial hostility to Islam, and to Muslims. When Inspecteur général Leysenne in his report of 1888 revealed to Jules Ferry, then Ministre de l'instruction publique, that statistics about education had been manipulated to deceive him about the situation on the ground, he also revealed that Muslim kids hardly attended school, not least because they were the 'souffre-douleur de leurs condisciples' ('punchbags for their fellow students'). He reported too that, in practice, religious neutrality was a myth, commenting: 'nous ne faisons guère scrupule de tourner en ridicule leurs pratiques religieuses' ('we seem almost completely uninhibited about ridiculing their religious practices').<sup>27</sup>

In such ways, a particular colonial version of, or relation to, *laïcité* helped colonialism work perversely to shape and strengthen and politicize an Algerian 'Arabo-Muslim' identity. Describing that perverse dynamic in relation to the colonial uses of the word 'musulman', McDougall writes: '*statut personnel musulman*, translated into Arabic

26 Malek Alloula, 'Mes enfances exotiques', in Sebbar (ed.), *Une enfance algérienne*, 9–24: 15; 'My Exotic Childhood', in *An Algerian Childhood*, 1–17: 7.

27 Cited by Rigaud, in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 29. One might compare Rachid Boudjedra's argument that the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut) 'a été enfanté, entre autres, par ce mépris occidental de la langue arabe et de l'identité arabo-musulmane dominante en Algérie' (*FIS de la haine* ([1992] Paris: Folio, 1994), 30, 'was spawned partly by the West's contemptuous attitude towards the Arabic language and Algeria's predominantly Arabo-Muslim identity').

as *shakhṣiyyatunā 'l-islāmiyya*, “our Muslim personality”, came to signify something the colonial system, *having created it as such*, could not admit – the definition of specifically “Muslim Algeria” as a political community’ (his italics).<sup>28</sup> Djebar’s anecdote is a small example of how this worked on the ground, all the more striking because Djebar was largely secular in outlook, had Berbers as well as Arabs among her immediate ancestors, and, as this passage makes clear, did not even usually have lunch with the other ‘Muslim’ girls. The label ‘Muslim’ is not necessarily one that Djebar would have applied spontaneously to herself, then, a point also raised by Zohra Drif when she wrote in her memoir *La Mort de mes frères* of 1960: ‘À l’internat où j’ai vécu sept ans, rien n’avait pu nous rapprocher, nous les « musulmanes », – c’est le titre qui nous était donné – des autres. Par le racisme et par le colonialisme, les Européens s’étaient construit un univers à eux, à côté duquel nous vivions’ (7, ‘In the boarding school where I lived for seven years, there was no way to close the gap between us “Muslims” – that was what they called us – and the others. The Europeans’ racism and colonialism had built their own universe, and we lived alongside it’). As Drif’s inverted commas emphasize, the term ‘Muslim’, as it emerged from the mouths of colonists, was at once slippery and spiked; and it is again apparent that it would be a mistake to think of it simply as a religious category.

Djebar’s story and Drif’s comments underline once more how separate the European and ‘native’ worlds often felt in colonial Algeria, *even* to those Algerian children who attended French schools. As they suggest, the schools were in practice often divided in two along religious/ethnic lines, formally and/or informally. In both texts, the fact that such divisions inevitably had politicizing effects is also clear. But in Djebar’s text it is clear too that the process of politicization did not have to lead to an unequivocal embrace of an ‘Arab–Muslim’ identity, even if it encouraged anti-colonialism. In the episode in the refectory, although from the headmistress’s perspective the girls were articulating a demand

28 McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria*, 92–93. This dynamic evidently helps explain the FLN’s political uses of Islam, which I discussed in Chapter 3. Feraoun was aware that French colonialism had helped to politicize Islam, through its discrimination against (and its very labelling of) ‘Muslims’, just as it undermined people’s confidence in (so-called) democracy. See *Journal*, 342, E310; see also Slimane Chikh, *L’Algérie en armes, ou le temps des certitudes* (Paris: Economica, 1981), 323–34.



‘as Muslims’, their request was fundamentally a request for equality. As one of the girls put it, ‘Nous avons à demander l’équivalent!’ (157, ‘We need to ask for the equivalent!’). If the punchline is unexpected, for the headmistress and for the reader, it is not only because ‘vol-au-vent’ may be a bit luxurious for a school canteen. It is also because the dish seems extravagantly French – not Islamic, or Algerian. The young spokesperson effectively refused to be enclosed within the category of ‘musulmane’, at the same time showing that she and the other girls had digested a fair amount of French culture; and it seems they might well have gone along with a markedly French version of equality or of *laïcité* or of republican indifference, provided it did not work to marginalize ‘Muslims’.

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Evidently Djébar, like all the ‘francophone’ writers in this book, was a star pupil, perhaps more receptive than most to her education and to French culture. She recalls winning a prize for the first time in the primary school where her father was the only teacher from an ‘indigenous’ Algerian background. She writes: ‘Cela devrait faire une scène digne de la presse de l’époque, de leur presse ... La fillette « indigène », ou « musulmane », ou arabe, comme on veut, seule fillette de ce type, sans doute, de l’école, en 1940 et 41 »’ (32, ‘It should have been the kind of scene that made it into the papers – their papers – in those days ... The little “native” girl, or, if you prefer, the little “Muslim” or Arab girl, no doubt the only one in the school, in 1940 or 1941’). The comments are a reminder of the capital made by the colonial authorities from those rare Algerian children who did really well in the colonial education system, and also another reminder of the struggle by colonists and the Republic to find a label that lumped ‘natives’ together, Muslim or not, Arab or not, and distinguished them from the ‘French’. But at the time, the young girl was not disturbed by the whiff of propaganda; above all, she was excited about her prize – a book. She remembers how she walked towards her father across the schoolyard, which she describes as ‘séparée en deux par un grillage assez haut : d’un côté les classes des filles, de l’autre celles des garçons’ (29, ‘divided in two by quite a tall fence: on one side the girls, on the other, the boys’). Her father was on the other side of the fence, and she waved the book triumphantly in her hand. The story continues:

« – C'est mon prix !

Derrière le grillage, le père s'est arrêté à deux ou trois mètres de là. Elle croit bien faire, la fillette, agitant le livre pour rendre visible la couverture avec le portrait d'un vieux monsieur, moustachu et coiffé d'un képi ... militaire.

L'instituteur indigène aperçoit enfin le titre du livre. Il s'agit d'une biographie : la tête du monsieur français à képi est ... le maréchal Pétain, qui dirige alors le pays (la France et ses colonies). On doit être en juin 1940 ou 1941.

[...] [C]e qui me frappe, c'est l'étrange demi-sourire sur la face paternelle. [...] » (32)

'It's my prize!'

On the other side of the fence, my father has stopped, two or three yards away. The little girl thinks she is doing the right thing, as she waves the book in her hand, showing him the cover with its portrait of an elderly gentleman with a moustache and a cap – a képi, as it happens.

The native schoolmaster finally makes out the book's title. It's a biography: the man in the képi is, it turns out, Marshal Pétain, who at the time is running the country (France and its colonies). This must be June 1940 or 1941.

[...] What strikes me is the strange half-smile on my father's face.

Naturally, the child was confused and upset by her father's reaction. Many years later, when Djébar discussed the incident with him, his explanation was that the other teachers had chosen the book to upset him, as he was the only one who was not a supporter of Pétain. And he went on: 'Nous, les maîtres de l'École normale d'instituteurs, nous sommes fiers d'être républicains et socialistes' (33, 'we teachers from Bouzaréah are proud to be republicans and socialists'). Louis Rigaud struck a similar note, recalling that when, under the Vichy regime, the director of Bouzaréah gave the trainee teachers a speech saying: 'Les élèves vous devez les former et non pas les conformer, vous devez les armer, mais pas les enrôler' ('Your job is to teach them, not to teach them compliance; you should be arming them, but not enlisting them'), it was quickly followed by a speech from the new governor general, Châtel, who said they should 'Croire et obéir' ('believe and obey'). That went down badly, according to Rigaud: 'Vraiment son discours est tombé à côté de la plaque, à tel point que jamais à l'École normale, nous n'avons hissé les couleurs, nous n'avons chanté « Maréchal nous voilà » et nous n'avons pas prêté serment comme c'était obligatoire dans la fonction publique, jamais' ('His speech

was completely off target for that audience. At the Training College we never flew the flag, we never sang Pétain's anthem, and we never took the oath, though as public servants we were supposed to').<sup>29</sup> On one level, all this lends support to the view that Bouzaréah was a relatively liberal, egalitarian institution, committed to republican principles, in the way that delighted Guénoun's father when he arrived there. On another level, however, Djébar's story seems to cast doubt on her father's generalization, which draws on the sort of heroic visions of the *instituteur* that we saw earlier, and which fundamentally concerns a certain conception of the relationship between republicanism, liberal/left politics and education. Memmi's recollections of anti-Semitism and even royalism amidst his teachers in the lycée are relevant here, as is Guénoun's recollection that the political position of 'European' teachers shifted during the war of independence: 'les instituteurs, avec qui voilà peu on tenait congrès, qui avaient voté socialiste ou communiste à la Libération, les militants, les laïcs, les républicains, viraient aussi à la rébellion brune' (*Un Sémite*, 101, 'the school teachers, whose union congress they had recently attended, who had voted socialist or communist after Liberation, the militants, the ardent secularists, the republicans, also leaned towards the right-wing rebels', 105). The question arises of whether the notion that education has some positive, inherent alignment with egalitarianism and other putative republican left/liberal values is purely mythical, or whether that alignment, which may exist in favourable circumstances, ruptured under the distorting pressures of colonialism.

Djébar's story about her prize provides an opportunity to delve a little more deeply into the issue, especially in relation to *laïcité*. When she tells us that the world of the school was 'cut in two, even more deeply divided than the society outside', it is almost unavoidable, approaching this story through a postcolonial lens, that we think of ethnic and/or religious divisions, of the sort in play in the refectory incident. In an italicized 'Intermède' just after the chapter about the prize Djébar remarks: '*la colonie, c'est d'abord un monde divisé en deux*' (35, her italics, 'first and foremost, the colony is a world that is divided in two'); and it is true, as Djébar reminds us in another work,

29 Interview with Rigaud in Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 97–98. It is relevant too that the French union for *instituteurs* was anti-colonial and opposed official policy in Algeria in the 1950s: see Jacques Simon, *La Fédération de l'Éducation nationale pendant la guerre d'Algérie 1954–1958* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014).

*Vaste est la prison* of 1995, that the ‘Muslim’ boys, in this school as in Harbi’s and others, were segregated:

[Mon père] avait une classe « indigène » : à cette époque, du moins chez les garçons, la ségrégation scolaire était justifiée par le fait, dans ce village de colonisation, que les petits Arabes, ne parlant pas français dans leurs familles, avaient besoin d’un enseignement « renforcé ». Aux élèves indigènes, instituteur indigène. (266)

My father had a ‘native’ class: during this period, at least for boys, school segregation was justified in that colonial village by the fact that little Arab boys, because they did not speak French in the family, needed ‘remedial’ teaching. And for native pupils – a native teacher. (272)

The terminology used to separate the ‘indigène’ from the French or European or Christian, and to justify that separation, is again picked out in inverted commas, which evidently convey scepticism about the basis on which the *élèves indigènes* were treated differently; and Djébar recalls explicitly that her father battled against all forms of discrimination towards the boys.

Looking at it another way, however, the sharpest division in this scenario, in both *Vaste est la prison* and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, almost invisible because it is so much in the foreground – and perhaps also because it does not so clearly belong to a different historical moment – is the division between the sexes. (In that same ‘Intermède’ Djébar goes on: ‘La colonie, la division elle l’enfante : elle est inscrite dans son corps, chacun des sexes est divisé, chacun de sa postérité est écartelé [...]!’ (35, ‘The colony gives birth to divisions: division is inscribed on the body, the sexes are divided, people are cut off from their history...’).) The decision to separate girls from boys with a high fence – ‘un grillage assez haut’ – came from the French authorities, and is part of a wider history that raises doubts about the association between republicanism, secular schooling and women’s liberation. That association appears quasi-automatic in France today, and underpins many an intervention in the endless, overblown debates in France about the Islamic headscarf or ‘veil’.<sup>30</sup> I will not engage directly with those debates here, but will say a little more about why colonial history may have some relevance to them, and to general understandings of *laïcité* – and why Djébar’s novels have relevance here too.

When, over the last three decades, French commentators have

30 On this ‘quasi-automatic’ association see Baubérot, *La Laïcité, quel héritage?*,

contemplated the acceptability or otherwise of allowing Muslim (or 'Muslim') girls to wear a veil to school, it has sometimes appeared that the central issue is the very nature or definition of *laïcité*. One could take the very persistence of debates along those lines as implying, however, that nothing in the principle of *laïcité* as such can point unambiguously to a specific policy in this area that schools ought, as a matter of principle, to adopt. The *Conseil d'État* has reached very different views on different occasions, notably in 1989, 1992 and 2004. It is clear, in fact, that the symbolic value of the veil has altered historically, as has the sphere regulated by *laïcité*, and so too the relation between the veil and secularism. What is more, all have continued to alter not least under the pressure of the debates themselves and of the legislative measures to which they give rise. For example, when, in the wake of a law of 1993 and prior to a new law of 2004, there was a controversy over possible distinctions between visible and ostentatious signs of religious affiliation (and a legislative choice between the terms 'ostentatoire' and 'ostensible'), the controversy, and the legislation, made the veil more conspicuous than it was before, and linked it more closely with *laïcité* or, to put it another way, religion. The meanings of *laïcité* and the veil are inherited but also changeable; yet the polarized terms of the confrontations over the veil, the legislative stakes, and the way in which principle has been invoked all seem to have disguised that historicity.

This is not to say that French commentators on the veil, and more generally around Islam and its compatibility with secularism and republicanism, have not appealed to history; in fact, they have sought repeatedly

103–04. I will continue to use the word 'veil', henceforth without inverted commas, because it is so important to the history of representations, including Djébar's texts (which often use 'voile' without inverted commas). The obvious problem is that the word fails to distinguish between different forms of headdress, whose cultural and religious significance varies and for which there are more precise terms. See Slimane Zeghidour, *Le Voile et la bannière* (Paris: Hachette, 1990), 34, for a list of about 30 different terms/garments. See too Rachida Titah, *La Galerie des absentes: la femme algérienne dans l'imaginaire masculin* (La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'aube, 1996), 139 and passim; and Fatima Mernissi, *Le Harem politique: le Prophète et les femmes* ([1987] Brussels: Complexe, 1992). There is abundant literature on this topic; other texts I recommend include Françoise Gaspard and Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Le Foulard et la République* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995); Anna Kemp, *Voices and Veils: Feminism and Islam in French Women's Writing and Activism* (London: MHRA and Legenda, 2010); and Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

to justify their positions historically, harking back to the origins of *laïcité*.<sup>31</sup> But many commentators have worked on the assumption that the term's origins should dictate its applications today, which is faulty logic; and relatively few have made reference to French *colonial* history, even though colonial and anti-colonial cultures, notably in Algeria, altered and in crucial respects heightened the political and affective charge of the veil within French culture, and also shaped the meanings of *laïcité*.<sup>32</sup> This is another issue I cannot examine in detail here, but I would note that French 'Orientalists' and colonists displayed an endless, dubious fascination with veiled women; that during the anti-colonial era the veil was used both as a symbol of anti-colonialism (that is, as a political symbol) and, more pragmatically, as a kind of disguise that allowed women, including weapons couriers, to pass through military checkpoints – soldiers taking the veils as a guarantee that the women were wholly domestic, wholly apolitical creatures; and that the urge to unveil 'Oriental'/Muslim women, and to 'liberate' or 'conquer' them in one sense or another, has disturbing precedents in colonial culture. In 1958, for example, French army officers in Algeria organized a notorious *pro-Algérie française* demonstration in which Muslim women were

31 For a revisionist analysis of the original context and purpose of Ferry's laws see Jean-Michel Gaillard, 'Le Moment Ferry: l'école de la République entre mythologie et réalité', in Françoise Barret-Ducrocq (ed.), *Pourquoi se souvenir?* (Paris: Grasset, 1999), 37–41.

32 Kyle Francis in "Algeria for the Algerians" argues strongly that a version of *laïcité* that was particularly hostile to Islam crystallized in the Algerian settler community towards the end of the nineteenth century. For detail on subsequent tussles over the legal framework see Raberh Achi, 'Le Conseil d'État, gardien de l'exception impériale à la loi de séparation des Églises et de l'État', in Jean Massot (ed.), *Le Conseil d'État et l'évolution de l'outre-mer français du XVIIe siècle à 1962* (Paris: Dalloz, 2007), 179–97. See too James McDougall, 'The Secular State's Islamic Empire: Muslim Spaces and Subjects of Jurisdiction in Paris and Algiers, 1905–1957', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52:3 (July 2010), 553–80. One of the anonymous readers for Liverpool University Press pointed out to me the striking fact that the *Commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de laïcité dans la République* chaired by Bernard Stasi did mention the 'ambiguous' fate of *laïcité* in Algeria in its 2003 report (see <https://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/034000725.pdf>, 11–12, consulted 14 March 2019). For discussion of the report and more generally for historically informed discussion of the debates over the veil see Paul A. Silverstein, *Postcolonial France: Race, Islam, and the Future of the Republic* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), Chapter 2.

choreographed to cast off their veils. A propaganda poster from this era addressed Algerian women with the slogan: ‘N’êtes-vous donc pas jolies ? Dévoilez-vous ! ’ (‘Aren’t you pretty? So take off your veil!’).<sup>33</sup>

In the colonial context, then, the veil became variously associated with the exoticism of an alien culture, with the oppression of Muslim women, with anti-French politics, with mystery, impenetrability and resistance, and with deception and violence. The rhetoric of French opponents of the veil was mainly about gender equality and modernity, and still is, I would say, though invocations of ‘security’ have become common too. Yet the history of colonial Algeria suggests that for the French government, even if it sometimes deployed the language of female emancipation, gender equality for Muslim women in particular was a very low priority. And with regard to colonial Algeria even more than postcolonial France, one has to question the priorities, and the conception of education, of those for whom uncovering Muslim women’s hair seemed (or seems) a higher priority than education itself.

Fadéla M’Rabet raises this issue sharply in a story she tells about her mother in early twentieth-century Algeria:

*Yemma* [ma mère] ne connut l’école française que quelques semaines – le temps d’apprendre *Gentille alouette* – parce que son institutrice lui avait demandé d’enlever son foulard. Sa mère lui dit alors: « Aujourd’hui, elle te demande d’enlever ton foulard, demain elle te demandera de manger du porc. Tu restes donc à la maison. »

J’en veux beaucoup à cette institutrice, qui ne permit pas à Yemma de satisfaire une curiosité qu’elle garda jusqu’à sa mort. Elle n’avait pas compris qu’en 1919, inscrire sa fille à l’école française était à lui seul un acte révolutionnaire.

33 Poster reproduced in Zhor Firar’s article ‘Le “Dévoilement” des femmes, une longue histoire française’ (*Contre-attaque(s)* 16 March 2016, at <http://contre-attaques.org/magazine/article/le-devoilement>, consulted 5 August 2016). The poster was distributed by the ‘5ème bureau d’action psychologique’ during the war of independence. On the demonstration see Winifred Woodhull, ‘Unveiling Algeria’, in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds), *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), Chapter 5.5; and Todd Shepard, ‘The Battle of the Veil’, in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 186–92. Shepard’s book is among those to treat colonialism as a distinctively French republican project (see also note 43 below), and casts a critical light on republican notions of universalism. For more on the historical French obsession with the veil see Alain Buisine, *L’Orient voilé* (Cadeilhan: Zulma, 1993).

*Yemma*, which is what I call my mother, went to a French school for just a few weeks – just long enough to learn the song *Gentille alouette* – because her teacher asked her to take off her headscarf. My grandmother said: ‘Today she wants you to take off your headscarf, tomorrow she’ll ask you to eat pork. You’re staying at home’.

I really resent what the teacher did, because it meant *Yemma* never had the chance to satisfy her sense of curiosity, which was a life-long trait. The teacher had not understood that the very act of enrolling your daughter in a French school in 1919 was revolutionary.<sup>34</sup>

A comparable story emerges in Djébar’s penultimate novel, *La Disparition de la langue française* (2003). Recalling a family meeting at a moment of crisis when he was a child, the principal character and sometime narrator, Berkane, makes this observation:

Ma mère surveillait, de ses yeux de chatte, le conseil de famille entre hommes. De nous tous, c’est elle seule qui sait lire et parle très correctement le français – son oncle paternel, à ses dix ou onze ans, l’avait enlevée de l’école. Il paraît que sa maîtresse d’école était venue par deux fois supplier ma grand-mère qu’on laissât la fillette suivre les cours au moins jusqu’au brevet : l’oncle, à la place de son frère mort prématurément, avait juré solennellement: « Jamais, moi vivant, une fille de chez nous ne sortira sans voile ! Son avenir, c’est d’attendre de se marier ! » (60–61)

My mother, with her cat-like eyes, watched over the men who made up the family meeting. Out of all of us she was the only one who could really speak and write French. Her father had died and her paternal uncle had taken her out of school when she was ten or eleven. Apparently her teacher, a woman, came to the house on two occasions to beg my grandmother to let her continue, at least until she got her diploma, but the uncle was having none of it: ‘Over my dead body! No girl from our family is going around without a veil. In the future she’ll get married, and for now she just has to wait’.

Whereas M’Rabet’s explicit criticism is directed at the *institutrice* who insisted that her pupil take off her veil, Djébar’s implicit criticism seems to be directed primarily at the patriarchal uncle who insisted that his niece cover her head, and that her destiny lay solely in marriage. (The

34 M’Rabet, *Une enfance singulière* (Paris: Balland, 2003), 21–22. M’Rabet goes on to say that she is impatient with ‘parents irresponsables et bornés’ (22, ‘narrow-minded, irresponsible parents’) who today insist on sending girls to school with headscarves, which means they get excluded. To me it seems odd to end up taking the story in that direction, or solely in that direction.



other men were little better: Berkane explains that his Chaoui (Berber) father was literate in Arabic but not in French, and had high hopes that his Moorish café would be able to deal more efficiently with French bureaucracy and taxation once his sons were educated in French; it did not seem to occur to him, or to Berkane, that his mother could have been the one to help.) But, in the end, there is not much difference between the two cases. Unveiling seems to have been required by the French in both instances, and the outcome for the girl was the same: an end to her education.

Djebar's own perspective on the veil is complicated, and plays out across her whole body of work.<sup>35</sup> One particular passage in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (1995) is especially pertinent for present purposes, however. *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* recounts the death of a succession of Algerian writers, most of whom wrote in French, starting with Camus, passing via Fanon, and ending in the events of the 1990s.<sup>36</sup> The writers assassinated during that conflict, still raging when Djebar published the text, included three of her close friends and, notoriously, Tahar Djaout. Unusually for one of Djebar's texts, few of the main 'characters' (all real people in this case) are women. In that context, one episode stands out as slightly anomalous, and so appears to bear special significance. It concerns a former female student of Djebar's who had become head of a *collège* near Algiers – not a writer, unlike the book's other main figures – and had taken to wearing 'un tchador blanc et brodé' (213, 'a white embroidered chador', 178).<sup>37</sup>

35 I have discussed Djebar's approach to veiling, metaphorical and literal, in previous work including 'Le Voile littéraire: la politique oblique d'Assia Djebar', in Jean Bessière (ed.), *Littératures francophones et politiques* (Paris: Karthala, 2009), 147–61.

36 When the Algerian government cancelled the second round of national elections in December 1991 because it seemed that the FIS was set to win, it triggered a conflict or civil war between the government and Islamists that lasted for a decade, sometimes referred to as the *décennie noire* or *années de plomb*. *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* is different from most of Djebar's texts in that it does not have the word 'roman' (novel) branded on the cover, and apparently provides a relatively stable basis from which to infer her attitudes. Nevertheless, it remains a literary text, and a partly 'fictional' one, involving imagination as well as testimony and memory.

37 The word 'chador', which comes from Persian, is strongly associated with the Islamist state established by the Iranian revolution of 1979, and by extension, geographical and conceptual, has gradually become associated with Islamism elsewhere as a religious/political phenomenon.

Djebar describes briefly ‘son front, son regard auréolé de ce satin blanc de la coiffe, après tout semblable aux citadines traditionnelles de mon enfance, celles-ci alors séquestrées’ (213, ‘her face, her gaze wreathed in the white satin of the headdress, similar after all to the traditional urban women of my childhood, though they were kept sequestered’, 178). She thereby establishes a link and a distinction; her phrasing conveys a sense of the breaks, twists and renewals in a history of veiling that is partly, but only partly, religious. This headteacher was ‘une pratiquante musulmane sincère’ (212, ‘a devoted practising Muslim’, 178); and she was assassinated at work in her school in October 1994. Djebar explains that some observers linked her murder with that of a well-known imam named Bouslimani, who, like the headteacher, came from Blida and who had been kidnapped, tortured and killed, seemingly because he was affiliated to an ‘islamisme pacifiste’ (214, ‘pacifist Islamic [/Islamist] movement’, 179). Another possible explanation was that the teacher had transgressed an edict from the ‘fous de Dieu’ (‘madmen of God’, a pejorative nickname for the Islamists of the FIS), who had declared a month previously that schools should go on strike. Djebar sees that policy as a ‘lointain écho, sans doute, de cette « bataille d’Alger » qu’avait imaginée [...] Abane Ramdane’ (214, ‘a distant echo, no doubt, of the “Battle of Algiers” that Abane Ramdane had conceived and then organized during the seven days of the general strike’, 179) – a phrase indicating that the FIS may have been (and indeed claims to have been) inspired not only by an Islamism whose roots lie outside Algeria but also by the FLN’s own heritage.<sup>38</sup> Whichever explanation or combination of explanations one favours, it seems that the teacher’s piously worn chador proved no protection against ‘Islamist’ political violence, and may even have attracted it.

That sad story offers an unusual angle on issues around the relationship between Islamism, women and the veil; between the veil and education;

38 I find Djebar’s presentation of the theories about this assassination hard to follow; it seems to me that she leaves open (without mentioning) the much-discussed possibility that the government was behind some of the killings officially attributed to Islamists. It is also unclear if her phrasing conflates the ‘battle of Algiers’ and the slightly earlier boycott of schools, though, as we saw in Chapter 3, the general strike affected schools too. On the FIS’s self-positioning in relation to FLN and Islam, see Hugh Roberts, ‘Doctrinaire Economics and Political Opportunism in the Strategy of Algerian Islamism’, in Ruedy, *Islamism*, 123–47: 139 and passim; and *The Battlefield Algeria 1988–2002: Studies in a Broken Polity* (London and New York, NY: Verso, 2003), 4–6.

and between the FLN, the FIS and violence. Djébar speculates in passing that the woman's decision to wear the veil could be explained in terms of her father's status as a German convert to Islam, which may have undermined her sense of self or of belonging ('fragiliser' is Djébar's word, 213, E178). It seems, then, that Djébar felt the need to *explain* the woman's decision to wear a veil, and in that sense viewed it as a kind of aberration. In other words, although in Djébar's writing the veil is multivalent, it seems she viewed the Islamic veil and Islamism somewhat negatively, rather than with equanimity or indifference. Even so, the story suggests that Islam, Islamism and piety should not be confused; and that Djébar accepted the existence, perhaps even the legitimacy, of a faith-based 'islamisme pacifiste' of which this woman's veil was a sincere token. More crucially for my present purposes, there is no indication that the woman's veil raised significant doubts for Djébar about her work as a schoolteacher. In broader terms, for Djébar – unlike the colonial authorities, unlike the Islamists of the FIS, and also unlike the FLN – the value of education, and of fundamental forms of female liberation, not least as associated with education, was never in doubt.

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I want to end this chapter by taking up Djébar's invitation to think again about the relationship between *laïcité* and colonial/republican/postcolonial history, especially in relation to sexual equality. As is clear in *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, the issue is pertinent to post-independence Algeria as well as to France. The suspicion of nominally secular colonial schools that led to the FLN's war-time call to boycott French schools is easy to understand, but, as we saw earlier, the question of the value, and the politics, of colonial education was more divisive among nationalists than one might have assumed; and the issue of the possible place for *laïcité* in post-independence Algeria is thornier still.

I presented Djébar's story about the refectory as a small and relatively benign example of how, in colonial Algeria, *laïcité* played out rather differently from in France; how religion and politics became mingled there in distinctive ways; and also how Islam was often treated as a particular problem for *laïcité*, even when it was not treated with outright hostility. The girls in the refectory were provoked, it should be remembered, by institutional behaviour designed – albeit badly – not to belittle them but to accommodate them. Feraoun joked in a letter about

getting both Muslim and Christian holidays as an ‘instituteur laïc’,<sup>39</sup> and in more significant ways too the French administration sought an accommodation with Islam and involved itself in Islamic affairs, as we have seen. Bourboune commented upon this ironically in *Le Mont des genêts*: a character called Abdelli in a conversation with Chehid, an old friend from the médersa, says:

même l’Administration respecte l’Islam, du moins ses rites, ses traditions. L’Aïd El Kébir est toujours férié, la commission supérieure des fêtes musulmanes est un organisme officiel, pendant le Ramadan, ce sont les coups de canon tirés par l’Armée qui marquent la rupture du jeûne. J’ai vu des agents des P.T.T. obtenir un congé spécial pour aller honorer leur Marabout local. J’ai jamais compris pourquoi, mais c’est comme ça. (55)

even the Administration respects Islam, or at least its rites and traditions. We always get a day off for Aïd El Kebir, there is official commission for Muslim festivals, and during Ramadan the army signals the end of the fast by firing a cannon. Post Office workers sometimes get a day’s leave to go and pay tribute to their local marabout. I’ve never really understood why, but that’s how it is.

Abdelli finds all this hard to reconcile with the fact that ‘on interdit pratiquement l’étude de la langue arabe’ (‘it is more or less forbidden to study Arabic’), and wonders if they will end up giving out subsidies for *haj*. He seems to be joking, but the French involvement in, and support for, médersas, discussed in Chapter 2, was arguably an even more anomalous way for the French government to spend its money. As Soheib Bencheikh points out, in Algeria in the 1930s there was a lively strain of Muslim secularist thought that argued for the separation of religion and the state, and for the end to state control of mosques, in spite of which the French continued to administer the affairs of Islam several decades after the law of 1905 separating the State from the Church.<sup>40</sup> That is to say, you had practising Muslims lobbying for greater secularism; or, to put it another way again, for the Republic to show greater fidelity to its own declared principles.<sup>41</sup>

39 Feraoun, letter of 30 October 1949 to René and Jeannine Nouvelle, *Lettres à ses amis*, 20. See also note 25 above.

40 Bencheikh, *Marianne et le prophète: l’Islam dans la France laïque* (Paris: Grasset, 1998), 114–17.

41 For more on this inconsistent history, including tensions between metropolitan authorities and the settler population around education and *laïcité*, see again Francis, “Algeria for the Algerians”; Franck Fregosi, ‘Le Préalable colonial, les

These colonial idiosyncracies and inconsistencies cast further light on the idea of the *mission civilisatrice*. Drawing on the research of J. P. Daughton, the distinguished historian of empire Frederick Cooper writes:

If one is to take seriously the ‘civilizing mission’ enunciated by the government of the French Third Republic at the end of the nineteenth century, then one should take note of the important argument [...] that colonial rulers devoted few resources – teachers, doctors, engineers – to the cause, but that the inveterate foes of secular republicanism, the Catholic Church, sent a vastly larger body of men into the empire, aimed not at civilizing but at converting, at fostering a social order far more hierarchical and traditionalist than that advocated at home and overseas by republican modernizers.<sup>42</sup>

We have already seen that Cooper, like Kadri, is right to warn of the risk of overestimating the French Republic’s commitment to the *mission civilisatrice*, and also to emphasize the role the church played in the colonies. (There is an example in *Le Fils du pauvre*: because Fouroulou cannot afford the *internat* he is housed by protestant missionaries, who

origines d’une exception musulmane à la laïcité’, in *Penser l’Islam dans la laïcité* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 199–221; Anna Bozzo, ‘Islam et République: une longue histoire de méfiance’, in Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire (eds), *La Fracture coloniale: la société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 75–82; and Effy Tselikas, ‘L’Histoire de l’éducation laïque “à la française” au Maghreb’, *Hommes et Migrations* 1258 (November–December 2005), 117–23, which includes the reflection from Dalil Boubakeur, who attended the Lycée Bugeaud and is now Recteur de la Mosquée de Paris, that he benefited from secular school, notably in studying Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment thought. The relationship of that mosque to the French state and *laïcité* is another complicated story, covered by Jalila Sbaï, ‘La République et la Mosquée: genèse et institution(s) de l’Islam en France’, in Pierre-Jean Luizard (ed.), *Le Choc colonial et l’Islam: les politiques religieuses des puissances coloniales en terres d’Islam* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 223–36 – one of several pertinent essays in that collection. For an interesting example of an Islamic ‘laïcité’ (by another name), see Mohamed Aghali-Zakara, ‘Islam et laïcité chez les Berbères (Touaregs)’, in Michel Bozdémir (ed.), *Islam et laïcité: approches globales et régionales* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), 385–96; and on the Tunisian case see Chokri Ben Fradj, *Un combat laïque en milieu colonial: discours et œuvre de la fédération de Tunisie de la Ligue française de l’enseignement (1891–1955)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004).

42 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 144–45. See also Daughton, *An Empire Divided*.

embrace the opportunity, when feeding and lodging children such as Fouroulou and his friend Azir, to ‘leur parler de religion, les conseiller, les éduquer’ (133; ‘to speak to them about religion, to educate, guide and advise them’, 102); it was convenient for the boys that the mission was right opposite the school, and it was convenient for the missionaries too, in a different way.) But Cooper’s way of contrasting the ‘inveterate foes of secular republicanism’ with ‘republican modernizers’ risks simplifying the ideological currents criss-crossing colonial culture, from the point of view of both colonizer and colonized. We know that republican modernizers could be enthusiastic imperialists: Jules Ferry himself is a significant and well-known example of an ardent republican and ardent educationalist who was also an ardent colonialist.<sup>43</sup> Léon Gambetta, known for his promotion of secular education and for his use in the 1870s of the slogan ‘le cléricalisme, voilà l’ennemi!’ (‘clericalism is the enemy!’), was known too for his remark: ‘L’anti-cléricalisme n’est pas un article d’exportation’ (‘anti-clericalism is not something to be exported’).<sup>44</sup> Even in France the principles of *laïcité* were never applied with complete consistency, and the relationship between the Republic (including its notion of *laïcité*) and the Church was never simply oppositional, despite what Cooper’s opposition between ‘civilizing’ and ‘converting’ may imply. And that relationship was even less oppositional in the colonies, where the interests of the Republic and the Church seemed to converge in the eyes of many republicans. In the colonies, the so-called civilizing mission really did have missionary aspects; and

43 Ferry said in the Chambre des députés on 28 July 1885: ‘les races supérieures ont un droit vis-à-vis des races inférieures [...], parce qu’il y a un devoir pour elles. Elles ont le devoir de civiliser les races inférieures’ (quoted by Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*, 104, ‘the superior races have rights with regard to inferior races [...] because they have a duty towards them. Their duty is to civilize them’). Conklin writes in *A Mission to Civilize*: ‘French republicans [did not] identify any contradiction between their democratic institutions and the acquisition and administration of their empire. This was because they viewed Africans as barbarians, and were continually undertaking – or claiming to undertake, as the case may be – civilizing measures on behalf of their subjects that appeared to make democracy and colonialism compatible’ (9–10). See also Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Françoise Vergès, *La République coloniale: essai sur une utopie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003) which examines colonialism as a republican project.

44 See Saaïdia Oissila, ‘L’Anticléricalisme article d’exportation? Le cas de l’Algérie avant la première guerre mondiale’, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 87:3 (2005), 101–12. DOI: 10.3917/ving.087.0101.

you could find republicans who favoured *laïcité* in France supporting Catholic missions in the colonies, because they saw in them the work of Western civilization.

Earlier I cited Fadhma Amrouche's remark that, when she was growing up, school was compulsory for boys, 'But for girls, no such rule was imposed, alas! A secular education was never offered to girls, beyond our own school, which was soon shut down, unfortunately'.<sup>45</sup> She herself was converted to Catholicism in her first colonial school, and passed the religion on to her children. Her experiences chime with Cooper's account of the colonial work of the Catholic church and reintroduce the question of gender. When I quoted her earlier my point was about the French authorities' generally low level of commitment to education for 'native' girls, but evidently her comments are also suggestive of colonial culture's lack of commitment to *laïcité*. And when it comes to *laïcité* and sexual equality – an issue raised by the fence dividing boys from girls in the young Djebar's school, as well as by Islamic veiling – the lessons of history become still murkier.

In France, especially 'greater' France, the histories of republicanism, secular schooling and women's liberation did not simply converge and coincide; far from it. That calls into question their ideological relation. The Republic existed for a long time before the notion of *laïcité* became an explicit part of the constitution and gained the sort of prominence it has now. The key laws on *laïcité* were introduced only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Jules Ferry's laws on secular education of 1881/1882 and the law of 1905). And it was not until 1944,

45 Amrouche, *Histoire de ma vie*, 38. She was born in 1882. In *Ces Voix qui m'assiègent* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999) Djebar noted that Fadhma Amrouche went to the first 'école laïque ouverte pour les fillettes kabyles' (89, 'secular school opened for Kabyle girls'). For further discussion of the unusual circumstances that shaped her education, see Julia Clancy-Smith, 'From Household to Schoolroom: Women, Transnational Networks, and Education in North Africa and Beyond', in Patricia M. E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard (eds), *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 200–31. For further discussion of the Tunisian case, see also her essay 'Envisioning Knowledge: Educating the Muslim Woman in Colonial North Africa, 1850–1918', in Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (eds), *Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in honor of Nikki R. Keddie* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2000), 99–118; and on colonial-era schoolgirls in Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF), Pascale Barthélémy, *Africaines et diplômées à l'époque coloniale (1918-1957)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010).

during the Second World War, that French women got the right to vote. What is more, Muslim women in Algeria got the vote even later, in 1958, halfway through the war of independence.<sup>46</sup> I mentioned earlier the women's teacher training college in Miliana, and perhaps, in relation to the norms of the day, it seems relatively progressive that it opened in 1876, only 11 years after the men's college. But the women's college accepted Algerians systematically only from 1945; before then, there were almost no Algerian women teachers.<sup>47</sup> As I have said already, gender equality for Muslim women was a very low priority for the French administration.

There are different ways of interpreting the time lag between the beginning of the Republic, the formal introduction of *laïcité*, and legislation on women's suffrage and sexual equality. Indeed, one need not accept the implications of the phrase 'time lag', since history casts a dubious light on the logical and causal relationship the phrase implies. One could argue that the relationship between republicanism, *laïcité* and gender equality has been looser, conceptually and historically, than is now generally assumed in debates on Islam, gender and republicanism. Alternatively, one could argue – as I would wish to – that under the pressures of colonialism, racism and sexism, the conceptual and practical relationship that might exist between *laïcité* and gender equality, or should exist between them, broke down or was ignored.

In the refectory story, there is no sign that the notion of *laïcité* was consciously brought into play by the young Djebar or her fellow protestors. (In this respect, the story differs from some I will examine later, where 'native' children came, slowly but self-consciously, to understand as tools of anti-colonialism certain political notions introduced through their colonial schooling.) When, with hindsight, Djebar notes that her *collège* 'declared itself to be "*laïc*"', her phrasing may encourage scepticism about whether the principle of *laïcité* could ever be made truly consistent and substantial. The same goes for her remark: 'Apparently my suggestion to the headteacher was sacrilegious!'. It is not clear how far the child

46 Daniel Lefevre, '1945–1958: un million et demi de citoyennes interdites de vote!', *Clio: Histoire, femmes et sociétés* 1 (1995), DOI: 10.4000/clio.524.

47 The women's college moved to El-Biar in 1946, and was often known as 'L'École Normale d'Institutrices de Ben-Aknoun'. Malika Lemdani Belkaïd offers many insights into the institution in *Normaliennes en Algérie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), based on the life stories of eight Algerian women who went through the system. See also <http://www.ecolenormale-benaknoun.info/menubenaknoun1.htm> (consulted 9 September 2015).



had the ironic sense of ‘sacrilege’ articulated by the adult narrator, but the irony undercuts the notion of *laïcité* as understood by the *directrice* and, by extension, the education system in which she worked. This does not mean, however, that Djébar was fundamentally sceptical about the notion, as a child or, more importantly, as an adult. Other texts suggest that Djébar believed that the notion of *laïcité* should have been seized by Algerians as ‘butin de guerre’ (‘the spoils of war’), to borrow a phrase that Kateb Yacine apparently used about the French language.<sup>48</sup>

As its rather unnovelistic title suggests, *La Disparition de la langue française* is relevant again here. It loops between the end of the colonial period and the start of Algeria’s *décennie noire*, reflecting at least as much on the legacy of anti-colonialism as on that of colonialism itself. It opens when Berkane returns to Algeria in 1991, after living for 20 years in the Parisian suburbs. We learn that he was six in 1952; so he was still only 15 or 16 when the war ended. His plan is to write and to achieve a kind of reconciliation with his homeland, but it turns out that he no longer feels at home. Not only have things changed, but he is troubled by traumatic memories from his childhood, before and during the war. One of those early memories concerns a formative experience at his French school (I will say more about that shortly), but perhaps the most important memories are those from Berkane’s time in a prison camp. These memories, as we will see, cast more light on the importance Djébar attached to *laïcité*.

Arguably the most thought-provoking facet of *La Disparition de la langue française* is its implication that the explanations for the

48 This phrase is associated with Kateb but I am not sure of its source. He expressed the same kind of idea in ‘Situation de l’écrivain algérien’, an interview with Geneviève Serreau, *Les Lettres nouvelles* 40 (July–August 1956), 107–12. He also spoke about the inspiration he gained from studying the French revolution: ‘Nous savions que nos professeurs, lorsqu’ils nous parlaient de La Fayette ou de Baudelaire, avaient conscience de nous lier à leur destin. On n’apprend pas en vain l’histoire ou la poésie. Loin de nous « franciser », la culture française ne pouvait qu’attiser notre soif de liberté, voire d’originalité’ (109, ‘We knew that when our teachers spoke to us about La Fayette or Baudelaire they were aware of linking our destiny with their own. It is not for nothing that one studies history or poetry. Far from “Frenchifying” us, French culture could only sharpen our desire for freedom, and indeed for originality’). For more discussion of Kateb’s relationship to French see Kamal Salhi, *The Politics and Aesthetics of Kateb Yacine: From Francophone Literature to Popular Theatre in Algeria and Outside* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1999), especially 99–123.

absence or rejection of *laïcité* in postcolonial Algeria (or the lack of any alternative notion of secularism) include not only an ossified anti-colonial stance but also the entanglements of Algerian anti-colonialism and the post-independence state with Islam. We know that French colonialism, as Fanon pointed out early on, helped to politicize Islam in Algeria by discriminating against Muslims, notably in terms of their religious freedoms and education. Put like that, the point is almost indisputable. But it becomes far more controversial if the emphasis is placed, as it is by Djébar in this novel, on the Islamization of anti-/postcolonial politics and on the importance to anti-colonialism of religious beliefs and energies. This was something that Fanon, among others, tended to neglect, but to which Feraoun was already sensitive, as we have seen.

There is a moment in *La Disparition de la langue française* when the young fisherman whom Berkane has befriended says to him: ‘Les héros, en Algérie, pendant la guerre, on les a appelés des *moudjahiddin*, un terme religieux, n’est-ce pas?’ (100, ‘In Algeria, during the war, the heroes were called *moudjahiddin* – which is a religious term, isn’t it?’). It is now widely known even among non-Muslims and non-Arabic speakers that the term has *jihad* as its root, but that was not the case when *moudjahiddin* started to be used regularly in French and English, during the Soviet–Afghan war of the 1980s (at which time – that is, during the Cold War – it tended to be positively connoted in the ‘West’). In Algeria, however, and for Arabic speakers, the religious associations were always present. It is worth remembering that the journal that was one of the major outlets for Fanon’s writing was named *El Moudjahid*.<sup>49</sup> If Berkane is initially put out by his friend’s reminder – ‘Rien à voir, dis-je, avec le héros de mon enfance’ (100, ‘“That’s got nothing to do with my childhood hero”, I said’) – there are signs that it is not, as he says, because the hinted-at link between Algerian Islamism and the FLN is too tenuous, but because the remark is too close to the bone. When he later alludes to the ‘tragic’ aspect of contemporary Algerian history he may be wondering whether the anti-colonial past, habitually glorified in Algeria, contained not only missed opportunities but the seeds of the catastrophe of the 1990s; and the novel brings the point home shockingly through his growing

49 The FLN settled on this title with some difficulty; the leaders initially considered alternatives such as *El Moukafih* (‘the combatant’) and *L’Algérien*, and were conscious that colonial propaganda tended to accuse FLN members of being religious fanatics. See Gadant, *Islam et nationalisme en Algérie*, Chapter 2.

realization, never fully articulated, that the seeds were planted within him too.

Discreetly but repeatedly, the anti-colonial struggle is associated, in Berkane's account, with religion: early on he recalls a confused scene from 1952 when a crowd of demonstrators who had been shot at by a French butcher chanted 'Allah Akbar !' as they hung him from one of his meathooks (42); he remembers his fantasy, as he became involved in the anti-colonial movement, of savouring his own martyrdom from the 'paradis musulman des martyrs' (210, 'Muslim martyrs' paradise'); and, most hauntingly, he recalls his experience of torture in terms shot through with religious imagery. He introduces the episode (in his present-tense narrative) as his 'petit calvaire' ('ordeal', but literally 'small Calvary') and explains how, during the torture, he became fascinated with the 'officiant' ('officiant', where one might expect 'officer') who poured a fine stream of suffocating sand into his mouth: '[I] est debout, les mains réunies juste au-dessus de ma tête, comme s'il me préparait une offrande [...] J'ai l'idée, tout à fait saugrenue, qu'il semble, avec ses paumes réunies toujours au-dessus de ma tête, s'apprêter à prier' (221, 'He stands over me with his hands clasped together just above my head, as if preparing an offering for me [...] I have the crazy idea that with his palms still pressed together over my head, he is getting ready to pray'). This 'crazy idea' suggests delirium, but the delirium may be revelatory: it seems that on some important level the young Berkane experienced the war as a clash of religions.

The novel reminds us too that the terrible violence of the colonial years was not only between the Algerians and the French but among Algerians. Berkane's girlfriend Nadjia describes the assassination of her grandfather, Larbi Hadj Brahim, in October 1957, apparently killed by the FLN because he did not keep up with their demands for growing financial contributions. Nadjia's memories nudge the protagonist towards further, half-repressed recollections, which are at the heart of the book. The two final chapters that centre on and are narrated by Berkane concern the prison camp where he was interned during the war of independence; nearly all the prisoners, he explains, were affiliated to the FLN but one man arrived who belonged to the rival MNA (Mouvement National Algérien) and who consequently was ostracized by the other men.<sup>50</sup> Berkane thinks

50 The MNA was founded in December 1954 by Messali Hadj, a leading figure in Algerian independence movements from the 1920s onwards, and dissolved only on 19 June 1962. Messali Hadj continued, until his death in 1974, to oppose the FLN and to call for political pluralism.

back to the violent conflicts between the FLN and the MNA in the Casbah; and he reflects on his political ignorance at the time, saying he had no awareness of the historic importance of Messali and thought of his followers simply as ‘traîtres’ (‘traitors’) or ‘renégats’ (‘apostate’). The latter term is another with a tellingly religious resonance. One day, in his sense of righteous hostility, Berkane found himself, quite unprovoked, attacking the MNA man and holding a knife to his throat. ‘Si longtemps après’ he comments, ‘je ne trouve même pas de quoi j’ai nourri ma fureur’ (230, ‘All this time afterwards I still have no idea what made me so furious’). Not long after bringing this memory to the surface – and concluding, perhaps, that he, like Algeria, is still exercised by a past he cannot forget or control – Berkane disappears.<sup>51</sup>

In general Berkane is not an unsympathetic character, but these stories about his past, and his only partially successful efforts to understand them retrospectively, are among the signs that his perspective is not always to be trusted. This also emerges in his attitudes to women, which at moments seem confused and conservative, and which, through Nadjia, become linked with his dawning, disquieting insight into his relationship, and his country’s ongoing relationship, to the legacies of anti-colonial nationalism. In describing one of his sexual encounters with Nadjia he writes: ‘En cet instant, ô mon amoureuse, je suis un prince, je suis un roi, un jouisseur de harem’ (141–42, ‘At that moment, oh love of mine, I felt like a prince, a king, a hedonist in a harem’). His vocabulary seems to testify to the influence on him, and so on their relationship, of hackneyed masculine and Orientalist fantasies (seen too in his eroticized fascination with veils); and he himself remarks, shortly afterwards: ‘je suis un analphabète de ton corps’ (143, ‘I am illiterate when it comes to your body’). The admission may be taken as a rhetorical trope, a performance of modesty that serves indirectly to bolster Berkane’s interpretative authority, but it may also be taken more literally. Either way, his use of the word ‘illiterate’ creates a link with the prison camp scene, which begins about 20 pages later. The repetition becomes part of the novel’s intricate interweaving of the political and the ‘personal’, the current and the historical, the remembered and

51 Sura Qadiri discusses Berkane’s disappearance in her book *Postcolonial Fiction and Sacred Scripture: Rewriting the Divine?* (London: MHRA and Legenda, 2014). She argues that ‘the silence or void evoked by Djébar’s *La Disparition de la langue française* may be read as a dislodging of the divine from reductive political discourse, maintaining its withdrawn status’ (58).

the lived. Djébar's aim, I would suggest, is to put a new emphasis on sexual politics by linking gender inequality with the grand theme of nationalism that has remained central to political rhetoric in Algeria long after independence.

The second metaphorical, or semi-metaphorical, allusion to 'illiteracy' occurs when Berkane says that as an adolescent involved in the Algerian war he was 'analphabète politiquement' (164, 'politically illiterate'). His admission forms the conclusion of another story about the prison camp, an episode that sits at the centre of the novel. The prisoners, Berkane tells Nadja, killed time by playing cards and smoking. A new inmate who arrived in January 1961 – that is, relatively near the end of the long war – was shocked by their listlessness, and he asked why they had not organized 'des discussions politiques'. The word 'discussions' is significant: what they lacked in his view was not a sense of political direction, but a political and – as 'analphabète' may imply – educational culture. Their reaction was '« politique » ? C'était abstrait, ce n'était pas nous' (161, 'Politics? That seemed too abstract, it wasn't our sort of thing'); and when they were asked about their programme for the independence era, they revealed that they didn't really have one. The new arrival responded by making a speech in which he told them that they would face many choices after independence, notably with respect to religion. Berkane's description of the end of the speech, and of its impact, reads as follows:

— [...] Par exemple, voici une question essentielle, et il passa au français, seulement alors : « Est-ce que l'Algérie sera un pays laïc ? »

Certains, autour de moi, s'empressèrent de traduire cette phrase à ceux qui ne parlaient qu'arabe ou berbère : « l'Algérie », ils n'avaient pas besoin de traduire, tous avaient répété *el Djezaïr* ; « un pays », bien sûr, ils ont traduit. Mais ils ont buté sur ce mot : laïc.

Ce dernier mot, je me souviens, a circulé comme une rumeur autour de moi. La plupart avaient compris l'*Aïd* avec prononciation française – car « laïc », ils n'avaient jamais entendu ce vocable, durant six ans de lutte collective. [...]

Quelqu'un a fini par interpellé l'orateur en arabe :

— Mon frère, qu'est-ce que vient faire l'*Aïd* ici ? (163)

'For example, one crucial question you should ask yourselves is this –' (and at this point he switched into French): '*Est-ce que l'Algérie sera un pays laïc?*'

The people around me who spoke French were quick to translate for anyone who spoke only Arabic or Berber. 'Algérie' didn't need translating,

they just repeated *el Djezair*, and ‘a country’ wasn’t hard to translate. Will Algeria be ... what? When it came to ‘laïc’, they got stuck.

As I remember, the word *laïc* ran murmuring through the crowd. Most people thought he had said *Aïd* in a French accent. Over six years of collective struggle, they had never heard the word *laïc*.

After a pause someone spoke up in Arabic: ‘Brother, what’s the *Aïd* got to do with it?’.

The majority of the resistance fighters, it seems, have no notion of the secular or *laïc*, a term that a number of them, ironically enough, mistake for the name of a religious festival. The importance of the story is underlined when Berkane returns to it a few pages later, then again two chapters further on. Yet he himself seems to struggle to grasp its significance: he has launched into the story rather suddenly (‘à brûle-pourpoint’, 161), and after telling it, poses the question to himself (and to the reader): ‘Pourquoi ai-je raconté, à Nadjia, cette histoire du camp [?]’ (165, ‘Why did I tell Nadjia this story about the camp?’). His own, tentative answer is that he was responding to an anecdote of Nadjia’s. In the text – and this is another cue to the reader – her story immediately precedes Berkane’s, although some hours elapse between the two moments of storytelling.

Nadjia’s anecdote concerned an unpleasant recent experience where she was criticized for the way that she was dressed. In a discussion of the violent inadequacy of the contemporary political situation and the weaknesses of their political leaders, Berkane had remarked angrily: ‘C’est [...] le français, comme langage politique, qui est en défaillance chez nous et cela dure, dans notre classe dirigeante, depuis plus de trente ans ! Tous ces petits mandarins qui se regardent, à tout propos, dans le miroir de Paris’ (156, ‘The thing is that French as a political language is inadequate for our situation, and that’s been the problem among our ruling class for more than thirty years now! All those bureaucrats constantly worrying about what they might look like from the perspective of Paris!’). His own ‘political language’ at this point seems to have its roots in anti-colonialism, in that it implies an opposition or disparity between an authentic Algerian ‘language’ or identity and a French or Frenchified political class. Nadjia, by contrast, while not disagreeing with Berkane’s assessment of the ruling class, brings him up to date, and moves the debate onto new ground, when she responds: ‘Mais les autres, de l’autre côté, les fanatiques, as-tu senti leur fureur verbale, la haine dans leurs vociférations ?’ (157, ‘But what about the other lot, the fanatics on the other side? Do you have any experience of the fury and the hatred in their voices?’). ‘The other lot’

are the Islamists of the FIS; and Nadjia has predicted – accurately, as we know – that they will win the first round of the Algerian elections, which were to take place on 26 December 1991 (155). In Nadjia’s view, neither of the political alternatives on offer is acceptable.

It is this exchange with Berkane that leads Nadjia to tell her story. She complains that whereas she used to enjoy taking taxis because of the easy conversations that drivers would strike up, she now finds, in the run-up to the elections, that many of them are set on playing recordings of the latest speeches by Islamist leaders. Some agree to turn off their cassettes when asked, but recently, one driver reacted by stopping his taxi and asking her to get out; and when she tried to pay for the journey, he returned her money and said: ‘Dans un mois au plus tard, toutes les femmes d’ici seront décentement vêtues!’ (160, ‘In a month from now, all the women here are going to be dressed properly’). ‘On verra’ (‘We’ll see’), she retorted, reminding him – with greater optimism than she felt, apparently – that women could vote. What bothered him, she speculates, was her ‘petit décolleté’ (‘lowish neckline’), and the passage finishes with her comment:

— Quand je dis « décolleté », c’était parce que je m’étais baissée et qu’il avait aperçu la base de mon cou et un centimètre de peau, plus bas, sans doute ! Il me voulait déjà, dans un mois, en tchador noir, de la tête aux pieds ... (160)

‘The top I was wearing wasn’t even low-cut, really. I think it was just that I bent forward and he caught sight of a tiny bit of flesh beneath my neckline! But his plan was for me to be wrapped in a black chador from my head to my toes, starting next month.’

It is in this context – in response to Nadjia; in an Algeria pitching into civil war; in the global circumstances associated with the chadors; and as part of Berkane’s sharpening process of self-examination and self-doubt, especially about his own anti-colonial mentality – that the story about an absent concept of *laïcité* comes to seem so significant. Berkane’s worldview appears to be tainted with a kind of masculine ‘Orientalism’, coloured by nostalgia for the anti-colonial era; and his anti-colonial feeling is tangled up, in only semi-conscious ways, with religious feeling. Nadjia challenges him to examine his mental reflexes, especially regarding sexual politics, an issue she makes him link with *laïcité*. This is the point at which Berkane invokes an idea of ‘tragedy’, remarking, ‘Ce faux sens de *laïc* transformé en *Aïd* semble tragique aujourd’hui’ (174, ‘The way *laïc* got misunderstood and transformed into *Aïd* seems tragic now’). The word ‘aujourd’hui’, ‘today’ or ‘now’,

doubtless evokes the country's whole post-independence history, but the sense of tragedy is particularly sharp at the moment the action is set.

Djebar may, as I have suggested, show us that Berkane's views are unreliable in some respects, but we can assume she believed him to be right on that point. Some of the evidence comes from her speeches, as distinct from her literary writing. When receiving German publishing's 'Peace prize' in October 2000, she said, with reference to the riots of October 1988 in Algeria:

Sans m'imaginer en Cassandre, il m'était aisé de prévoir que, dans l'année qui suivrait, les intégristes reviendraient au centre de la sphère politique ... Eux certes auréolés par ces morts d'innocents, mais résolus à imposer leur vision caricaturale d'un Islam des origines. En attendant, les conséquences premières du terrible drame furent la fin du parti unique – « front de libération » qui ne libérait plus rien depuis 26 ans –, mais aussi la légalisation d'un parti politique religieux, mesure en contradiction avec la Constitution qui garantissait un minimum de laïcité !<sup>52</sup>

I am not claiming to be Cassandra, but I could foresee clearly enough that over the following year the Islamists would take centre stage again politically ... They could bask in the glow of the innocent people who had died, and they were determined to impose their grotesque caricature of Islam and its 'original' meaning. Meanwhile, the tragedy of 1988 meant the end of the single-party regime – the party being the 'liberation front' that hadn't brought anyone any liberty for 26 years – and also the legalization of a religious political party, although that was contrary to the Constitution which was supposed to make the country secular, at least to some degree.

The phrase 'un minimum de laïcité' leaves doubt about how far any notion of secularism was ever really built into the Algerian constitution, but Djebar's remarks, spoken in her own name, made clear her approval of *laïcité*, as well as her disapproval both of *intégristes* and of the post-independence FLN. In *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* she recalled Fanon's funeral as an event worthy of 'une Algérie laïque et progressiste' (125, 'a secular, progressive Algeria'); and in another speech from the same period, speaking about the terrifying difficulty of living and writing in Algeria at that time, she referred to 'la laïcisation de la langue qui conditionne celle des pratiques sociales' ('the secularization of language that is the basis for the secularization of social practices'). This process,

52 Djebar, 'Idiomes de l'exil et langue de l'irréductibilité' (a speech of 2000), 14, available at <http://remue.net/spip.php?article683>, consulted 29 December 2018.



she asserted, was among the principal tasks of all intellectuals, adding ‘nous ne pouvons y répondre, nous, écrivains, que dans notre propre langage, qu’il soit roman de fiction, poème d’imprécation ou pièce de théâtre de dénonciation ... ’ (‘as writers we can only respond to this need in our own language, whether that means the writing of fiction, or an imprecatory poem, or a political play ... ’).<sup>53</sup> It was primarily in her fiction and other ‘creative’ work – perhaps above all, as I have suggested, in *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* and *La Disparition de la langue française* – that Djébar pursued that self-imposed programme of *laïcisation*, and did so with a deep commitment to gender equality, beyond anything ever offered in colonial Algeria, or in post-independence Algeria.

I noted earlier that in recent debates about *laïcité* in France, the historical origins of the notion have been invoked as if they might determine its current applications. But, through Djébar, I have wanted to show that line of reasoning to be flawed; flawed, that is, wherever it is applied. On my reading, *La Disparition de la langue française* brings the point home through Nadjia’s historical and political literacy and articulacy, and through Berkane’s belated acknowledgement, as half-buried memories of religiously tinged violence resurface, that some of the resources of the French language and of French culture might have been valuable to Algerians, irrespective of their historical relationship to colonialism. *Laïcité* may not have looked like the ‘spoils of war’ to Berkane when he was a young man, during the war of independence, but Djébar’s story suggests that, for postcolonial Algeria, some version of the concept should have been valuable, and still could be.

53 Djébar, ‘Tout doit-il disparaître?’ (a paper given in 1995), in *Ces voix qui m’assiègent*, 243–49: 246–47.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# French Lessons

On sait avec quelle précautionneuse parcimonie, la culture française a été dispensée, et quels obstacles les maîtres coloniaux ont dressé devant elle. On sait moins que ceux des colonisés qui ont pu s'abreuver des grandes œuvres sont tous non point des héritiers choyés, mais des *voleurs de feu*.

Le chauvinisme culturel et la conception nationaliste bourgeoise du savoir sont stupides et méprisables. L'œuvre d'art est d'*un* homme mais elle s'adresse à tous ceux qui par elle et en elle, communient dans les souffrances et la joie, la misère et la gloire de l'homme.

Jean Amrouche, 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité:  
de quelques vérités amères' (1958)<sup>1</sup>

French schools in colonial Algeria were bound to be a focus for 'native' families' anxieties about the prospect of *déracinement*, especially when their contact with French culture and French or European people

1 'It is widely recognized that our colonial masters have disseminated French culture only cautiously and parcimoniously, erecting obstacles along the way. It is less widely recognized that those of us who have had the chance to immerse ourselves in the great works of French culture are not its pampered beneficiaries but have *stolen fire*. | Cultural chauvinism and the bourgeois nationalist conception of knowledge are idiotic and contemptible. A single man creates a work of art but it is addressed to all those who find in it and through it the shared experiences of joy and sorrow, and a reflection of the destitution and the glory of mankind.'

Amrouche, 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité', 63. His italics. The phrase 'voleur de feu' would have been associated for Amrouche not only with the myth of Prometheus but with Rimbaud, who used it in a well-known letter of 1871. Rimbaud, letter to Paul Demeny of 15 May 1871, *Œuvres complètes*, 342–49: 346.

was otherwise very limited. What is more, those anxieties were well-founded, at least in important respects, as we have seen; numerous authors described the increasing sense of alienation from their family backgrounds as their education progressed. In that context too, the republican principle of *laïcité* – French, alien and inconsistently applied though allegedly neutral in respect of different religions – looked, from some angles, like part of the problem, whatever its potential to provide a framework for schools’ negotiation of cultural/religious differences.

Nevertheless, in Djébar’s story about the refectory we also saw a form of cultural confrontation and disorientation that was more positive, at least in some ways. Extra-curricular and curricular factors, including the opportunity to study French revolutionary history and to hear French revolutionary rhetoric, emboldened the students to dip their toes into the world of political resistance – if only, at that stage, to express dissatisfaction about what they, as ‘Muslims’, were served for lunch. They had some consciousness of, but not necessarily any sense of irony about, the inspiration they took from their French history lessons. And while there was no sign that the notion of *laïcité* was deliberately brought into play by the young Djébar or her fellow protestors, it was clear that for the adult author/narrator that notion and its peculiar colonial trajectory were part of the story. At some point Djébar was introduced to *laïcité* as an abstract concept as well as an inconsistent practice, and decided she could use it both to challenge the prejudices and inconsistencies harboured in her school and to question aspects of the culture into which she had been born.

This chapter will continue to examine the impact of colonial schooling on Djébar and other writers, with more attention to what went on inside the classroom, and inside the students’ heads, and to what it was, *even* in a *colonial* education, that made it fruitful, at least in part, at least for some students. Later in the chapter I will focus particularly on their accounts of studying the French language and French literature, evidently a key aspect of the process, educational and psychological, that brought into being the literary works that reflect on that experience. This will bring me back eventually to an issue I raised much earlier in this book, starting with my discussion of Said: the notion of an ‘aesthetic project’ as something with a degree of independence from politics, perhaps studied in a classroom that also has a degree of independence from politics. In Said’s work, as in my own, however, those notions of literature or the aesthetic and of the classroom coexist with the urge not only to treat literary texts as a kind of historical evidence (for example in Feraoun’s

explorations of ‘local’ cultures – fond, detailed and unconflictual, if sometimes ironic), but to view literature and the classroom as immersed in politics; and the chapter will begin with that theme. On the one hand, I want in this chapter to gain some sense of how French schooling stimulated the forms and fictions of self-reinvention for which many of the writers are known. On the other hand, I want to understand better how some of the children ‘subjected’ to colonial schooling and prey to its inconsistencies became some of its astutest critics, as well as its greatest success stories. That is the issue to which I shall turn first. We have already seen that French schooling – though generally inaccessible, as Amrouche said, and often chauvinistic – could prove positively politicizing, laying the ground for anti-colonial broadsides such as ‘La France comme mythe et comme réalité’; looking at other examples will help illuminate how this dynamic – inadvertent and perverse from a colonial perspective – came about.

### The fatherland and its metaphorical family

Some of the most important ideas and values that students were exposed to in colonial schools were putatively universal, and some were also reputed to be characteristically French. Those enshrined in the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* and the *devise républicaine* are perhaps the most obvious examples, and the most important. France repeatedly betrayed these values as a colonial power, not least in its schools, but those schools also disseminated them.

In the last chapter we saw Hayat’s description of her father’s work, in *L’Indigène aux semelles de vent*, as a quasi-religious vocation and a form of ‘combat’, and how he taught his pupils about French revolutionary history as well as exposing them to French and revolutionary writing. The passage continues like this:

En bon instituteur qui se respecte, tu affichais dans ta classe *La Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*. Tes élèves répétaient après toi en ânonnant : « Tous les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits ... La loi est l’expression de la volonté générale ; elle doit être la même pour tous » ... avant de s’en retourner dans leur mesure, pieds nus ... (58–59)

Like any good, self-respecting teacher, you pinned the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* to your classroom wall. Repeating your words, your pupils intoned: ‘All men are created equal and they remain

free and equal in their rights ... The law is an expression of the general will; it must apply equally to one and all' ... then trailed off to their impoverished homes in their bare feet ...

As we have seen, that same vexed perception of the gap between republican rhetoric and colonial reality shaped Amrouche's 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité'; and it recurs repeatedly among 'francophone' writers. In *Le Monde* in March 1957 Amrouche had written: 'la France, c'est la liberté, [...] partout où la liberté est offensée et opprimée, la France est offensée et opprimée [...] la défaite de la liberté en Algérie serait la défaite de la France, et la victoire de la liberté la victoire de la France' ('France and liberty are synonymous [...] wherever liberty is offended against or oppressed, France is offended against and oppressed [...] the defeat of liberty in Algeria would mean a defeat for France, and the victory of liberty would be a victory for France').<sup>2</sup> An anonymous 'désenchantée', responding to an article about the beneficial effects of French schools on Muslim girls, wrote in February 1955 in the journal of the AEMAN (*Association des étudiants musulmans de l'Afrique du nord*): 'Nous admirons la culture française, nous l'avons fait nôtre. Mais nous dissociions [...] culture française et régime colonialiste, et cela justement parce que nous voulons maintenir dans leur pureté certaines traditions très françaises: l'esprit « jacobin », la constante démocratie française, le sentiment républicain français' ('We admire French culture and have made it our own. But we want to dissociate French culture from the colonialist regime, precisely because we hope to maintain the purity of certain very French traditions: the spirit of "Jacobinism" and French republicanism, and the endurance of French democracy').<sup>3</sup> Rather than showing hostility to the notion of 'universal values' or simply dismissing such values as myth, many of these writers emphasized the values' fundamental worth (as did Djébar with *laïcité*), and indeed associated them with all that was best in French culture – or should have been. It was in that spirit that Senghor wrote, in his 'Prière de paix' (the last poem in the 1948 collection *Hosties noires*): 'Seigneur, pardonne à la France qui dit bien la voie droite et chemine par les sentiers obliques ! [...] Ah ! Seigneur, éloigne de ma mémoire la France qui n'est pas la France, ce masque de petitesse et de haine sur le visage de la France' ('Lord, forgive France, who says that all should walk straight and true, while she takes the devious path [...] Oh, Lord, take from my

2 Cited by Pervillé, *Les Étudiants algériens*, 270–71.

3 Cited by Pervillé, *Les Étudiants algériens*, 274.

memory the France that is not France, this mask of meanness and hatred on the face of France').<sup>4</sup>

That conception of French/republican/universal values helps explain why – and how – people such as Feraoun and Amrouche could become categorically opposed to colonialism in Algeria while remaining deeply committed to French culture.<sup>5</sup> It also helps explain the feeling expressed by Maryse Condé's mother, in the passage used as one of this book's epigraphs, that her high level of education made her more French than the waiters who complimented her condescendingly on her fine command of the language. (Amrouche had similar feelings at times, as we have seen, and was sarcastic about those whose reaction to his French was: 'Gosh, that's really good – quite extraordinary, for a native.') Something similar was going on in Djébar's father's attempt to mark himself off from the Pétainist teachers around him by saying 'we teachers from Bouzaréah are proud to be republicans and socialists', or Feraoun's outburst at a right-wing colleague in 1956, as the rift between 'native' and 'European' teachers deepened: 'You shallow, narrow-minded Vichyist, I am more French than you are, and you're well aware of it. Your malevolent remarks are motivated by your jealousy'.

It must always have been more or less impossible, however, to express such feelings without some sense of paradox. The notion that there may be *degrees* of Frenchness – the idea that one person of French culture and perhaps of French nationality is more French than another – distances Frenchness from formal political citizenship as well as from universal

4 Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Poésie complète*, ed. Pierre Brunel (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2007), 168; *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Melvin Dixon (Charlottesville, VA and London: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 71. 'Prière de paix' is dated January 1945. Jean-René Bourrel notes in the French edition that numerous African intellectuals, including Ahmadou Kourouma, reacted strongly against the theme of forgiveness in the poem (203).

5 Pervillé in *Les Étudiants algériens* also reaches the conclusion that nationalism did not correlate with hostility to French culture. He points out (226) that the third part of Ferhat Abbas's *Le Jeune Algérien*, entitled 'L'Intellectuel musulman en Algérie', had nothing but praise for teachers and was dedicated thus: 'À mes Maîtres vénérés de l'École, du Collège, de l'Université – « Vous représentez, pour vos élèves musulmans, ce qu'il y a de plus généreux dans l'âme de la France. C'est en vous et par vous qu'elle sera aimée de l'Algérie nouvelle »' ('To my revered masters at primary school, *collège* and university: "For your Muslim pupils you represent all that is most generous in the French spirit"'). This wording is from the 1931 edition (41); the 1981 version of Abbas's book changed 'vénérés' to 'respectés'.

values. That raises the question of how Frenchness is defined, or asserted, or felt, and by whom. In Feraoun's case, as we saw in Chapter 3, the assertion of Frenchness was followed the next day by the reflection: 'When I say that I am French, I give myself a label that every French person refuses me. I speak French, and I got my education in a French school. [...] But dear God, what am I really?'. There is more to be said about the construction of 'Frenchness', but I think it is already clear that it was fundamentally on racial (that is, racist) grounds that Feraoun's Frenchness was refused by a significant number of French people.

This brings us to the third element of the *devise républicaine*, alongside the ideas of freedom and equality that we have seen invoked more frequently by 'native' pupils and teachers: 'fraternité'. Evidently it is gendered, and to some degree it is bound to evoke the idea of a political community built on bloodlines, real or imagined. The myth around 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois' can be understood in that framework, as can Amrouche's description of the low status of 'indigènes' alongside France's 'fils légitimes' ('legitimate sons'),<sup>6</sup> or Feraoun's description, in his early, anonymous letter to Camus, of *instituteurs* half way between 'you and their own people' who wanted only to 'draw closer to you and assimilate completely' and join the 'adoptive family'. In the same text Feraoun added:

Aujourd'hui, je sais comme vous, cher monsieur, que les Français d'Algérie 'sont, au sens fort du terme, des indigènes'. Je souhaite seulement qu'ils en aient conscience et qu'ils n'accusent pas trop la France lorsqu'il lui arrive de les oublier, parce que chaque fois que 'la mère-patrie' répond à l'appel de ses enfants abandonnés, c'est pour tancer vertement ces autres indigènes qu'elle n'a jamais voulu adopter et qui, dans le fond, n'ont jamais cru à une impossible filiation.

Today, dear Sir, I share your view that the French of Algeria are 'natives (*indigènes*) in the strong sense of the word'. I just wish that they would remember the fact, and that they were less quick to complain when France seems to neglect them. Every time the 'mother country' responds to the cries of its abandoned children, it does so by upbraiding the other 'natives', whom it has never wanted to adopt, and who never really believed they were part of the same family.<sup>7</sup>

Amrouche too played with the metaphor of adoption: 'L'adoption : le moment décisif n'est pas celui où le père reconnaît son fils mais celui où

6 Amrouche, 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité', 62.

7 Feraoun, 'La Source de nos communs malheurs', 37–38, 40–41.

le fils reconnaît son père et l'investit de sa gloire paternelle' ('Adoption: the crucial moment is not when the father recognizes his son but when the son recognizes his father and endows him with the glory of paternity').<sup>8</sup> Amidst this *mêlée* of mythicized ancestors, legitimate sons and unadopted children, the notion of *fraternité* was often treated with bitter irony even by a francophile such as Feraoun. We saw an example in Chapter 3, when I quoted Feraoun's remark of 1957 that Guy Mollet 'massacre fraternellement l'Algérien'. In an essay of 1958 Amrouche wrote: 'Le colonisateur s'impose non seulement comme maître et instructeur provisoire (dans les perspectives paternaliste et fraternaliste) mais comme figure de l'homme accompli, comme modèle achevé de civilisation, comme tel inaccessible au colonisé' ('The colonizer imposes himself not only as master and instructor for the time being, in a spirit of paternalism and fraternalism, but as the very model of human accomplishment and civilization, beyond the reach of the colonized').<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, even in the case of *fraternité*, French political rhetoric continued to provide some positive inspiration, shaping and colouring notions of political brotherhood or solidarity. In *L'Incendie* Dib says of the *fellahs* who were going through a slow process of politicization, as they recognized colonialism and class hierarchy as the sources of their oppression: 'tous ces hommes [fellahs] étaient affamés d'amour fraternel' (62, 'all these men were starving for fraternal love'). French culture did not and does not have a monopoly on metaphorical notions of brotherhood, or sentiments of brotherhood, but its republican echo must be part of its meaning in that statement; and the same goes for Feraoun's call, in the letter to Camus, for 'les conditions d'une véritable fraternisation qui n'aurait rien à voir avec celle du 13 mai' ('conditions allowing true fraternization, nothing to do with what passed for fraternization on 13 May').<sup>10</sup> Amrouche invoked the notion in his commemorative oration for Feraoun and his assassinated colleagues: they shared a faith

8 Amrouche, *Journal*, 13 November 1954, 280.

9 Amrouche, 'Notes pour une esquisse de l'état d'âme du colonisé' (first published in *Études méditerranéennes* 1958, 49–53), in Amrouche, *Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français*, 49–53: 52.

10 Feraoun, 'La Source de nos communs malheurs', 44. His allusion is to the putsch and choreographed demonstrations of May 1958. For a detailed discussion see Malika Rahal, 'Les Manifestations de mai 1958 en Algérie ou l'impossible expression d'une opinion publique "musulmane"', in Jean-Paul Thomas, Gilles Le Béguec and Bernard Lachaise (eds), *Mai 1958: le retour du général de Gaulle*



that ‘à partir de la reconnaissance de l’Autre, on peut garder une vraie fraternité’ (‘on the basis of recognition of the Other, one can maintain true fraternity’).<sup>11</sup>

The idea of the fatherland or mother country, and its epicene colonial relative, the ‘mère-patrie’ (picked out in inverted commas in my last indented quotation from Feraoun), was another crucial element of the French colonial/republican network of familial metaphors.<sup>12</sup> Derrida touched on this when he recalled his Algerian childhood in *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre*: ‘La métropole, la Ville-Capitale-Mère-Patrie, la cité de la langue maternelle, voilà un lieu qui figurait, sans l’être, un pays lointain, proche mais lointain, non pas étranger, ce serait trop simple, mais étrange, fantastique et fantomal’ (73, ‘The *metropole*, the Capital-City-Mother-Fatherland, the city of the mother tongue: a place that represented a faraway country without being one, near but faraway, not foreign, that would be too simple, but strange, fantastic, phantom-like’, 42). The phrase ‘mère-patrie’ must occasionally have felt odd even to enthusiastic colonialists, and of course the idea or metaphor was reworked in various ways, or replaced with ‘patrie’ alone. Maurice Viollette, who (as I mentioned earlier) was critical of some of colonialism’s inconsistencies, not least with regard to education and political representation, wrote in *L’Algérie vivra-t-elle?* of 1931 about ‘la volonté de la France d’être une mère commune, attentive et généreuse pour tous, Européens comme indigènes?’ (xxi, ‘France’s will to act as an attentive and generous mother shared between all, both European and native’). ‘Patrie’ appeared in school textbooks, as Jonathan Gosnell points out in *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria 1930–1954*; his examples include a 1926 history book used in primary schools across the French-speaking world (‘Vous êtes tous de bons petits Français ; vous aimez votre patrie. [...] Vous avez dès aujourd’hui à remplir un devoir envers la France : c’est de la bien connaître pour la bien servir’, ‘You are all good little French

(Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 39–58; and Woodhull, ‘Unveiling Algeria’.

11 Amrouche, *Un Algérien s’adresse aux Français*, 369. On ‘fraternité’ and its problems see Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, ‘Fraternity’, in Edward Berenson, Vincent Duclert and Christophe Prochasson (eds), *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 112–18.

12 Alain Rey’s *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française* dates the expression *mère-patrie* to 1798 (III, 148, under ‘Patrie’) and gives this definition: ‘la métropole (par rapport à des colonies, à des territoires lointains, etc.)’ (‘the metropolis, as distinct from colonies, distant territories etc.’).

children; you love your fatherland. [...] From this moment on, you will have a duty towards France: get to know it well, so you can serve it well'), and *Notre livre* of 1953: 'Algériens [...], enfants des villes ou du bled, du Tell ou du Sud, au teint clair ou bronzé, regardez la France toute proche malgré la mer. C'est là votre patrie. Vous êtes tous des frères ; traitez-vous en frères' ('Algerians [...], children of the city or the furthest corner of the countryside, from the Tell or the South, fair-skinned or tanned, look to France, which is so close despite the sea. That is your fatherland. You are all brothers, and must treat one another as brothers').<sup>13</sup> But one can see why 'patrie' too may have felt uncomfortable in the colonial context, especially to any colonialist worried, as was Viollette, that the colonized might get ideas about forming or reclaiming a *patrie* of their own. (Amrouche quoted Viollette on this point, as we have seen.) This must help explain why 'mère-patrie' had a certain currency among colonial propagandists, despite its awkward hermaphroditism. Roques and Donnadiou claimed, in the preface to *L'Empire français*, that the Second World War was producing a 'rassemblement émouvant' ('moving sense of coming together') and a 'solidarité miraculeuse' among 'nos indigènes', such that for the first time, 'Eux aussi ont parlé de la « Mère patrie »' (9–10, 'They too have started to talk about the *mère-patrie*'). The opening paragraph of Condé's memoir echoes this, in its ironic way: if her parents had been asked how they felt about the Second World War, Condé writes, they would have said it was the worst time of their lives, not because of Hitler's crimes against humanity but because they were deprived of their trips to France. 'Pour eux,' she goes on, 'la France n'était nullement le siège du pouvoir colonial. C'était véritablement la mère patrie et Paris, la Ville lumière qui seule donnait de l'éclat à leur existence' (11, 'For them, France certainly was not the seat of colonial power. It was truly the *mère-patrie* and Paris was the City of Light, with a unique ability to add lustre to their lives', 3).

I mentioned in Chapter 2 that for most colonized peoples, including Algerians, the Second World War, rather than deepening attachment to the European metropole, increased scepticism about what they had to gain from identifying with it, and fighting for it, and fuelled profound doubt about the value of European civilization. As I also mentioned earlier, that sort of doubt was felt within Europe too, shaping much academic and cultural work in the second half of the twentieth century. For an intellectual such as George Steiner it involved fear of the dark

13 Cited by Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria*, 41, 63.

energies of nationalism (as well as a crisis of confidence in the value of the ‘humanities’). For colonized peoples, however, one of the first and most important effects of the historical trauma was to give a new impetus to nationalism as a form of anti-colonialism. At the end of Dib’s *La Grande Maison* (1967), which is set just before the start of the Second World War, a proportion of the Algerian population welcomes the rise of Hitler, above all because he is a powerful figure who promises to bring drastic change and to humiliate the French (though anti-Semitism is also a factor, as is the myth that Hitler is a Muslim). The point I want to bring out is that, within the novel, the backdrop to their reaction – a reaction that is evidently confused as well as ignorant, but unequivocally hostile to French colonialism – includes French schools’ circulation of notions of *patrie* and *mère-patrie*, and the questions they raised about nations and belonging. One particular episode implies that the compound ‘mère-patrie’ contained – and encouraged – some semi-acknowledged awareness of the self-splitting power of the notion of the ‘fatherland’ or ‘mother country’ in the colonial context, and suggests that these notions, perhaps even more clearly than liberty, equality and fraternity, were bound to impel some ‘native’ pupils to think beyond colonial structures and identities.

*La Grande Maison* was published in 1952, after the Second World War had ended. Dib’s framing of nascent Algerian nationalism was shaped not only by the war itself but by his knowledge of the holocaust, and of Vichy France’s decision to deprive Algerian Jews of citizenship. Readers today also inevitably view the action and attitudes through the filter of the Algerian war of independence. The protagonist, Omar (whose story extends across two further novels, *L’Incendie*, published in 1954 and set, like *La Grande Maison*, in 1939, and *Le Métier à tisser*, set during the Second World War, and published in 1957 – that is, during the war of independence), is drawn into a process of gradual political awakening, whose first significant moment comes early in *La Grande Maison* when Omar’s teacher, Monsieur Hassan, announces that he will be giving a *cours de morale* on ‘La Patrie’.<sup>14</sup> Omar, who is constantly suffering from hunger, takes this as a cue to switch off and to enjoy chewing the piece of bread he has hidden in his pocket. When

14 The idea of the ‘cours de morale’ lives on in modern France. See Eugénie Bastié, ‘Qu’y a-t-il dans les “cours de morale” à l’école?’, *Le Figaro*, 26 August 2015, available at <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2015/08/26/01016-20150826ARTFIG00288-qu-y-a-t-il-dans-les-cours-de-morale-a-l-ecole.php>, consulted 29 December 2018.

Monsieur Hassan asks if any of them know what ‘patrie’ means, they fall silent. Then one boy answers:

Brahim Bali pointa le doigt en l’air. Tiens, celui-là ! Il savait donc ? Bien sûr. Il redoublait, il était au courant.

– La France est notre mère Patrie, ânonna Brahim. (18)

Brahim Bali put up his hand. Him? Surely he didn’t know! Oh, but he was repeating the year, so of course he had been told the answer before. ‘France is our *mère-patrie*’, he intoned.

Dib’s *style indirect libre* brings the narratorial voice close to the perspective of Omar and the other children, who are initially surprised that Brahim knows the answer. The fact that the material is, in more than one sense, simply repeated helps explain the children’s lack of interest. (The verb ‘ânonna’, which we saw earlier in Hayat’s description of her father’s classroom, underlines the point; I have translated it as ‘intoned’, but the French also suggests that he mumbles, or speaks falteringly; the root of the word is *ânon*, a baby donkey.) The passage implies that there is something mechanical about the teaching, as well as something rigidly didactic about the programme.

All the same, the strange phrase ‘mère Patrie’ seems to spur the class into action:

Les lèvres serrées, Omar pétrissait une petite boule de pain dans sa bouche. La France, capitale Paris. Il savait ça. Les Français qu’on aperçoit en ville viennent de ce pays. Pour y aller ou en revenir, il faut traverser la mer, prendre le bateau ... La mer : la mer Méditerranée. Jamais vu la mer, ni un bateau. [...] La France, un dessin en plusieurs couleurs. Comment ce pays si lointain est-il sa mère ? Sa mère est à la maison, c’est Aïni ; il n’en a pas deux. Aïni n’est pas la France. Rien de commun. Omar venait de surprendre un mensonge. Patrie ou pas patrie, la France n’était pas sa mère. On apprenait des mensonges pour éviter la fameuse baguette d’olivier. C’était ça, les études. (18)

With his lips tightly closed, Omar kept working away at the piece of bread in his mouth. France he knew about – its capital was Paris. The French people in town were from that country. To get there or to get back you had to cross the sea in a boat. The Mediterranean sea. He’d never seen the sea, or a boat, for that matter. [...] For him, France was a picture in a book. How could that distant country be his mother? His mother was Aïni, and she was at home; and you only have one mother. Aïni certainly wasn’t France; they had nothing in common. Someone was telling lies, Omar realized. Whether it was his fatherland or not, France

wasn't his mother. But you repeated lies to avoid getting the cane – that what was studying meant.

We see Omar's mind racing, struggling to reconcile what he is told and what he knows, tugged at by the assonance between 'mer' (sea) and 'mère' (mother), and quickly rejecting the suggestion that France – where French people come from, and he does not – is any sort of mother to him. Aïni has 'nothing in common' with France. And it is clear that Omar is accustomed to this feeling of deception and alienation. The passage continues to describe, in *style indirect libre* and with sharp irony, some of the scenes summoned up for Omar by his school books, which he finds exotic but must pretend to identify with if he wants to get good marks: 'Papa' reading his newspaper in his armchair by a flickering fire; happy moments spent decorating the Christmas tree; and summer trips to one's *maison de campagne* ('Ainsi : la maison de campagne où vous passez vos vacances. Le lierre grimpe sur la façade ; le ruisseau gazouille dans le pré voisin. L'air est pur, quel bonheur de respirer à pleins poumons !' 19; 'Another example: the country house where you spend your holidays. Ivy rambles over its walls and a brook babbles in the neighbouring meadow. What a pleasure to fill your lungs with such lovely clean air!). Another of the rose-tinted *scènes et types* offered by the textbooks concerns 'le laboureur': 'Joyeux, il pousse sa charrue en chantant, accompagné par les trilles de l'alouette' (19, 'The cheerful labourer pushes along his plough, singing to himself as skylarks trill in the background').<sup>15</sup>

From such examples it is clear why 'native' students' might have felt alienated, and why some teachers worried about the question of 'adaptation'. It was the same sort of alienation experienced by Said in his 'mystifyingly English' lessons about meadows, castles and King Alfred. Derrida bemoaned his out-of-place geography lessons, reminiscent of the map scene in 'L'Hôte' and *Loin des hommes* – 'pas un mot sur l'Algérie, pas un seul sur son histoire et sur sa géographie, alors que nous pouvions dessiner les yeux fermés les côtes de Bretagne ou l'estuaire de la Gironde' (76, 'not a word about Algeria, not a single one concerning its history and its geography, whereas we could draw the

15 'Scènes et types' was a series of colonial postcards supposedly illustrating different ethnic types, costumes and so on (and including some striking examples of veiling/unveiling). See Alloula, *Le Harem colonial: images d'un sous-érotisme* ([1981] Paris: Séguier, 2001).

coast of Brittany and the Gironde estuary with our eyes closed', 44). A former *normalienne* interviewed in Lemdani Belkaïd's *Normaliennes en Algérie* – an Algerian woman whose sense of alienation was slow to develop – remarked: 'Je n'ai jamais vu la carte de l'Algérie avant l'indépendance. Le jour où j'ai réalisé ça, je me suis demandé comment j'avais pu vivre sans une idée du tracé de mon pays, de l'endroit où je vivais ... comme une analphabète!' (83, 'Before independence, I had never seen a map of Algeria. The day I realized that was the case, I asked myself how I had managed to live without any inkling of the shape of my country, the place where I lived – as if I were illiterate!'). History lessons, according to Derrida, were even worse: 'ce qu'on enseignait à l'école sous le nom d'« histoire de France » : une discipline incroyable, une fable et une bible mais une doctrine d'endoctrinement quasiment ineffaçable pour des enfants de ma génération' ('what was taught in school under the name of the "history of France": an incredible discipline, a fable and a bible, yet a doctrine of indoctrination almost uneraseable for children of my generation').<sup>16</sup> Memmi framed the issue eloquently in *Portrait du colonisé*:

L'histoire qu'on lui apprend n'est pas la sienne. Il sait qui fut Colbert ou Cromwell mais non qui fut Khaznadar ; qui fut Jeanne d'Arc mais non la Kahena. Tout semble s'être passé ailleurs que chez lui ; son pays et lui-même sont en l'air, ou n'existent que par référence aux Gaulois, aux Francs, à la Marne ; par référence à ce qu'il n'est pas, au christianisme, alors qu'il n'est pas chrétien, à l'Occident qui s'arrête devant son nez, sur une ligne d'autant plus infranchissable qu'elle est imaginaire. Les livres l'entretiennent d'un univers qui ne rappelle en rien le sien ; le petit garçon s'y appelle Toto et la petite fille Marie ; et les soirs d'hiver, Marie et Toto, rentrant chez eux par des chemins couverts de neige, s'arrêtent devant le marchand de marrons. (133–34)

The history that is taught to him is not his own. He knows who Colbert was, or Cromwell, but he learns nothing about Khaznadar; he knows about Joan of Arc, but not about El Kahena. Everything seems to have taken place outside his country. He and his land are nonentities or exist only with reference to the Gauls, the Franks, or the Marne. In other words, with reference to what he is not: to Christianity, although he is not a Christian; and to the West, which ends under his nose, at a border whose imaginary nature makes it all the more insurmountable. His

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, *Monolinguisme*, 76, E44. See also Abécassis et al., *La France et l'Algérie: leçons d'histoire*.

school books talk to him of a world which in no way reminds him of his own; the little boy is called Toto and the little girl, Marie; and on winter evenings Marie and Toto walk home along snow-covered paths, stopping to buy chestnuts from a street vendor. (105)

There is quite a contrast between the tone of that passage and one in Camus's *Le Premier Homme*:

Les manuels étaient toujours ceux qui étaient en usage dans la métropole. Et ces enfants qui ne connaissaient que le sirocco, la poussière, les averses prodigieuses et brèves, le sable des plages et la mer en flammes sous le soleil, lisaient avec application, faisant sonner les virgules et les points, des récits pour eux mythiques où des enfants à bonnet et cache-nez de laine, les pieds chaussés de sabots, rentraient chez eux dans le froid glacé en traînant des fagots sur des chemins couverts de neige, jusqu'à ce qu'ils aperçoivent le toit enneigé de la maison où la cheminée qui fumait leur faisait savoir que la soupe aux pois cuisait dans l'âtre. Pour Jacques, ces récits étaient l'exotisme même. Il en rêvait, peuplait ses rédactions de descriptions d'un monde qu'il n'avait jamais vu, et ne cessait de questionner sa grand-mère sur une chute de neige qui avait eu lieu pendant une heure vingt ans auparavant sur la région d'Alger. Ces récits faisait partie pour lui de la puissante poésie de l'école [...] (136–37)

The texts were always those used in France. And these children, who knew only the sirocco, dust, short torrential cloudbursts, the sand of the beaches and the sea in flames under the sun, would assiduously read – accenting the commas and full stops – stories that to them were mythical, where children in woolly hats and scarves, their feet in wooden shoes, would come home dragging bundles of sticks along snowy paths until they saw the snow-covered roof of the house where the smoking chimney told them the pea soup was cooking in the hearth. For Jacques, these stories were as exotic as they could possibly be. He dreamed about them, filled his compositions with descriptions of a world he had never seen, and was forever questioning his grandmother about a snowfall lasting one hour that had taken place somewhere near Algiers twenty years earlier. For him these stories were part of the powerful poetry of school. (112–13)

In the first lines of this extract *Le Premier Homme* seems to be on similar terrain to *La Grande Maison*. Both novels were based on the authors' own experiences, and they were born only seven years apart, Camus in 1913, Dib in 1920. Both Omar and Jacques (Camus's protagonist in this autobiographically inspired novel), when they read descriptions of snowy winter weather, find France exotic and quasi-mythical; and Jacques, like

Omar, has an illiterate mother, and will move away from her, culturally, through his education. (Camus's novel is dedicated to his mother: 'À toi qui ne pourras jamais lire ce livre', 11; 'To you who will never be able to read this book', 3.) But, in the end, the boys' relationship to France and colonialism is fundamentally different, and this involves drastically different attitudes not only to the exoticism of non-adapted textbooks but to the whole project of education. Jacques, whose father died in the battle of the Marne in October 1914, has family ties to France, and these help him experience as poetry what Omar experiences as mendacity and Derrida identifies as a kind of propaganda.<sup>17</sup>

In this instance, though, the teaching also proves inspirational for Omar, in its way. It may now seem self-evident that the notion of the 'patrie' or the 'mère-patrie' would become important to him, but Dib portrays Omar grappling with these ideas for the first time, and in a state of confusion, and it is worth considering in more detail what allows him to take something positive from this lesson. What Omar's teacher says to his class about 'la patrie' initially is entirely orthodox. He opens the lesson by saying 'La patrie est la terre des pères. Le pays où l'on est fixé depuis plusieurs générations' ('The fatherland is the country of your forefathers; the country that has been your home for generations'). Further axioms and explanations include 'La patrie n'est pas seulement le sol sur lequel on vit, mais aussi l'ensemble de ses habitants et tout ce qui s'y trouve' (19, 'The fatherland is not only the soil we live on, but everything and everyone in that place'). Omar wonders if the *patrie* really includes everyone: what about 'Veste-de-kaki', a child even hungrier and more destitute than himself? What about Omar's mother? And what about Hamid Saraj, an anti-colonial communist militant and intellectual who is in trouble with the French authorities? Monsieur Hassan continues:

– Quand de l'extérieur viennent des étrangers qui prétendent devenir les maîtres, la patrie est en danger. Ces étrangers sont des ennemis contre lesquels toute la population doit défendre la patrie menacée. Il est alors

17 Class, as well as religious and ethnic background, was evidently a factor in children's varied reactions to textbooks. As I indicated in Chapter 2, the locus or scale of adaptation was a difficult question even for those who found non-adaptation anomalous; some Algerian children, as we saw earlier, were familiar with snow, and Jacques, unlike Omar, had intimate experience of the sea. Olivier Todd offers an evocative description of the exoticism of the school classroom for the young Camus in *Albert Camus*, 29–30, E10–11.



question de guerre. Les habitants doivent défendre la patrie au prix de leur existence. (20)

‘When foreigners arrive from abroad and claim to be the new masters, the fatherland is in danger. These foreigners are enemies and the whole population has to defend the fatherland against them. War becomes inevitable – it is a matter of life and death for the inhabitants, who must defend the fatherland.’

For Dib’s first readers, Monsieur Hassan’s words – uttered fictionally in 1939 and published at the start of the 1950s – had as their primary referent and context the Second World War; but the language of patriotism was presented as reaching across different historical moments. In one direction, it reached back into French visions of ‘nos ancêtres les Gaulois’ and of the work of the *instituteur* as such. I noted earlier that mythified conceptions of the *patrie* were promoted in the wake of France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, when France’s vincibility was quite widely blamed on *instituteurs* (an argument, as Feraoun observed in his journal (183, E136), that resurfaced during the Second World War). In the essay where he described Vercingétorix as ‘a national hero who resisted the enemy’ and discussed history teaching in the *écoles normales*, Lavissee had written: ‘Le patriotisme a besoin d’être cultivé’ (‘patriotism needs to be cultivated’).<sup>18</sup> But the rhetoric of patriotism could also point forward, of course, and it involved wider principles. Readers after 1954, and especially after 1962, were almost bound to think of the Algerian war of independence; and although that possibility was not open to Omar, the generalized, transhistorical aspects of his teacher’s speech encouraged him to test the rhetoric against the world he knew.

18 Bemoaning the prevalence of a false, sentimental patriotism, based on ‘une vanité frivole [qui] s’est effondrée dans nos désastres’ (‘a shallow vanity that crumbled in disastrous circumstances’), Lavissee went on: ‘Le vrai patriotisme est à la fois un sentiment et la notion d’un devoir. Or tous les sentiments sont susceptibles d’une culture, et toute notion, d’un enseignement. [...] Il y a dans le passé le plus lointain une poésie qu’il faut verser dans les jeunes âmes pour y fortifier le sentiment patriotique. Faisons leur aimer nos ancêtres les Gaulois et les forêts des druides [...]’ (Lavissee, ‘Histoire’, 1271, ‘True patriotism involves the heart and at the same time an idea of duty. All human feelings can be shaped by culture, just as all ideas are shaped by education. [...] The distant past offers a form of poetry that must be infused into young minds to strengthen their patriotic feelings. They should be made to love our ancestors the Gauls and the forests of the druids [...]’) – and so on, via Godfrey of Bouillon and Joan of Arc. He acknowledged that there was a degree of myth-making in all this (‘légendes’ is his word), but said France needed legends.

The chapter ends with Omar still confused, but it is clear that the class has created a political spark. Indeed, the spark has been fanned quite deliberately by the teacher, who suddenly intervenes dramatically:

Omar, surpris, entendit le maître parler en arabe. Lui qui le leur défendait ! Par exemple ! C'était la première fois ! Bien qu'il n'ignorât pas que le maître était musulman – il s'appelait M. Hassan –, ni où il habitait, Omar n'en revenait pas. Il n'aurait même pas su dire s'il lui était possible de s'exprimer en arabe.

D'une voix basse, où perçait une violence qui intriguait :

– Ça n'est pas vrai, fit-il, si on vous dit que la France est votre patrie.

Parbleu ! Omar savait bien que c'était encore un mensonge. (20–21)

To his surprise, Omar heard his schoolmaster say something in Arabic. He never let them do that – never! This was the first time. Of course, the schoolmaster was a Muslim, Omar knew that – he was called Monsieur Hassan, and Omar knew where he lived – but he couldn't believe his ears. He hadn't even known for sure whether Monsieur Hassan could speak Arabic.

In a low voice, with the violence of his emotions breaking through, the teacher said: 'It isn't true that France is your fatherland, whatever people tell you'.

Goodness gracious! Omar was intrigued, but clearly it was just another lie.

In this case, the way the teacher suddenly, unconventionally, spoke for himself was another factor in encouraging a young mind to work politically. Yet he was not believed, because of the institutional framework, and because he was contradicting himself (he is the 'on' in his own sentence, one of the people who misled the children about their fatherland). What matters most, however, is not the opinion on which Omar fails to settle, but the way he starts to think. His scepticism is bred less by a single rebellious teacher than by the mismatch between his textbooks and his own life. The 'non-adaptation' of the material creates a kind of pressure, and the response of Omar's mind is to create associations, to move sideways and to compare general rhetoric with particular experience.

Another way of putting this, which puts questions of adaptation in a slightly different light, is that the unintended flexibility, and political polysemy, of the teaching materials derived partly from their abstraction. The degree of abstraction in 'fraternity' and '*patrie*' helped create confusion for Omar, but also allowed reappropriation and a new form of politicization. Something similar happened in Amrouche's journal when he quoted Maurice Viollette's remark that Algerians might

be driven to create their own *patrie*; thinking across different levels of abstraction, he wrote:

La France : Une patrie, ou la PATRIE.

Le conflit entre les deux doit être tranché à l'avantage de la patrie.

On peut trahir La Patrie Humaine, au sens absolu de ce mot. Nous ne retiendrons ce genre de crime que contre ceux qui auront impudemment identifié une patrie avec la Patrie ... (280)

France: a fatherland, or THE FATHERLAND.

The conflict between these two ideas has to be resolved in favour of the fatherland.

One can betray the Human Fatherland, in the absolute sense of the word. I view as guilty of that crime only those who impudently identify the fatherland with The Fatherland ...

If France and its enemies had been named by the teacher, Omar might simply have absorbed what he needed to repeat, without real conviction, to satisfy his teacher, then switched off. The abstraction and the would-be timeless rhetoric allowed him to ask himself who or what a patriot was, and whether it was possible that both his own 'maître', Monsieur Hassan, who represented French authority, and Hamid Saraj, who was repeatedly in trouble with the French authorities, could both be patriots.

One of Dib's other texts, 'Rencontres', reveals another dimension of how nationalist feeling emerged. In that story, as I noted earlier, Dib reveals that the first 'outsider' or 'foreigner' he met was his doctor, and the second his school teacher, Monsieur Souquet. Dib remarks that Monsieur Souquet's son was an even greater object of curiosity than the teacher himself, because, apart from that one French boy, 'il n'y avait dans la cour de cette école que des Algériens en herbe' (114, 'in the courtyard of that local school there were only budding Algerians', 110). He then adds:

En passant, je ferai d'ailleurs observer qu'à l'époque nous ignorions ces mots: Algériens, Algérie, *Al Djazair*. Personne ne nous en avait parlé, ou dit la signification, ce qu'ils étaient censés désigner. Ni nos parents à la maison ni qui que ce fût dehors. C'est l'école qui allait nous l'apprendre. Et nous, de découvrir alors que nous étions un pays déterminé, appartenions à une terre à part. (114)

I should note in passing, however, that we didn't know those words: *Algerians, Algeria, Al Djazair*. Nobody had told us those, explained their meaning or what they were supposed to indicate. Not our parents

at home, nor anyone outside. It was school that was going to teach us this. And we were then to discover that we were a specific country; we belonged to a separate land. (110)

This was another, more concrete way in which French schools could give native students the idea, and some of the fundamental vocabulary, of Algerian nationalism.

There is a comparable passage, with a different emphasis, in Taos Amrouche's autobiographical novel *Rue des tambourins* of 1960 – another story where a particular teacher made a difference. The narrator found her teacher, one Madame Gasquin, tough but inspirational, not least because she changed her pupil's attitude to her 'pays':

J'appris par Madame Gasquin que notre pays avait un nom et que j'appartenais à une race fabuleuse dont l'origine était mal connue. Je me sentis fière de descendre des Atlantes ou de l'antique Égypte. [...] [J]'éprouvai un sentiment d'étrange sécurité à savoir que, nous aussi, nous avions notre place dans l'histoire. Les mots *kabyle* et *berbère* qui, jusque là, n'avaient pas de sens pour moi, se chargèrent d'une signification presque magique. (166–67)

I learned from Mme Gasquin that our land had a name and that I belonged to a fabulous race of people whose origins were obscure. I felt proud to be a descendant of the peoples of the Atlas or ancient Egypt [...] It gave me a strange feeling of security to know that we too had our place in history. The words Kabyle and Berber, which until then had meant nothing to me, took on an almost magical significance.

Looking back through the filter of Algerian independence, we may at first assume that 'notre pays' is a national category, though the words can be read in two ways, as they could when Feraoun referred to Si Mohand's poetry as 'un miroir où se reflète l'âme de son pays' ('a mirror in which is reflected his land's soul'). The primary meaning, it turns out, is something like 'Kabylie' (which raises the possibility of reading this passage in terms of the 'Berber myth', and a colonial policy of divide and conquer). Nonetheless, a possible Algerian identity is conjured up too. The principal effect of the educational experience described by Taos Amrouche was a new pride in an identity that was distinctly not French; and the wider historical context was one where French schools were among the factors making it increasingly possible to think of an Algerian 'pays' or 'patrie' in national/nationalist terms.

I will end this section with a final, slightly lengthier literary example of the way the French colonial regime offered Algerian nationalism some

of its vocabulary and tools. One of the commonest and crudest symbols of the nation, the flag, was known to many Algerian schoolchildren in its French form before they knew of an Algerian version, and indeed before Algerian national/nationalist versions started to be made, in the first half of the twentieth century. It was a flag that sparked the Sétif massacres of 1945, which were a turning point for anti-colonialism; and the sudden raising of the *tricolore* over Feraoun's school, it will be remembered, was enough to keep his students away one day in 1957. The example I will explore in more detail comes from Djébar's *La Disparition de la langue française*, where the flag as an emblem of emergent nationalism is associated both with the sort of anti-colonial violence I discussed in Chapter 4 and with education.

I discussed earlier how Berkane's return to Algeria unleashed many old memories, some of them very distressing. One was the memory of his first experience of a 'nationalist demonstration' in 1952, when he was six years old, where a crowd avenged itself on a French butcher who had fired a gun at them by hanging him on one of his meat hooks, to cries of 'Allah akbar'. ('L'enfant se dit : « Ils crient comme à la mosquée ! »', 42; 'The child said to himself, "They're calling out like they do at the mosque!"'.) The young Berkane talked about this a few days later with his mother, and realized that what had first caught his attention and drawn him towards the demonstration, and what had sparked the butcher's threats, was a 'chiffon aux trois couleurs, avec du vert, du rouge, et du blanc' (43, 'a piece of cloth with green, red and white on it'). His mother corrected him: 'Ne dis pas « un chiffon », c'est un drapeau !' ('Don't say "a piece of cloth", it's a flag!'). He pointed out that it was not the flag he was used to seeing at school – perhaps the only flag he knew. His mother then explained, with her eyes gleaming: 'Ce drapeau que tu as vu, c'est le nôtre !' ('The flag you saw is *our* flag!'); the other one was 'le leur' (43–44, 'theirs'). She explained too that if he had not seen it before it was because it had to be kept hidden. She did not explain why, but something about the 'symmetry' of 'le nôtre/le leur' (ours/theirs) seemed to make sense to him, and even to reassure him. We are told that all he remembered about the incident was the flag – not the violence.

The fact that the incident re-emerges in his mind, first in a dream and then in his waking memory, suggests, of course, that the violence, associated with the cries of Allah Akbar, was never truly forgotten by Berkane, who must have found the experience traumatic. But the memory seems to have been quickly suppressed, which comes

to explain how, not long after the incident, he earned a slap from the headteacher at his French school – ‘un bon et évident « premier souvenir d'école »’ (46, ‘A classic “first memory of school”’). A few days after the demonstration, Berkane’s teacher told the class to draw a picture of a boat with its flag floating off its mast. Berkane stole some ideas from his ‘voisin européen’ (‘European neighbour’) Marcel, ‘un petit Espagnol’ (47, ‘a little Spanish boy’), copying the other boy’s colour scheme for the sky, the sea and the mast. But when it came to the flag, Berkane reached for a green pencil, and went his own way.<sup>19</sup> There is no sign that he was conscious this would get him into trouble, though somewhere in his mind, given the context in which he had seen the Algerian flag for the first time and what his mother had said, he must have known he was being provocative. The teacher was duly horrified when he saw Berkane’s drawing, and took him to see the *directeur*, who was incensed by Berkane’s would-be symmetrical explanation: ‘Marcel, il a dessiné son drapeau, moi, j’ai dessiné le mien!’ (50, ‘Marcel drew his flag, and I drew mine!’). This was the moment Berkane was slapped by the headteacher. He was instructed to come back with his father, and told himself:

C’est une catastrophe pour moi. Mon père va devoir fermer son café ; auparavant, c’est sûr, il va me frapper avec son ceinturon en disant : « Tu as certainement fait une bêtise. » Car, je n’ai pas de chance, moi : dans tout le quartier, je suis le seul enfant arabe à avoir un père pour lequel l’école des Français, c’est sacré ! (51)

This is a complete disaster. My father will have to close his café. I’m sure he’ll beat me first with his belt, and tell me I must have done something stupid. I am really unlucky – I’m the only Arab kid in the whole neighbourhood whose father thinks that going to the French school is a sacred duty!

19 Bey’s *Bleu, blanc, vert* opens with a post-independence counterpart to this story: Ali, as a young child, is told at school not to underline words in red, to avoid the *bleu blanc rouge* of the French flag. The scene plays on continuities across the colonial and post-colonial eras, including the place of nationalist propaganda in education, and the tendency of children to go off script. A highly negative portrait of post-independence education is offered by Salim Bachi in *Dieu, Allah, moi et les autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017); it is examined more analytically in Erin Twohig’s *Contesting the Classroom: Reimagining Education in Moroccan and Algerian Literatures* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), which emphasizes the marginalization of literary fiction in the era of Arabization and ‘Algerianization’.

Chapter 2 of *La Disparition de la langue française* ends on that cliffhanger. For a while the narrative goes elsewhere, then Berkane picks up the story again. The morning after he got into trouble for drawing his flag, his father prepared very carefully for the meeting with the headteacher. He went to the barber and put on his ‘costume de cérémonie’: ‘le pantalon turc bouffant, le gilet en soie brodé de fils d’or, la veste des jours de fête, son fez rouge enroulé d’un turban de lin blanc sur la tête, qui le rendait majestueux, sa barbe et ses moustaches peignées de près’ (61, ‘he wore baggy Turkish trousers, a silk waistcoat with gold embroidery, and the jacket he wore on special occasions; on his head sat his red fez, swathed in a white linen cloth, which looked quite majestic. His beard and moustache were carefully combed’). The young Berkane was confident that this would make a positive impression; but he was quickly disabused.

When they entered the headteacher’s office, the first thing the *directeur* said was: ‘« Allons, toi, tu vas traduire à ton père ce que je vais dire »’ (“All right, you’re going to translate what I say to your father”); then, eyeing the father’s outfit, ‘« Avec cet accoutrement (cela m’a choqué, c’était la première fois que j’entendais ce mot, mais j’ai compris, au ton du directeur, que le mot était méprisant), je suppose qu’il ne parle pas et ne comprend pas le français ! »’ (62, “I assume from your father’s get-up that he doesn’t speak a word of French!” (I was shocked by his tone: I had never heard the expression “get-up” before, but his scorn was clear enough’). At this point, Berkane’s father started to speak in what the adult narrator describes as his ‘français-sabir’ (something like ‘pidgin’ French), marked by ‘prononciation hasardeuse’ (62, ‘dodgy pronunciation’):

« Si le môme a fait une bêtise, commença-t-il.

– Oui, le coupa aussitôt le directeur, pour grave, c’est grave ! Une insulte. »

Berkane hésite, ajoute, rêveur :

– Je crois qu’il a dit, en me désignant du doigt : « Une insulte à la République, à la mère patrie, à la France ! »

Mon père, au mot « France » a un sursaut ; il fait un pas vers le bureau du directeur :

– S’il a insulté la France, déclare-t-il dans son français approximatif, prends-le, monsieur le Directeur, ce garçon et fais de lui ce que tu veux ... » Il hésite, corrige son tutoiement : « Vous êtes, vous, plus que son père ! » (62–63)

‘If the child has done something wrong ... ’ he began.

‘Yes, it’s really very serious!’, the headmaster burst out. ‘It’s an insult!’.

Berkane hesitated for a moment, carried away by his memories, and added: 'I think he said it was an insult to the Republic, to the *mère-patrie*, and to France!'

The word 'France' made my father jump. He stepped towards the headmaster's desk and declared in broken French: 'If this boy has insulted France, you can do what you like to him, no problem!'. Worried that 'no problem' might have sounded too informal, he paused, then said: 'You, Sir, are more than a father to him!'

The headteacher appeared rattled by this dramatic display – including, perhaps, the escalation of parental metaphors – and showed the drawing to Berkane's father. He glanced at it just long enough, the adult Berkane reports, to see that Berkane had drawn the flag correctly, then launched into the second scene of his performance for the headteacher ('du vrai théâtre', 64): « Vous avez, devant vous, un ancien combattant de l'armée française ! » ('Before you, Sir, stands a former member of the French army!'). This was another way of placing himself on the side of the Republic, and of French nationalism. He mentioned that he played a part in the liberation of Paris and Strasbourg. That seemed to have some effect; partly, perhaps, the adult Berkane suggests, because the headteacher had evaded military service, though he and his father did not know that at the time. Berkane's father concluded his second speech by saying « Mon fils, il sera un bon soldat français ! » (64, 'My son is going to be a good French soldier!'), then whacking Berkane far more aggressively than the headteacher would ever have dared. Now deeply unnerved, the headteacher, pushed into a more pastoral or educational role, asked him to stop, saying that one should not hit a child like that, that Berkane should be forgiven, and that he should be kept away from the bad company that must have been to blame for his artistic/political blunder. The young Berkane too was left a little disorientated, and was very surprised when he got home that evening to find his father treating him with unaccustomed tenderness, and saying: « Fais attention à partir de maintenant ! Tu es mon véritable fils, puisque tu connais notre drapeau ... Mais il faut être patient. Il arrivera, le moment où le drapeau flottera là, devant nous » (65, 'You be careful from now on! You're my true son because you know our flag, but we have to be patient. The moment will come when our flag will fly above us').

As in Dib's story about the 'leçon de morale', the French school put the child in a situation that he understood to be important politically without understanding why, and indeed without yet having much idea of politics. In neither case, of course, was the eventual evocation of



an Algerian national identity intended by the authors of the school curriculum – almost the opposite; but the possibility emerged in the language, literal and metaphorical, that the children were given (the *patrie*, the flag). Like Dib, Djébar captures the sense of confusion and even menace that marked the children's experience of these formative moments, but also their sense of possibility.

At the same time, Djébar's description of the would-be symmetrical vision of 'ours/theirs' – flags; perhaps fatherlands; perhaps rights – suggests that there was something crude about such oppositions. This is not to deny the power and importance of the idea of an Algerian *patrie*, opposed to France, at that point in history, or of the flag as its emblem; and it is clear in the end that Berkane's father embraced 'opposition' in that sense. But if he could manipulate the headteacher, it was partly because he was able to rise above the headteacher's own crude sense of cultural oppositions. He showed they had something in common, but also pretended they had more in common than they did; and if his performance was effective, it was fundamentally because the teacher continued to assume that, unlike him, Berkane's father, apparently uneducated or even uncivilized, had no distance on either culture, and could only be himself.

### *L'Âme de la civilisation: the French language*

There is a moment in Memmi's *La Statue de sel* when Alexandre, the protagonist and narrator, recalls a moment of triumph in one of his French lessons. It comes at the end of the chapter called 'Le Lycée' where he talks about falling between stools as he moves away from his parents mentally and culturally, yet fails to gain acceptance into the world of his more privileged classmates. He has encountered overt anti-Semitic prejudice and has become very aware of the things that make him different from other pupils, especially his pronunciation and vocabulary, stigmatized by one teacher as his 'langage de concierge' (126, 'the language of a street urchin' in the published translation, 110; 'concierge' refers to a resident caretaker in a block of flats). He is also very ambitious intellectually, reading voraciously, trying hard to impress his teachers and doing his best to master the French language and French literature. 'Obscurément, je sentais que je pénétrerais l'âme de la civilisation en maîtrisant la langue', he recalls (123, 'I had the vague feeling that I would penetrate the very soul of civilization

by mastering the language', 108). A similar youthful feeling – an aspiration, perhaps later viewed as an illusion – was described in June 1960 by Jean Amrouche:

La France ou le Paradis lointain. Elle fut d'abord cela pour moi : un paradis réel, celui d'un langage, à conquérir par le langage, où entrer par le langage.

Un paradis imaginaire et imaginé à partir du langage dans sa réalité substantielle et concrète, secrétée par la littérature et créée par Elle. Non éprouvée autrement durant toute l'enfance et l'adolescence. (*Journal*, 335)

France, a distant Paradise. That was what it first represented for me: a real paradise, the paradise of particular language, to conquer through language itself, or enter via that language.

An imaginary paradise, imagined through language in substantial and concrete form, emanating from Literature, created in that realm. That was how I experienced things, all through childhood and adolescence.

Alexandre's moment of triumph came when his French teacher, Marrou, asked the class which verse was 'most Racinian' in a scene from *Andromaque*. Most of the boys did not understand the question, unsurprisingly. Alexandre was not sure he understood either, but intuitively gave the right answer:

– « Je ne l'ai point encore embrassé d'aujourd'hui. »

Marrou me regarda de son regard un peu lourd.

– C'est bien cela, dit-il lentement.

En mon cœur, je pleurai de joie. Moi, fils d'un juif d'origine italienne et d'une berbère, je découvrais spontanément ce qu'il y avait de plus racinien en Racine. Le soir, dans mon lit, souvent je pleurais de joie, lorsque lisant Rousseau, par exemple, je croyais retrouver dans sa passion, ses humbles origines, son refus de son milieu, mes ambitions et mon avenir. Mais comme j'étais seul avec mon livre, je pleurais de vraies larmes qui coulaient sur l'oreiller, des larmes de douleur et d'orgueil.

*'Je ne l'ai point encore embrassé d'aujourd'hui.'*

Marrou gazed at me with his somewhat heavy look.

'That's right', he said slowly.

In my heart of hearts I cried with joy. I, son of an Italian-Jewish father and a Berber mother, had discovered spontaneously what was most Racinian about Racine.

Often, at night, in bed, I would weep with joy when, as I read Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, I felt that I could recognize, in his passion and his humble background, and in his rejection of his own surroundings, my own ambitions and my own future. But I was alone

with my book, and wept real tears. They fell onto the pillow, tears of pain and of pride.<sup>20</sup>

The passage conveys several impressions at once: Alexandre's sense of isolation; his profound personal investment in the French literary texts he read inside and outside school; and his awareness that he was being transformed. The importance of the moment is emphasized when he returns to it in the penultimate chapter, 'L'Épreuve' ('Examination'), which loops back to the novel's starting point. In his school exam he refused to do what was expected of him, and embarked instead on some kind of self-examination via writing. By the end of the novel he understands better his contradictions and his discomfort with himself and the world he inhabits, and describes himself as 'de culture française mais Tunisien. (« Vous savez, l'art racinien, l'art français par excellence, n'est parfaitement accessible qu'aux seuls Français »)' (364, 'Tunisian but of French culture ("You know, the art of Racine, an art that is perfectly French, is truly accessible only to the French ... ")').<sup>21</sup> His starting point as 'son of an Italian-Jewish father and a Berber mother' is crucial; the phrase implies that the triumph was made greater by the distance he had travelled, and also that there was something ironic about the fact that he, of all people, was the one to 'get' Racine.

Yet there is something suspect about that sense of distance, and of irony. There is no real reason to assume that understanding Racine comes naturally to French children; but some such assumption must surely lie behind any sense of irony experienced at this point by Alexandre, or Memmi, or the reader. The same assumption was in play in a remark recorded bitterly by Amrouche in his journal in April 1952: 'Daniele Occhipinti (journaliste fasciste) disant [...] que jamais, en Italie, on n'aurait accepté qu'un *native* soit prof. de littérature italienne' (254, 'Daniele Occhipinti, a fascist journalist, said that in Italy it would have been completely unacceptable for a "native" to teach Italian literature'). In the background was the history that created a particular network of

20 *La Statue de sel*, 128, E112–13. The quotation from *Andromaque* is from Act I, scene iv, line 264.

21 Camus alludes to Memmi's encounter with Racine in his brief preface, which starts: 'Voilà un écrivain français de Tunisie qui n'est ni français ni tunisien' (9, 'Here is a French writer from Tunisia who is neither French nor Tunisian'). It is also discussed by Jarrod Hayes in his article 'Colonial Pedagogies of Passing: Literature and The Reproduction of Frenchness', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34: 1/2, *The Global & the Intimate* (Spring–Summer 2006), 153–72.

links and associations between the French language, French literature and French national identity; the development, from the late eighteenth century onwards, of the idea that each great nation has, or should have, its national literature and its national language. To illuminate more fully this moment in *La Statue de sel* – and, in more general terms, to understand how children like Memmi experienced their French lessons – I need to say a bit more about that history. I shall focus initially on the French language; in the next section, I will say more about literature.

Very few countries have ever been in a situation where their population has been united by a single language spoken by everyone within the country's borders (and, in an age of mass literacy, written by everyone, if the language is written at all), and spoken and written outside the nation's borders only by emigrants and language-learners. The myths, institutions and policies that have grown up around the ideas of a 'national language' and a 'national literature' have tended, however, to disguise the diversity that is the norm, and to work against it, not least in the sphere of education. If I think of my own undergraduate years in a French department, the structure of the syllabus implied that the Frenchness embodied in literature and language could be traced smoothly back into the distant past – perhaps not as far as *leurs ancêtres les Gaulois*, but back to the Middle Ages. It came as a surprise when I read in a book by Louis-Jean Calvet that only about two-fifths of the population of France were native French speakers at the time of the revolution of 1789.<sup>22</sup> The need to impose French as a national language was to become an article of republican faith, but, long after the revolution, even after universal education had become the norm, considerable linguistic diversity continued to exist.

This was evidently true of the French empire, where republican principles often foundered, and it was true in metropolitan France too, to an extent that is often forgotten. The issue is treated in Michel Serres's moving essay 'Ma langue maternelle, mes langages paternels' ('My Mother Tongue, My Paternal Languages'), which reflects on the depth of linguistic diversity in twentieth-century France. He writes:

Lorsque des Pères ignobles décidèrent d'assassiner leurs fils par millions, au cours de combats hideux, en 1914–18, ils groupèrent les jeunes paysans par régiments d'infanterie, selon leurs régions respectives, pour qu'ils puissent comprendre, en des langues aussi différentes que le gallo ou le

22 Calvet, *Linguistique et colonialisme: petit traité de glottophagie* ([1974] Paris: Payot, 1988, 2nd edition), 166–78.

niçois, les ordres qu'ils leur donnaient de se suicider, en mettant à mort les enfants d'en face. Le meurtre des fils se perpétua en dialectes locaux. Ainsi put-on enseigner plus tard en langue dominante le meurtre des pères.

When the wicked Fathers decided to murder their sons by the millions, in hideous battles in 1914–1918, they sorted the young peasant men into infantry regiments region by region, so that they would understand, in languages as different as Gallo or the Provençal of the Nice area, the orders they received to commit suicide while butchering the boys on the other side. The murder of the sons took place in local dialects. In this way people were able, later on, to use the dominant language to offer lessons on the murder of the fathers.<sup>23</sup>

Serres was born in 1930 and must have had in mind his own education, as well as war memorials in his native Gascony. He describes the problems of comprehension, and of prejudice, he faced as a young man when he moved to pursue his education in Paris, having grown up speaking what he calls the Gascon 'patois' with his parents. He explains:

Autant que les passants, nos professeurs d'université nous traitaient de paysans mal dégrossis, tout autant qu'ils appelaient Iroquois les Québécois et sauvages les Océaniens ou Africains : nous avons tous trois en commun le rapport à la nature, toundras, brousses ou labours. En face, ces civilisés se considéraient comme tenanciers de la culture.

Just as readily as passers-by in the street, our professors at the university classed us as peasants barely off the farm, in the same way that they called the Québécois 'Iroquois' or called the Oceanian or African students 'savages': all three groups had in common our relation to nature, be it tundra, bush, or ploughed fields. They, on the other hand, considered themselves civilized people, proprietors of culture. (200)

The colonial vocabulary is more than metaphorical. Serres recalls too that at the end of the oral exam for the philosophy *agrégation* in 1955 the president of the committee explained, with regret, that despite Serres's brilliant marks no one would be able to give him a job because his French was too hard to understand – a judgement Serres accepted at

23 Michel Serres, 'My Mother Tongue, My Paternal Languages', trans. Haun Saussy, in Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (ed.), *Empire Lost: France and Its Other Worlds* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009), 197–206: 197. As far as I know the French text has not been published; I am grateful to Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi for providing me with a copy.

the time.<sup>24</sup> It was his second language, spoken perfectly, but – or rather, and – with a strong accent.

Today in France several different languages are still spoken in sizeable communities; and, as Serres suggests, there may be less prejudice against different accents in universities; but the general tendency, as he records with regret, has been towards greater linguistic homogenization. He is sceptical about some of the more common explanations, including the influence of wars or television – or *instituteurs*: ‘On célèbre ou critique beaucoup, à ce sujet, l’efficacité des instituteurs de l’école républicaine : cette légende [...] me paraît se livrer à la publicité de notre enseignement ; nous profs, nous vantons volontiers’ (‘In this connection, primary school teachers are often celebrated or denigrated for their efficiency in carrying out the work of the republic. This legend [...] seems to me to belong to the public-relations side of education: we teachers and professors are apt to overstate our own importance’, 202). The principal factor, Serres asserts, was the shift away from agriculture as the predominant form of work and social organization; according to his figures, 75 per cent of Frenchmen were *paysans* at the start of the twentieth century, but, by the end, only 2.3 per cent.<sup>25</sup>

24 Serres, ‘My Mother Tongue’, 199. Pierre Bourdieu spoke of comparable experiences: ‘I spent most of my youth in a tiny and remote village in south-western France, a very backward place as city people would like to say. And I could only meet the demands of schooling by renouncing many of my primary experiences and acquisitions, and not only a certain accent’. From *Réponses* (1992), cited by Michael James Grenfell in *Pierre Bourdieu: Education and Training* (London: Continuum, 2007), 40.

25 Serres, ‘My Mother Tongue’, 202. One of the texts Serres must have had in mind was Eugen Weber’s classic *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870–1914* ([1977] London: Chatto & Windus, 1979). Chapter 18, ‘Civilizing in Earnest: Schools and Schooling’, begins: ‘The school, notably the village school, compulsory and free, has been credited with the ultimate acculturation process that made the French people French – finally civilized them, as many nineteenth-century educators liked to say. The schoolteachers, in their worn, dark suits, appear as the militia of the new age, harbingers of enlightenment and of the republican message that reconciled the benighted masses with a new world, superior in wellbeing and democracy’ (303). The chapter is full of fascinating detail about how little known French was in nineteenth-century France, and offers many parallels with the colonial situation. Weber himself pursues those parallels in the final chapter, writing: ‘The famous hexagon can itself be seen as a colonial empire shaped over the centuries [...] [In 1870] it was neither morally nor materially integrated; what unity it had was less cultural than administrative. Many of its

As a political project, the promotion of French as a national language in France had both practical and ideological dimensions. On one level it was about spreading social glue. On another, more mythified level, it was about the national genius that language and literature were supposed to embody and convey, and the superiority of France over its European rivals. (One small example of that attitude comes in the geographer Onésime Reclus's book of 1880 *France, Algérie et colonies*, now remembered mainly for including the first recorded usage of the word 'francophone': Reclus stated, pretty much as a matter of self-evidence, that French was 'digne de sa réputation de langage le plus vif et le plus civilisé d'Europe' – 'worthy of its reputation as the liveliest and most civilized language in Europe'.<sup>26</sup>) This is the aspect of the history of 'English' and 'French' that Steiner alluded to in the essay I cited at the very start of this book: the idea that a certain idea of national identity, and indeed a certain form of nationalism, is one of the foundations of those academic disciplines, each based on the study of 'a' literature, made singular by its fundamental relationship to 'the' national language, and considered uniquely able to evoke, generate and represent a national identity.<sup>27</sup>

inhabitants, moreover, were indifferent to the state and its laws, and many others rejected them altogether' (485–86).

26 Reclus, *France, Algérie et colonies* ([1880] Paris: Hachette, 1887), 447. Reclus's comment is unsurprising in its historical context; perhaps more surprising is Durkheim's comment in his groundbreaking work of historical sociology *L'Évolution pédagogique en France* of 1938 that it was in the seventeenth century that French acquired the clarity and 'almost mathematical exactness' that distinguish it from other languages ancient and modern (310/E271). Reclus's book, incidentally, was also of its time in its delineation of different ethnic groups in the French population, but grimly prescient in its remark: 'Il n'y a pas de race française, pas plus que de race allemande, de race anglo-saxonne ou de race espagnole. Ce sont là des inventions de savants et pédants d'Allemagne : elles ont répandu des fleuves de sang, elles en répandront encore' (436, 'There is no such thing as the French race, any more than there is a German race, an Anglo-Saxon race or a Spanish race. Those ideas, which were invented by self-important German scholars, have been responsible for spilling rivers of blood, and that is going to continue').

27 A good place to start on this topic (and many others) is Raymond Williams, *Keywords* ([1976] London, Fontana, 1988, revised edition); see 'Literature' and 'Nationalist'. In the extensive literature on the French case see also David C. Gordon, *The French Language and National Identity* (New York, NY and Paris: Mouton, 1978); Calvet, *Linguistique et colonialisme*; Wendy Ayres-Bennett

An issue raised by Steiner's essay is what difference it makes whether one is studying foreign literature, or 'comparative' literature, or remains focused on one's 'own' literature in one's 'own', 'national' language (or what one thinks of in those terms). Even studying French in England (as my students do) is significantly different in various ways from doing so in France; but the issues around ownership and the nation were evidently much more acute in colonies such as Algeria and Tunisia. Memmi's sense of triumph in his French class stemmed partly from his perception that the language was not his own – and not only because it was not his first language. In that same chapter he wrote: 'J'essayais de prononcer une langue qui n'était pas la mienne, qui peut-être ne le sera jamais complètement, et pourtant m'est indispensable à la conquête de toutes mes dimensions' (120, 'I tried desperately to speak this language which wasn't mine, which perhaps will never be entirely mine, but without which I would never be able to achieve complete self-realization', 105).<sup>28</sup> At moments he felt deeply uncomfortable speaking and writing French, and his unease had little or nothing to do with linguistic or stylistic competence. In *Portrait du colonisé* he remarked:

loin de préparer l'adolescent à se prendre totalement en main, l'école établit en son sein une définitive dualité.

Ce déchirement essentiel du colonisé se trouve particulièrement exprimé et symbolisé dans le bilinguisme colonial. Le colonisé n'est sauvé de l'analphabétisme que pour tomber dans le dualisme linguistique. S'il a cette chance. La majorité des colonisés n'auront jamais la bonne fortune de souffrir les tourments du bilingue colonial. Ils ne disposeront jamais que de leur langue maternelle ; c'est-à-dire une langue ni écrite ni lue, qui ne permet que l'incertaine et pauvre culture orale. [...]

and Mari C. Jones (eds), *The French Language and Questions of Identity* (London: MHRA and Legenda, 2007); and Renée Balibar and Dominique Laporte, *Le Français national: politique et pratiques de la langue nationale sous la Révolution française* (Paris: Hachette, 1974). On the relation of this national framework to literature teaching, see, for example, Compagnon, *La Troisième République des lettres*, and Viswanathan, *Masks of conquest*; and, on history teaching, Serge Berstein and Dominique Borne, 'L'Enseignement de l'histoire au lycée', *Vingtième siècle* 49 (January–March 1996), 122–42; and Jo McCormack, 'Memory in History, Nation Building, and Identity: Teaching about the Algerian War in France', in Patricia M. E. Lorcin (ed.), *Algeria and France, 1800–2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 135–49.

28 I have reproduced the published translation here, but it does not capture the striking use of 'conquest' in Memmi's strange French phrase.



La non-coïncidence entre la langue maternelle et la langue culturelle n'est pas propre au colonisé. Mais le bilinguisme colonial ne peut être assimilé à n'importe quel dualisme linguistique. La possession de deux langues n'est pas seulement celle de deux outils, c'est la participation à deux royaumes psychiques et culturels. Or ici, les deux univers symbolisés, portés par deux langues, sont en conflit : ce sont ceux du colonisateur et du colonisé. (134–36)

far from preparing teenage boys and girls to take charge of their own lives, school creates a permanent split within them.

That fundamental rift within the colonized is expressed and symbolized above all by colonial bilingualism. The colonized is saved from illiteracy only to fall into linguistic dualism. This happens only if he is lucky, since most of the colonized will never have the good fortune to suffer the torments of colonial bilingualism. They will never have anything but their mother tongue; that is, a tongue which is neither written nor read, sustaining only oral culture, which is insubstantial and lacks solidity. [...]

The difference between a native language and a cultural language is not peculiar to the colonized, but colonial bilingualism cannot be compared to just any linguistic dualism. Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two sets of tools, but actually means participation in two psychic and cultural realms. Here, the two realms symbolized and conveyed by the two tongues are in conflict; they are those of the colonizer and the colonized. (106–07)

Along similar lines, Amrouche – Memmi's French teacher, it will be remembered – wrote in 1960: 'Je crois que le bilinguisme est chose extrêmement dangereuse, car si l'on veut éduquer l'homme, faire l'homme, il faut d'abord le fonder' ('I believe that bilingualism is extremely dangerous, because to educate a man, to make a man, you first have to give him a solid foundation').<sup>29</sup> And around the same time, Haddad, who like Djébar was the son of an Algerian French teacher, wrote in 'Les Zéros tournent en rond': 'Je suis moins séparé de ma patrie par la Méditerranée que par la langue française' (9, 'I am separated from my fatherland less by the Mediterranean sea than by the French language'). One of Haddad's points was that the high level of illiteracy among Algerians cut him off from the readership he would have wanted, but he also saw a more fundamental mismatch between Algerian writers and French:

29 Amrouche, 'Colonisation et langage', in *Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français*, 329–32: 330.

même s'exprimant en français, les écrivains algériens d'origine arabo-berbère *traduisent* une pensée *spécifiquement algérienne*, une pensée qui aurait trouvé la plénitude de son expression *si elle avait été véhiculée par un langage et une écriture arabes*.

[...] *Les mots, nos matériaux quotidiens, ne sont pas à la hauteur de nos idées et encore bien moins de nos sentiments*.

Il n'y a qu'une *correspondance approximative* entre notre *pensée d'Arabes* et notre *vocabulaire de Français*. (34, Haddad's italics)

even expressing themselves in French, Algerian writers from an Arabo-Berber background must *translate* thought that is *specifically Algerian*, thought that would have found full expression *if its vehicle had been the Arabic language and Arabic writing*.

[...] Words, our daily materials, cannot do justice to our ideas, still less to our feelings.

Our *French vocabulary* corresponds only *approximately* to our *Arab thought*.

There is no denying the depth of feeling in these remarks. Memmi, Amrouche and Haddad really did feel internally divided, at least at moments, and suffered for it. Their anger and disappointment were directed at colonialism, but also at themselves; in making these arguments they expressed themselves primarily in French and, moreover, they had worked as teachers in the French/colonial system.<sup>30</sup> Haddad indicated that he was speaking on behalf of 'orphelins inconsolables' (32, 'inconsolable orphans') severed from their mother tongue and bearing 'la marque indélébile de l'Islam' (33, 'the indelible mark of Islam'), presenting Arabic not just as the most eligible national language but as the natural vehicle of specifically Algerian thought, and a potentially perfect form of national self-expression.

Here we might think back, however, to the scene in Feraoun's *Fils du pauvre* where the Quran was described as 'an old book in Arabic' whose text was 'incomprehensible' to the villagers. Haddad had good reason to consider it preposterous that in colonial Algeria Arabic was often treated, not least in schools, as a foreign language (16, 43). But he skated over the fact that it was indeed a foreign language, in crucial respects, for a good number of 'native' Algerians – not all of whom were Muslims. He

30 Michèle Robequain touches on Memmi's time as a philosophy teacher in her 'Jalons bio-bibliographiques', in David Ohana, Claude Sitbon and David Mendelson (eds), *Lire Albert Memmi: déracinement, exil, identité* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 2002), 213–31.

recognized that ‘Arabization’ was linked to an Islamic religious identity; he presented this positively, while insisting that the Algerian ‘revolution’ was ‘laïque’ (15). He did not acknowledge the difficulties raised for the notion of Arabic as national language by Algeria’s Berber populations, or by the complex relationship – and the distance – between classical Arabic (the language of the Quran, and of other writing of an earlier era), modern standard Arabic (MSA), and *Darija*, the spoken Arabic of the Maghreb.<sup>31</sup> Nor did he acknowledge how far the supranational and ethnic dimensions of Arabic (or these various Arabics) complicated the language’s allegedly Algerian character. Some recognition of Algeria’s internal heterogeneity emerged in his passing use of the compound adjective ‘arabo-berbère’, but that term appeared only quite late in his essay, and the Berbers and their language had disappeared again by the time he got to ‘notre *pensée d’Arabes*’ (‘our Arab thought’).

Notwithstanding the particularities of Arabic and of Algeria, the rhetoric used by Haddad and others around Arabic as a national language in Algeria was not so different, in fact, from the rhetoric around French in metropolitan French history, insofar as it prescribed and promoted the nation-wide currency of the language by claiming simply to describe its purportedly natural and perfect ‘fit’ with the nation.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the French/modern European notion of a national language was itself an influence, from two different angles, on the way Arabic was promoted in Algeria. For one thing, the myth of French’s uniquely civilized quality

31 As Dawn Marley notes, in the post-independence cultures of the Maghreb, which have been shaped by Arabization, French continues to have ‘a relatively high degree of prestige’, alongside the high prestige of classical and standard Arabic; but ‘Despite their prestige, neither MSA nor French is closely linked to national or ethnic identity in the Maghreb, whereas Dialectal Arabic and Tamazight, the languages of home and local community, are those that carry the “precious freight” of ethnicity’. ‘Maghrebians via French’, in Ayres-Bennett and Jones (eds), *The French Language*, 183. For detailed analysis of the Moroccan case, see Charis Boutieri, *Learning in Morocco: Language Politics and the Abandoned Educational Dream* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016). For my understanding of these issues I am also indebted to my PhD student Rym Ouartsy and her work on language usage in Maghrebi cinema.

32 Boualem Sansal, in his long, outspoken tract *Poste restante: Alger: lettre de colère et d’espoir à mes compatriotes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), attacks the country’s putative ‘constantes nationales’ – the insistence on the idea that Algerian people are Muslim, speak Arabic and are Arabs – and calls for a commitment to *laïcité* (36–41). See also Dalila Arezki, *L’Enseignement en Algérie: l’envers du décor* (Biarritz and Paris: Atlantica-Séguier, 2004).

sometimes fuelled colonial hostility to Arabic (though this was not the only colonial attitude to Arabic, as we saw earlier), which someone like Haddad reacted against strongly. For another, the French notion of a national language provided a model that influenced Algerian nationalists. Jean-Robert Henry argues categorically: ‘L’arabe « moderne » au Maghreb s’est affirmé contre le français, mais aussi sur son modèle très typé de langue « nationale », noyau d’une culture « nationale », même si celle-ci est rapportée pour partie au niveau mystique de la Nation arabe’ (“modern” Arabic established itself in the Maghreb over French, but according to a very French model of a “national” language, seen as the kernel of a “national” culture, even if the latter relates partly to the mystical Arab Nation’).<sup>33</sup> Meynier makes a similar point when he contends that the most enthusiastic proponents of Arabization in post-independence Algeria were locked into a ‘logique de substitution’. He also makes the striking observation that Arabization was promoted above all by *francisants*: that is, those most familiar with the French model, and those made guilty and uncomfortable by their own close relationship with the French language and French culture – including, we must assume, its linguistic nationalism. (These were also among the reasons, according to Meynier, that the Arabic-language version of *el-Mujâhid* was more secular than the French-language *El Moudjahid*, which came first.)<sup>34</sup>

At this point a deeper irony emerges from beneath the apparent irony of Alexandre’s distinguished performance in French. Not least through his French lessons, someone such as Alexandre (or Memmi) seems to have internalized a view of the French language, French literature and Frenchness that aggravated his sense of marginalization, even as he conquered the language and came to understand the literature. Through these layered ironies, and beyond them, the issue thrown into relief by Alexandre’s experiences is that the very notion of a national language has been marked by dogmatism and a capacity to cause

33 Henry, ‘Introduction générale’, in Jean-Robert Henry (ed.), *Nouveaux enjeux culturels au Maghreb* (Paris: CNRS, 1986), 5–27: 18. Jacqueline Kaye and Abdelhamid Zoubir make the same sort of argument in *The Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature and National Identity in Algeria and Morocco* (London: Routledge, 1990), 22. I am not in a position to *measure* the influence of French culture in this regard; I do not think there can be any doubt, however, that a certain notion of a ‘national’ language was spread with the French language itself, notably through educational institutions, and especially through French lessons.

34 Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN*, 506–08.

suffering. Alexandre's aim of penetrating 'the very soul of civilization' by 'mastering' the language suggests that the young Alexandre had been drawn into a mythified view of French as a uniquely civilized language whose relationship to Frenchness was politicized, fetishized and exaggerated. Alongside his intuitive response to the question about *Andromaque*, his phrase 'Obscurément, je sentais ...' ('I had the vague feeling ...') was further evidence that as a boy his excellent grasp of French culture had become second nature; and the well-crafted sentences in which all of this is described seem to indicate that as an adult he had achieved the mastery he hoped for. Yet in this historical and ideological context it was possible to speak and write a language perfectly, and even to do so in the absence of any other, 'mother' tongue (which was Derrida's case, as described in *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*) without feeling that the language was 'one's own'.

Alexandre's project of imbibing, through the French language and French literature, a wider French culture imagined to exemplify and embody civilization as such, was, then, self-fulfilling in one respect and self-defeating in another. Making the culture his own meant internalizing the ideology about the links between language, literature and civilization, and at the same time the ideology telling him the culture would never really be his. It is a similar paradox to the one we saw earlier in Amrouche's assertion (in his pre-nationalist phase): 'I've always believed in breeding [*la race*], and innate values. I have always thought of myself as one of the *Seigneurs*'; and we might see it again in Fanon's statement in 'Le Noir et le langage' ('The Black Man and Language'), a chapter in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 'Parler une langue, c'est assumer un monde, une culture', or, as he also puts it, 'supporter le poids d'une civilisation' (30, 13, 'To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture; [it means] bearing the weight of a civilization', 38, 17–18). That statement, or over-statement, could also be seen as self-confirming, but only, again, in a paradoxical way. (The first thing Fanon ever wrote – that is, was taught to write, at school – was 'je suis Français'.<sup>35</sup>) Every time someone such as Amrouche, Feraoun, or Condé's parents asserted that they were more French than the French, the opposite view was already there, and was reanimated as they reacted against it.

One of the issues raised by these double-edged experiences of linguistic incorporation and alienation is the extent to which a

35 See Peter Geismar, *Fanon* (New York, NY: Dial Press, 1971), 15. My thanks to Jean Khalfa for directing me to this source.

thought universe is carried in the language itself. Memmi evoked two different understandings of the issue when he wrote: 'Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two sets of tools, but actually means participation in two psychic and cultural realms. Here, the two realms symbolized and conveyed by the two tongues are in conflict; they are those of the colonizer and the colonized' (136, E107). 'Symbolized' ('symbolisés') and 'conveyed' ('portés') may imply different understandings of the relationship between language and thought. There are vast and intriguing questions here, which I cannot really pursue, about how much of the conceptual baggage of a language resides in its very structures: in the use of tense, for example, or the relationship between subjects, verbs and objects; and how much of the 'participation' in different psychic and cultural realms, beyond the contingent, symbolic associations of different languages, comes automatically and unconsciously with the language itself, and so determines worldviews. I will make just two points. First, nothing in any deep linguistic/psychic structures is necessarily linked to anything like a *national* culture, since languages and their idioms may reflect and help constitute supranational cultures, or smaller cultures, communities and groups built and divided along various lines.

Second, when writers experienced problems of linguistic/cultural 'fit', the evidence that French carried ideological baggage within it lay close to the surface. Sometimes it was highlighted – and redressed, at least to a degree – by the introduction of vocabulary from Arabic or from Berber languages. On other occasions, the problems may have been less conscious. An example we saw earlier was Alexandre's first reaction to a place in the lycée ('I sometimes think, with horror, about the darkness in which I might otherwise have lived', and so on, culminating with 'I was out to conquer the world'). I commented in Chapter 4 that from his phrasing it appeared that he had imbibed colonial values; and, as we have seen in this chapter, the same may be said about remarks such as Alexandre's 'I would penetrate the very soul of civilization by mastering the language', or Amrouche's 'a real paradise, the paradise of particular language, to conquer through language itself, or enter via that language'. The gendering of the imagery is also striking. Yet even if these gendered/colonial aspects of the language may long have remained unexamined and somehow constraining of thought, they were not so deeply embedded that they could not be detected or criticized. Indeed, in these texts, the adult author or narrator in the literary text seems to be opening up space for such criticism, even as the language is reproduced.

In such cases, the metaphorical and conceptual underpinnings of words, idioms and images can become an object of scrutiny and a matter of debate (whether or not one speaks any other language, though I suppose that doing so may help); and, ultimately, linguistic practice, culture and mentalities may change.

The essay where Amrouche described bilingualism as ‘chose extrêmement dangereuse’ began with criticism of the ‘colonisateur français universaliste’ who ‘commençait son enseignement avec une générosité illusoire en disant : « Nos ancêtres, les Gaulois ... »’ (‘began the work of education with illusory generosity as he said: “Our ancestors the Gauls ... ”’). In this way, Amrouche said, the colonizer ‘opérait immédiatement une coupure dans l’esprit des élèves’ (‘immediately created a split in his pupils’ minds’), displaying and inculcating disdain for their prior cultures.<sup>36</sup> I am suggesting that relatively little of that disdain, if any, was carried at a fundamental level within the language itself; but the French education that these pupils received itself encouraged that misapprehension. I return to the point, then, that the suffering occasioned for people like Haddad and Amrouche by their relationship to French needs to be explained not in terms of any split caused inherently by bilingualism (as is obvious, really, and as Memmi recognized when he wrote: ‘colonial bilingualism cannot be compared to just any linguistic dualism’), and not only in terms of colonialism (whose significance in all of this was always readily apparent), but also in terms of the tangle of nationalist ideas around language, which still have considerable cultural and educational force. I doubt many people today would agree with Amrouche that bilingualism was dangerous. I assume far more would agree with – and have been encouraged by their education to agree with – Amrouche’s problematic assertion, expressed in the same essay, that the first language one speaks, and studies, which ideally reaches beyond consciousness into the ‘profondeurs de son être’ (330, ‘depths of one’s being’), should be a national language, and that of one’s ‘lignée naturelle’ (331, ‘natural line of descent’). And, especially in education, that issue is still bound up with the study of literature, as it was for Amrouche: ‘An imaginary paradise, imagined through language in substantial and concrete form’. In the next section, which is the last, I will explore further that question of writers’ conceptions of (French) literature, both as colonial pupils and, eventually, as writers.

<sup>36</sup> Amrouche, ‘Colonisation et langage’, *Un Algérien s’adresse aux Français*, 329.

‘Se dire à soi-même adieu’: French literature

When, in his talk on ‘Colonisation et langage’, Jean Amrouche discussed the work he had done in collecting Kabyle poetry, he spoke of his attachment to Mallarmé and Baudelaire. His tone is strikingly more positive than were his comments on the French language and bilingualism:

Cette poésie [kabyle] que j’aie [sic] reçue, je dois dire que je ne l’ai connue qu’à travers l’expérience de la poésie française qui a été pour moi une expérience fondamentale. Cependant il y a une sorte d’antériorité dans l’être de la poésie berbère, de ces chants qui ont bercé mon enfance par rapport à la poésie française qui est pour moi une poésie, disons de famille, et non pas une poésie étrangère. (331)

I must say that when I came to know Kabyle poetry, I did so via my experiences of French poetry, experiences that were fundamental for me. Yet by their nature the Berber poems, the songs I was brought up with, have a kind of precedence over French poetry, which for me is part of the family, so to speak, not foreign.

The relationship between ‘fundamental’ and ‘a kind of precedence’ in this passage is complex; exposure to Kabyle poetry came first chronologically, but its meaning and value for him, and his urge to anthologize it *as* poetry, were shaped by his later experience of French poetry. The foreign and the intimate were enmeshed in ways that the idea of a ‘natural line of descent’ could not capture. The sense of a kind of rivalry between the poems in different languages, or between the languages, though inevitable in Amrouche’s situation, was only part of his relationship to the poems.

Just after this in the essay Amrouche stated plainly – and correctly, in my view – that the fundamental problem he was facing was the colonial relationship (332), rather than anything in the language itself. A language belongs to those who speak it, he asserted. Pushing back against the idea that it was ‘sacrilège’ to use French to criticize French colonial culture, and at the same time challenging the idea of a ‘national’ language, he concluded: ‘c’est ma langue, et je n’accepte absolument pas que les Français considèrent que la langue française est leur propriété à eux. La langue française est une création de l’homme, elle est une propriété de l’être humain, dans la mesure où il la possède’ (332, ‘it is my language, and I refuse to accept the idea that French people can treat the French language as their property. Mankind created the French language and it belongs to any human who masters it’). It was in the same spirit



that he had cited Montaigne's celebrated line, 'tout homme porte en soi la forme entière de l'humaine condition' ('every man has within him the entire human condition')<sup>37</sup> and – in the lines I quoted at the start of this chapter – described educated *colonisés* who had nourished themselves on 'great works' as *voleurs de feu*. The nationalist, bourgeois conception of knowledge and of culture was stupid, he said; a work of art was addressed to anyone who found meaning in it.

Mustapha Kateb, a significant figure in Algerian theatre, struck a similar note when he remarked: 'Nous avons résisté à Bugeaud mais pas à Molière [...] Pour le peuple algérien, Molière n'est pas un étranger, il n'a rien à voir avec la puissance colonisatrice' ('We resisted Bugeaud but not Molière [...] For the Algerian people Molière is no foreigner, and he has nothing to do with the colonizing power').<sup>38</sup> 'Nothing' was an exaggeration, of course, as was, in a different way, the idea of 'the Algerian people' (most of whom cannot have given Molière any thought), but many 'francophone' writers recall moments in their French lessons when 'Frenchness' ceased, at least for a moment, to be a barrier, and when they as students and readers became absorbed in a French text and seemed to leave the colonial world behind them. Memmi's intuitive response to *Andromaque* was one of those moments – but in complex and paradoxical ways, given that part of the thrill lay in his sense of acquired and impossible-to-acquire Frenchness.

It may also be the case – in fact, I think it must be the case – that their experiences of the colonial world sometimes gave a political dimension to their reactions, even if it was not always wholly conscious. Alexandre gives no explanation of how he latched onto the line 'Je ne l'ai point encore embrassé d'aujourd'hui' ('I have not yet embraced him today'), spoken tenderly by Andromaque about her son, but it is tempting to speculate that the scene from which it was drawn held a particular resonance for him, and for Memmi. Andromaque is facing the possibility of sacrificing her maternal relationship with her son in order to save him, and perhaps it is not too far-fetched, despite the many differences between the two situations, to think that Memmi might have perceived some sort of emotional parallel with his parents' decision to send him off to the French school, knowing that the experience would

37 Amrouche, 'La France comme mythe et comme réalité', 55. The quotation is from 'Du repentir'; the wording in the 2007 Pléiade edition is 'Chaque homme porte la forme entière, de l'humaine condition'. Montaigne, *Les Essais*, III.ii, 845.

38 Cited by Haddad, 'Les Zéros tournent en rond', 20.

take him away from them, in various senses. We may think back to Halbwachs's remark: 'when he goes to school for the first time, [...] his way of being and even almost his very nature change. From this moment onwards he contains within himself a veritable duality. When he goes home, his parents feel that he belongs to them less and less'.<sup>39</sup> In that respect, Memmi's situation was at once specifically colonial and quite general. We may also think back to the contrast Feraoun drew between the violent situation in which he found himself and 'les beautés classiques d'*Andromaque*'. At no point, it seems, was Feraoun tempted to link his teaching of *Andromaque* explicitly to his own context, though the play is about warring imperial clans, deep tensions of affiliation and horrifying cycles of violence and revenge.

In ways suggested, perhaps, by Marrou's question about Racine's verse, the conventions of teaching at the time tended to steer students away from political connections of that sort; but, having said that, we should recognize that in this respect, as in others, teachers – and students – had some leeway, and that some canonical texts had a political dimension that was hard to ignore. The authorities too were aware of this, of course: Harbi recalls how one of his militant friends when he was in the lycée, Ahcène Rahem, was arrested for writing pro-MTLD slogans on walls (the Mouvement pour le triomphe des libertés démocratiques was an Algerian nationalist party), and, when roughed up during an interrogation, 'évoqua Voltaire, son attitude dans l'affaire Calas et son *Traité sur la tolérance*. Ce qui valut à notre professeur de français une convocation à la sous-préfecture, où il dut expliquer son enseignement' (78, 'brought up Voltaire's role in the Calas affair and his *Treatise on Tolerance*. Which meant that his French teacher got summoned to the office of the local governor and asked to account for his teaching methods'). Mokhtar Mokhtefi, in a memoir reflecting on how he became a nationalist militant, recalls that Voltaire was important to him too, as was the Rousseau of the *Contrat social*, and that it was a particular *professeur de français* who gave him a taste for reading and led him to those texts.<sup>40</sup>

The first French writer to make a big impression on Djébar, at least according to *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, was Baudelaire.

39 Annie Ernaux's *La Place* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983) treats this theme movingly; there are many other examples, a good number of them gathered in Claude Pujade-Renaud, *L'École dans la littérature* ([1986] Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006).

40 Mokhtefi, *J'étais Français-musulman: itinéraire d'un soldat de l'ALN* (Algiers: barzakh, 2016), 92.

He provided a formative experience of imaginative flight, associated in complex ways with a sense, similar to Memmi's, that she did not belong in the colonial world in general, or the colonial school in particular. Her teacher, Mme Blasi, read out 'L'Invitation au voyage', a poem about poetry's power to construct imaginary worlds. Baudelaire invites the reader to travel to a place, characterized by 'splendeur orientale' and by desires at once aroused and becalmed, that *could only* exist in the imagination, or in a poem. 'Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, | Luxe, calme et volupté' ('There all is beauty, all is measure, | Richness, serenity and pleasure');<sup>41</sup> the rhyme and metre simultaneously embody and reveal as a kind of artifice the sense of harmony, of things falling into place, that the lines describe. Like Alexandre in Marrou's class, Djébar was aware that it may have seemed anomalous to her teacher and her classmates when she responded with greater sensitivity than anyone around her: 'Je fus sans doute la seule fillette – l' « indigène » – à être bouleversée à la fois par le rythme, la musique, sa limpidité, les images furtives, si proches, presque caressantes et pourtant venant de si loin' (106, 'I have no doubt that I – the "native" girl – was the only one to be overwhelmed by the effect of the poem, its rhythm and musicality, its vividness and all its fleeting images, intimate and almost affectionate yet arriving from so far away'). Her phrase 'arriving from so far away' is partly about historical distance but above all about an imagined cultural geography.

The temptation to describe this early encounter with Baudelaire as an epiphany for Djébar is strong; in her inaugural speech at the Académie française Djébar mentioned it again, and named Mme Blasi among key figures who had given her 'la force d'être ce que je suis, c'est-à-dire un auteur d'écriture française' (14, 'the strength to be what I am, that is to say an author who writes in French'). According to the novel she perceived Mme Blasi – who intoned Baudelaire's poem with her hands clasped together 'en un geste ... de prière ? d'offrande ?' ('in a gesture of ... what? Prayer? An offering?') – as 'soudain muée en prêtresse' (101–02, 'suddenly transformed into a high priestess'). There is plenty more of this sort of religious imagery in the passage, and

41 Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, dual text edition, trans. Anthony Mortimer (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2016), 106–07. This moment in Djébar's text is also discussed by Françoise Lionnet in 'Ces voix au fil de soi(e): le détour du poétique', *L'Esprit Créateur* 48:4 (2008), 104–16, which considers the relationship between aesthetics and politics in Djébar's work, especially her doctoral thesis and *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*.

in many comparable passages, including those from *La Statue de sel* where Alexandre associated French education with light and salvation. Other examples include Abdelkébir Khatibi's comment, with regard to Corneille and Racine among others: 'Je devais mon salut à l'amitié des livres' ('I owed my salvation to friendship with books'), or Albert Bensoussan's homage to various classic writers in *Au nadir*, which gives a flamboyant twist to this mainly Catholic vocabulary:

j'accédais au temple du savoir absolu, je devenais fidèle, dévotissime, d'une culture passionnément admirée, la religion de Rabelais, Montaigne et Ronsard, les Patriarches, Corneille, Racine et Molière, les Rois Mages, Montesquieu, Voltaire et Rousseau, la Trinité laïque, et tous les *nabis*, Lamartine, Musset, Vigny, les petits prophètes, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valéry, sans oublier le grand *Eliyahou hanabi* de ce judaïsme synchrétique, Victor Hugo ...

I was gaining access to the temple of absolute knowledge, I was becoming a faithful – no, devout – initiate of a culture I passionately admired, the religion of Rabelais, Montaigne and Ronsard (the Patriarchs), Corneille, Racine and Molière (the Three Kings), Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau (the *Trinité laïque*), and all the *nabis*, Lamartine, Musset, Vigny, and the minor prophets, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valéry, not forgetting the great Elijah of this brand of syncretic Judaism, Victor Hugo ...<sup>42</sup>

When the protagonist–narrator talked in this blasphemous way he was told off by his mother, but he was undeterred, going on to describe his university as 'ma nouvelle synagogue et mes professeurs ses rabbins vénérés' (32, 'my new synagogue, with my professors its new, venerated rabbis'). Especially in this last case the profusion of religious references seems to invite a humorous, slightly distanced response from the reader, but not simply an ironic one.

Perhaps one reason writers reached so frequently for this sacred language was the close relationship between education and religion in the colonial context, starting with the very idea of the *mission civilisatrice*. The comparison made by Feraoun between teachers and missionaries was a common one. Paul Bernard, who was a director of Bouzaréah, described teachers' 'vocation' in terms of 'sermons laïques,

42 Khatibi, *La Mémoire tatouée: autobiographie d'un décolonisé* (Paris: Denoël, 1971), 79; *Tattooed Memory*, trans. Peter Thompson (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016), 69; Albert Bensoussan, *Au nadir* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 30–31.

apostolat moral, conquête morale' ('secular sermons, ethical evangelism, and moral conquest'); in a 'Lettre d'un moniteur du Bled à ses collègues' of 1961, Naoui Hasni addressed his colleagues as humanist missionaries: 'missionnaire que tu es, tu prêches la bonne parole, non pas religieuse mais humaine' ('you are missionaries, preaching the good word, but your message is human, not religious');<sup>43</sup> and Mohand Lechani spoke in 1948 of teachers as 'Pionniers [...] de la civilisation, véritables missionnaires laïques' ('Pioneers of civilization, true secular missionaries').<sup>44</sup> In all of this one could still hear the familiar metropolitan rivalry between

43 Bernard is cited in Pervillé, *Les Étudiants algériens*, 206–07; the Hasni quotation comes from the *Bulletin des CSE* 98 (Autumn 1961), reproduced as Annexe III in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 194–98: 195.

44 Mohand Lechani was another Kabyle who passed through Bouzaréah on his way to becoming a teacher and writer. In a speech at the *Conseil de l'Union française* in 1948 (printed in the *Journal Officiel* 21 May 1948, and cited by Rigaud in Jouin et al., *L'École en Algérie*, 36–37), he praised 'instituteurs français de la brousse' ('French teachers in remote schools') in these terms: 'Ils n'étaient pas seulement des instituteurs, éducateurs, ils l'étaient au sens plus large du mot. Ils n'apprenaient pas seulement aux enfants à parler, à écrire, le français, ils formaient leurs facultés, leur esprit, ils les élevaient à la dignité d'hommes, ils leur donnaient un enseignement diffusant les principes qui sont l'honneur de notre pays, ils assuraient ainsi le rayonnement de la pensée, de l'idéal de la France' ('They were not just teachers but educators in the broadest sense of the word. As well as teaching children to speak and write in French they also shaped their intellects and minds, conferring upon them the dignity of men and educating them in the principles that are a credit to our country; in doing so they spread the thought and ideals of France'). These comments are noteworthy not only for Lechani's rhetoric, some of which now appears offensive, but also because Lechani, who was a founder of the journal *La Voix des humbles*, always refused French nationality. One issue raised by his rhetoric, incidentally, is the distinction between 'enseignement' (along with related notions such as 'instruction' and 'formation') and 'éducation', terms which could – and to some extent still can – have quite different meanings and connotations. A striking example appears in *De l'Éducation des races: études de sociologie coloniale* (Paris: Challamel, 1913) by Paul Giran, a book that insists on the inferiority of certain races and their inability to acquire a French mindset even if they learn French. One chapter, 'L'Éducation par l'instruction', examines the 'theory' that 'l'éducation des enfants et celle des peuples peut être faite à l'école' (200, 'the education of children and of whole peoples may be carried out at school'; 'éducation' has a strongly moral dimension here). For a discussion of the wider historical and conceptual background to such distinctions see the entry on 'Bildung' in Cassin, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies/Dictionary of Untranslatables*.

Christianity and secular education, but, as we saw in Chapter 4, the two were knotted together in colonial Algeria in distinctive ways, and often co-present in schools.<sup>45</sup>

What is more, textual interpretation had always provided a meeting point between the two traditions. This is another large topic. Mort Guiney is among those to have written about the historical and conceptual links between literary interpretation and the interpretation of sacred texts, especially in France: his polemical argument is that since the Third Republic the modern French republican educational system has advanced ‘a catechistic model for the transmission of knowledge, especially – though not exclusively – literary knowledge’, and more generally ‘a crypto-theological ideology modelled on the mysteries of the Roman Catholic Church, under the deceptive guise of a rational, universalist, and scientific antithesis of the theology it seeks to replace’. On some crucial level, he suggests, the education system serves the interests of the powerful, and the teaching of literature is designed to baffle schoolchildren and make them feel inferior. When he mentions that Baudelaire’s ‘Invitation au voyage’ has even made it into primary schools, his point is that it cannot be understood by such young children, and is not intended to be understood.<sup>46</sup>

Guiney’s wider arguments are worth more serious consideration than I can give them here, where my particular concern is the effect on these ‘francophone’ writers of their early, formative encounters with French literature. When Djébar tells us about her reactions to ‘L’Invitation au voyage’, at a point when she was just out of primary school, she does

45 Comparable arguments about the relationship between religion, education and colonialism in India are made by Viswanathan in *Masks of Conquest*, as I mentioned in passing in Chapter 1. Kumar also examines the issue in *Political Agenda Of Education* (153): ‘literary texts were chosen with a view to inculcate Christian ethics. Literary study provided the secret door through which Trevelyan’s dream about the light of Christianity spreading in Asia could enter the Indian system of education’.

46 M. Martin Guiney, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), xiii, xiv. On this history see also Durkheim, *L’Évolution pédagogique en France* (notably 52–53/E42, 280–83/E244–46); Albanese and Guiney, *French Education*; Martine Jey, *La Littérature au lycée: invention d’une discipline (1880–1925)* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1998); Pierre Albertini, *L’École en France du XIXe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 2006); and, for a classic overview of French educational history in the modern period, Antoine Prost, *Histoire de l’enseignement français 1800–1965* (Paris: PUF, 1968).

not tell us much about what she thought Baudelaire's poem 'meant': she does not offer an interpretation, and perhaps, as Guiney's argument implies, she would have struggled to do so at the time. But in another sense she gives quite a powerful description of what the poem meant to her, and how it affected her. In more general terms she speaks of the years between the ages of 10 and 17 as a time when 'le monde s'élargit soudain grâce aux livres, à l'imagination devenue souple, fluide, un ciel immense, [...] chaque livre à la fois un être (l'auteur), un monde (toujours ailleurs)' (101, 'the world suddenly widened thanks to books, and thanks to the work of the imagination, now more supple and fluid, a vast, open sky, [...] each book at once a being – the author – and a world (always elsewhere)'). Part of what drew her in was her feeling that the poem was addressed to her – by the poet, in a way, and more immediately by the teacher. The opening lines of 'L'Invitation au voyage', which are all she quotes, read:

*Mon enfant, ma sœur,  
Songe à la douceur*

*My sister, my child  
Think of sweetness and light*<sup>47</sup>

She received the poem as 'l'invitation à la beauté des mots français ; plus que cela encore, à la respiration secrète sous les mots, rythme qui fait à peine tanguer cette voix de lenteur et de cérémonie' (103, 'an invitation to the beauty of French words; and more than that, an invitation to hear the secret breath beneath the words, a rhythm – slow, ceremonial, barely perceptible – that introduced the slightest lilt into her voice'). The way she drank in the experience, and was overwhelmed by it, is conveyed in terms that are highly corporeal and sensuous.

Certainly one could describe that experience as mystical, partly irrational, perhaps religious. Other details of the chapter complicate its relationship to religion, however, and to quasi-religious mysticism and/or authority. Part of what gave Baudelaire's words their power for the young girl (and so perhaps part of the explanation for why she in particular responded so powerfully) was their connection with her memory of a beautiful tenor voice chanting the Quran on the radio.

<sup>47</sup> Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 104–05. The particular published translation I am referring to, one of many, is rhymed and begins 'My sister, my child | How sweet and how mild'; I have adapted it here because, in French, the first two lines form a grammatical unit.

‘[J]e suis ébranlée de sentir combien la beauté est une et multiple, que même le verset coranique a son contrepoint, que ...’, she writes (103, ‘I am shaken when I realize that beauty is unitary and multiple, that each verse of the Quran, even, has its counterpoint, that ...’). The musical link, reinforced by the idea of ‘counterpoint’, is more than an analogy; something in the beauty is shared, she suggests, perhaps because it has bodily as well as cultural foundations. Of course, literature is associated with religion here; not all of Djébar’s readers will be transported, or carried along, by her descriptions; and ‘one and multiple’ will sound too mystical for some tastes. But the context of her reaction – including the educational context, and the colonial and Algerian cultural contexts – means the emphasis is elsewhere. She immediately goes on to create a link, and a contrast, between this ‘premier choc esthétique’ (104, ‘first aesthetic shock’) and her request, which had just been refused, to study Arabic in her *collège*, an episode I discussed in Chapter 2. She is especially interested, it turns out, in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry; later in the novel she mentions her frustration at having access to it only in French translation, which makes her feel like an ‘orpheline’ (277, ‘orphan’, an echo of the word used by Haddad in a similar context). As a young child she had already studied Arabic, it will be remembered, in Quranic school, whose method of rote learning she criticized, as it did not encourage real comprehension. A crucial part of the appeal of the Baudelaire poem, then, was that she *could* understand, and/or could consciously make something of the poem on her own. That seems to move the text, and the experience, further from religious doctrine or instruction and closer to the secular.

At the same time, the passage implies that the effect of Baudelaire’s poem on her was partly unconscious. When, with reference to the treatment of Arabic as a foreign language, she remarks that colonial culture ‘*anaesthetized* me, dulling the amazement I should have felt’ (105–06; my italics; this is part of the passage I discussed in Chapter 2), the criticism comes shortly after the reference to the ‘first *aesthetic* shock’ and just before she returns to her reflections on how ‘L’Invitation au voyage’ induced in her:

un émoi, un remuement que je n’aurais su définir comme « esthétique » : ce fut là, précisément, mon entrée silencieuse mais royale dans une plaine de méditation – lent et imperceptible accès à un irréel si prégnant que votre corps (yeux, oreilles, doigts qui voudraient palper le rythme, pieds qui risqueraient de déraiper, d’obliquer sans but), votre corps, oui, mais aussi votre cœur, sans que vous en compreniez le pourquoi, se retrouvent pantelants. (106)



a flurry of emotion, stirrings that I would not have known to call ‘aesthetic’: that precise moment marked my entrance, silent but regal, into the open country of meditation – I arrived slowly and imperceptibly in an unreal realm so heavy with meaning that your whole body was overcome – with your eyes, ears, fingers trying to sense the rhythm, your feet nearly losing their grip or skittering off – your whole body and your heart as well, though you didn’t know why.

According to this description, the poem conveys ideas and emotions, or stimulates them, partly through its music and its rhythm, and partly in ways that the conscious mind cannot grasp. Cognition, here, is presented as partly sensory and emotional. But these responses may also find a route back into the conscious mind; and the strongest claim one could make here would be that the aesthetic somehow worked as an antidote to the perverse *anaesthetic* of unreflective teaching and unselfconscious authority, whether religious or colonial. Baudelaire’s secular beauty becomes linked, in this passage, with Djébar’s thwarted quest to get in touch with Arabic language and literature in their non-religious (or not-only-religious) aspects, and with her own developing sense of self, which is beginning to include a certain political consciousness.

This claim for poetry’s power, or even for this poetry’s power over her, is certainly a strong one, but it is also quite conventional. When, in ‘To Civilize our Gentlemen’, Steiner expressed grave doubts about the humanizing capacities of the humanities, it did not prevent him from ending the essay by endorsing Kafka’s remark: ‘If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? [...] A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us’.<sup>48</sup> Djébar’s novel offers a lyrically performative description of that sort of profound effect, in her particular educational and historical situation. Her account of literature’s importance to her would be less engaging and rich, however, if the self-reflexive dimension of her writing were not marked by scepticism as well as affirmation about the power of fiction, of poetry and of writers.<sup>49</sup> At moments in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* she associates writing with vanity and futility,

48 Kafka, Letter to Oskar Pollak (27 January 1904), cited by Steiner, ‘To Civilize our Gentlemen’, 88.

49 The multifaceted, sometimes unsettling aspects of Djébar’s relationship to reading, particularly as represented in this novel, are analysed by Jane Hiddleston in *Writing After Postcolonialism: Francophone North African Literature in Transition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 238–54.

playing on the echo of ‘vain’ in *écrivaine* (401, ‘writer’ in the feminine, a relatively recent coinage in French); she is occasionally ironic about other texts she was exposed to as a child, including Hector Malot’s sentimental *Sans famille* (which was still widely read at that time, and made her cry) or the operetta *Les Cloches de Corneville*, which struck her as corny even as a child, from her vantage point in the chorus of *paysannes* (204); and she indicates that her behaviour was drawn into ‘romantisme’ (219) and distorted as she tried to imitate characters in novels or plays, for instance when holding forth urbanely ‘comme un personnage de roman mondain’ (215, ‘like some character in a novel set in high society’; see also 217–19 and 351). A more noxious version of the same phenomenon surfaces in *La Statue de sel*, when Alexandre is horrified at the spectacle of his mother dancing – a passage where, as we saw in Chapter 4, he vented his internalized misogyny and racism: ‘Dans mes livres, la mère était un être plus doux et plus humain que les autres, symbole du dévouement et de l’intelligence intuitive. [...] Ma mère, à moi, la voici : cette loque envoûtée par l’épouvantable musique’ (180, ‘In the books that I had read, the mother was always somebody more soft and human than all the others, a symbol of devotion and intuitive intelligence. [...] As for my mother, here she was: this wreck of a woman, with a spell cast on her by the dreadful music’, 161).

Djebar’s response to Baudelaire is different because she is not deceived. The realm into which she is transported is explicitly unreal (‘irréel’). Poetry provided a temporary escape from her feelings of oppression, and perhaps made her think differently, but it could not provide a lasting remedy. She describes herself as ‘dérivant ailleurs’ (‘drifting elsewhere’):

et moi, dans cette classe du collège, j’oublie que, pour mes camarades, je suis différente, avec le nom si long de mon père et ce prénom de Fatima qui m’ennoblissait chez les miens mais m’amoindrit là, en territoire des « Autres » [...] Écoutant, je suis à la fois dans la classe et ailleurs (103)

at that moment, sitting in the schoolroom, I forget that, from the point of view of my classmates, I am different, marked out by the long surname inherited from my father and by my given name, Fatima, which is considered very dignified by people at home but which here, in the territory of the ‘Other’, is demeaning [...] As I listen, I am once in the classroom and somewhere else.

We saw in the last chapter how deeply divided Djebar found her French schools, and the colonial world to which they belonged. For a few moments, listening to the ‘Invitation au voyage’, she felt included – but

from the outside, so to speak. She pursues the idea a few pages later, after interjecting the story about the school's marginalization of Arabic, and makes the point a wider one about literature and her French lessons:

Par la suite, ce qui me rassura – sans doute grâce à Baudelaire et à madame Blasi –, ce fut la certitude que, dans ces cours s'étalant sur les six années à venir, il n'y aurait pas, malgré les apparences, nous les « indigènes » (pas plus d'une vingtaine de jeunes filles sur deux cents internes), différentes des autres, et, d'autre part, les « Européennes » [...] Non, pas un monde divisé en deux. (106–07)

Later on – no doubt thanks to Baudelaire and thanks to Mme Blasi – I was reassured to know that, contrary to appearances, in those lessons, which would be spread over the following six years, it would not be one of those situations where we 'natives' (only about twenty girls out of a hundred in the boarding house), different from the others, were on one side, and the 'Europeans' on the other side [...] No, our world would not be split in two.

Straight after this paragraph she switches direction again: 'Cette division existait certes (plus tard, quelques scènes de réfectoire nous le rappelèrent rudement)' (107, 'The fact there *was* a split was undeniable: and I would get a harsh reminder of that fact a little later on, in the refectory') – an advance allusion to the scene I discussed in Chapter 4 – but the chapter ends with her return to the idea of the 'autre univers' she found in her reading, and the comfort it gave her, again figured in highly sensual terms.

Harbi used the same phrase to describe some of his early experiences of French literature: recalling his introduction to the Hachette *Bibliothèque verte*,<sup>50</sup> he wrote: 'Avec ces livres, je pénétrais dans un autre univers, sans rapport avec mon monde quotidien' (30, 'With these books I gained access to another universe, unrelated to my daily world'). In its context Harbi's remark makes clear that the otherness of this 'other universe' is in many ways distinctly French/European; and, to that extent, his response can be explained in terms of the exoticism – one might also say the alien quality – of metropolitan culture and lifestyles in the eyes of children who grew up in the Maghreb, whether 'European' or Algerian, Christian, Muslim or Jewish. Earlier I quoted Derrida, among others, on the outlandishness, for Algerian children, of

<sup>50</sup> There is a detailed description of the series, and a link to a full list of titles, at [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliothèque\\_verte](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliothèque_verte), consulted March 2016.

French geography and history books; as for literature, Derrida wrote: ‘La découverte de la littérature française, l’accès à ce mode d’écriture si singulier qu’on appelle la « littérature-française », ce fut l’expérience d’un monde sans continuité sensible avec celui dans lequel nous vivions, presque sans rien de commun avec nos paysages naturels ou sociaux’ (76, ‘The discovery of French literature, my access to that unique mode of writing known as ‘French-literature’, meant experiencing a world without any tangible continuity with the world we live in, a world with almost nothing in common with our natural or social landscapes’, 45). ‘Nothing in common’ could be a criticism, but in Derrida’s case too it is presented as a positive experience – the only part of his French education that he enjoyed. The ‘other universe’ was French, but it was ‘other’ in other ways too.

More than one writer talks of having discovered in literature an alternative *patrie*. This is partly, again, a linguistic matter, or a matter of the language’s historical baggage; Haddad recalls that when Gabriel Audisio said to him ‘La langue française est ma patrie’ (‘The French language is my fatherland’), he replied: ‘La langue française est mon exil’ (21, ‘For me, the French language means exile’). But for Djébar it is the literary aspect of ‘French literature’, rather than any Frenchness, that matters more, and commands the deeper affiliation. In the final sentence of *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, reflecting on ‘L’écriture et l’Algérie comme territoires’ (274, ‘Writing and Algeria as territories’, 229) she alludes to ‘un « dedans de la parole » qui, seul, demeure notre patrie féconde’ (276, “‘the word within” [...] that, alone, remains our fertile homeland’, 230). Hélène Cixous, comparably, says she thought when she was young – partly because of the anti-Semitism and misogyny she encountered in both Algeria and France – that she was not entitled to write because she had ‘Aucun lieu légitime, ni terre, ni patrie, ni histoire à moi’ (‘no legitimate place in the world, no land, no fatherland, no history of my own’). But from 1955 on, she says, ‘j’ai adopté une nationalité imaginaire qui est la nationalité littéraire’ (‘I adopted an imaginary nationality, which is literary nationality’).<sup>51</sup> Given their personal histories, this gesture by

51 Cixous was born in Oran in 1937. First quotation cited by Morag Shiach, *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1991), 24, from *Entre l’écriture* (Paris: des femmes, 1986, 24); second quotation from *Hélène Cixous, photos de racines* by Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber (Paris: des femmes, 1994), 207; *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1997), 204. By her own account, Cixous tended to react against the

Djebar and Cixous cannot be taken to imply any failure to understand the importance of having a real ‘patrie’, if that means something like citizenship. They intended, however, to testify to the importance to them of a cultural or imaginary realm at some distance from politics, especially nationalism. In the same spirit, Djebar emphasized repeatedly in her work that her own reading had ranged across many cultures or languages (at least in translation) – Agatha Christie is mentioned as an early discovery (*L’Amour*, 20, E11) – and that Algerian culture, or what we might now project back into the past as ‘Algerian culture’, had always been multilingual. Writers who were important to her, and were name-checked in her work, included Camus (described as one of her ‘frères en langue’ (‘brothers in language’)<sup>52</sup>), Beckett, Augustine, Ibn Khaldun and Apuleius. In an essay of 1995 called ‘L’Écriture de l’expatriation’ she spoke of inscribing ‘la multiplicité des langues (latin, arabe, berbère et français) à la racine même de la culture algérienne’ (‘the multiplicity of languages (Latin, Arabic, Berber and French) at the very root of Algerian culture’), then went on: ‘Par ailleurs, la notion même de « nationalité littéraire » serait donc à rééclairer’ (‘What is more, the very notion of “literary nationality” needs to be viewed in a new light’).<sup>53</sup>

Despite the geographical, historical and cultural range of her literary references, and her well-founded suspicion of the idea of ‘literary nationality’, it is still the case that a significant proportion of the authors Djebar alludes to wrote in French. No doubt that is for more than one reason. It is partly, again, because of French education’s work in promoting the notion of a national language and a national literature. Even in the educational context, however, the range of texts was broader than we might now assume. Of course, there was a canon, and there were norms; Djebar in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* recalls the whiff of subversion around Gide, whose work, which she and her friend Mag discovered for themselves, was not considered suitable for school; and she says that by reading outside class they avoided ‘l’étroitesse intellectuelle’ (‘the intellectual narrowness’) of girls older than themselves, finding that ‘les « vrais livres »’ were ‘[une] source d’exaltation et même

Frenchness of French literature; that issue is discussed by Brigitte Weltman-Aron in *Algerian Imprints: Ethical Space in the Work of Assia Djebar and Hélène Cixous* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015) – see Chapter 2, ‘Going to School in French Algeria: The Archive of Colonial Education’.

52 *Ces voix qui m’assiègent*, 218.

53 *Ces voix qui m’assiègent*, 213.

de mutation' (133–34, “real books”) were ‘a source of elation and even of transformation’) – something like Kafka’s ice axe, perhaps. Yet for the baccalauréat at the time Djébar took it (in 1953) there were no set texts as such; and when texts were specified or suggested at the pre-bac level, they were not exclusively French. The programme introduced in 1947 for *seconde* (the first of the final three years of secondary education, leading to the bac) included many of the French ‘classics’ one might expect, such as Racine, Molière and Hugo. But it also included Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, Walter Scott, lyric poets, Italian and Spanish, and the ‘principaux courants de la littérature contemporaine’ (‘principal trends of contemporary literature’) – represented, it was specified, by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Ibsen, Kipling and D’Annunzio.<sup>54</sup> The list was Eurocentric, but relatively broad within that constraint; and adventurous teachers could make something of the breadth. Lacheraf, another voracious reader, whose educational trajectory through *médersas* and lycées allowed him to immerse himself in Arabic-language literature as well as French, wrote fondly in his memoir about an inspirational teacher named Da Costa, who taught him in *quatrième*, in 1932–33, and who practised ‘un comparatisme universel très moderne dont on ne parlait pas encore ouvertement. D’une certaine façon, j’étais moi-même en plein dans une universalité culturelle et pédagogique’ (‘a very modern form of universal comparatism, an approach that was not yet being openly discussed. In a sense I myself was deep in a kind of educational and cultural universality’). Da Costa, he reflected retrospectively, a proud Basque, must have grown up speaking Basque ‘avant de se vouer à la littérature *en soi*’ (his italics; ‘before devoting himself to literature *in itself*’ (or ‘*per se*’)), framed in the tradition of ‘« humanités »’.<sup>55</sup>

What might constitute ‘literature *in itself*’ is, of course, a thorny issue. In its context, Lacheraf’s phrase is intended to move literature away from nationalism and monolingualism, and perhaps even away

54 My thanks to Clémence Cardon-Quint for clarifying for me the nature of the ‘bac’ programme at this time. My detailed information is drawn from André Chervel, *Les Auteurs français, latins et grecs au programme de l’enseignement secondaire de 1800 à nos jours* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1986), whose introduction includes a useful historical overview of secondary education, especially literary education, in that era, 3–26.

55 Lacheraf, *Des noms et des lieux*, 258. On the same page he claims that by the age of 16 he had read ‘presque tous les classiques français, étrangers, et beaucoup de livres arabes anciens et modernes’ (‘nearly all the French and foreign classics, and many Arabic books both ancient and modern’).

from Eurocentricity. Another factor working against greater eclecticism, however, and another reason someone like Djébar tended to read more in French than in translation, is that the tradition of literary study has tended to incorporate a commitment to reading in the original. This is not the place to examine in detail the foundations of that commitment, but it is worth noting that they lie partly in histories I have touched on already; not just linguistic/literary nationalism, but also the place of literature and writing in the study of Latin and ancient Greek ('dead', classical languages, valorized as the source of 'Western' culture), which influenced the study of modern languages and literatures; and the relationship of modern literary study to the study of religious texts. Some aspects of this tradition no doubt need to be demystified. But the commitment to reading in the original has other aspects that I think are more pertinent here, and cannot so easily be dismissed as mystification. The first is the belief that two people have something significant in common by virtue of having a language in common; and although that sort of belief, as we have seen, has a questionable history, it cannot be reduced to its nationalist and metaphysical facets. Djébar's idea that Camus was her 'brother in language' was based partly on some such belief; they were divided by colonialism and nationalism, and by gender and ethnicity, but shared something important in sharing French.

The other point to underline here is that commitment to reading in the original is integral to a certain modern conception of literature as such, as I have argued elsewhere<sup>56</sup> – a conception perhaps gestured towards, however cursorily, by Lacheraf's 'in itself'. I will not repeat my previous arguments now, and will say only that I believe that readers of Baudelaire's poetry, say – to take an obvious example – have good reason to hold, as many do, that a poem they value, though it may be translated successfully in various senses, is also untranslatable, and unparaphrasable, in a crucial sense. ('Valuing a poem' might mean thinking it worthy of being taken seriously, perhaps studied, and perhaps translated.) Whatever the merits of that argument, it is certainly the case that many educational institutions, including French schools, have worked on the assumption that reading poetry, and literature more generally, in the original is a significantly different experience from reading a translation or version of it, however good, in another language.

<sup>56</sup> 'World Literature: What Gets Lost in Translation?', in Jarad Zimbler, Ben Etherington and Rachel Bower (eds), *Crafts of World Literature*, special issue of *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 49:3 (June 2014), 411–26.

This must be another of the reasons why someone like Djébar tended to gravitate, as a reader, towards texts originally written in French.

Some such conception of literature is also very important from the point of view of certain writers. It was primarily as a *writer* of French, rather than a 'French speaker' or francophone, and as a writer of *fiction*, that Djébar saw herself as belonging to the same community or culture or lineage as Camus. French was their raw material, the medium of their work, and the work would have been different if they had worked in a different medium. As we have seen, Djébar's writing and her experience of writing were profoundly shaped by the particular history of the French language in colonial Algeria. She engaged self-questioningly with the issues of linguistic 'fit' raised by Haddad, which she extended and enriched through her openness to Berber cultures, including oral cultures, her attention to women's relationship to language (that is, to particular languages), and her stylistic efforts to allow Arabic and Berber to infuse her written French, inflecting its vocabulary, rhythm and structures. And it matters too that in writing she imagined – and knew – her first readership (and prospectively her only readership) to be French-speaking, or French-reading.

One of the last chapters of *L'Amour, la fantasia* offers a particularly striking image of her relationship to French, and to her emergent identity as a French writer. It is titled 'La Tunique de Nessus' after the mythological robe, blood-stained and poisonous, that was given as a gift and then killed its recipient. At the end of the chapter she writes:

Une constatation étrange s'impose : je suis née en *dix-huit cent quarante-deux*, lorsque le commandant de Saint-Arnaud vient détruire la zaouia des Beni Ménacer, ma tribu d'origine [...]

C'est aux lueurs de cet incendie que je parvins, un siècle après, à sortir du harem ; c'est parce qu'il m'éclaire encore que je trouve la force de parler. Avant d'entendre ma propre voix, je perçois les râles, les gémissements des emmurés du Dahra, des prisonniers de Sainte-Marguerite [...]

La langue encore coagulée des Autres m'a enveloppée, dès l'enfance, en tunique de Nessus, don d'amour de mon père qui, chaque matin, me tenait par la main sur le chemin de mon école. Fillette arabe, dans un village du Sahel algérien ... (243)

I am forced to acknowledge a curious fact: I was born in *eighteen forty-two*, the year when General Saint-Arnaud arrived to burn down the zaouia of the Beni Menacer, the tribe from which I am descended. [...]

It is Saint-Arnaud's fire that lights my way out of the harem one hundred years later; because its glow still surrounds me I find the strength



to speak. Before I catch the sound of my own voice I can hear the death-rattles, the moans of those immured in the Dahra mountains and the prisoners on the Island of Sainte Marguerite [...]

The language of the Others, in which I was enveloped from childhood, the gift my father lovingly bestowed on me, that language has adhered to me ever since, like the tunic of Nessus: that gift from my father who, every morning, took me by the hand to accompany me to school. A little Arab girl, in a village of the Algerian Sahel ... (217)

The passage casts light on some of the issues I discussed earlier: Djébar can evidently turn the language ‘back’ on the colonizer; and the French language as such does not constrain in any crucial respect what she can say about colonial or Algerian history. The fact she can read French colonial documents that have never been translated is particularly important to this novel, and to the historical work it does. (The point is mundane, but one very important respect in which competence in a ‘foreign’ language gives access to new ‘psychic and cultural’ realms, to repeat Memmi’s phrase, is by giving access to everything in the relevant culture, from the past and the present, that is untranslated – an opportunity missed by millions of Europeans in Algeria who failed to learn Arabic or Berber.) Nonetheless, her sense of guilt at having benefited from a colonial education and from the French language is integral to this passage, as is the sense of guilt projected towards French readers.<sup>57</sup> The image of French as a tunic of Nessus, a poisonous gift, captures this vividly. If the gift bestowed by her father – the ‘gift’ imposed by colonialism, to put it another way – was somehow fatal, it

57 The fact that Djébar felt guilt does not mean that anyone else should see her use of French as culpable. That issue must have been in her mind when she was inaugurated into the Académie française, its first member from the Maghreb. In her oration she spoke of the wounds inflicted by colonialism but spoke above all (as is traditional) about the previous occupant of her official seat, a lawyer named Georges Vedel. She recalled the long years Vedel had spent in a prison camp during the Second World War; she evoked his deep shock when he found out, after his release, about the extermination camps that had operated nearby – ‘une Barbarie au cœur même de l’Europe’ (Djébar, ‘Discours de réception’, 11, ‘Barbarianism in the heart of Europe’); and she noted that Vedel had attributed certain accomplishments in his later life to his mastery of Spanish and German, which he acquired during his years as a prisoner of war (and presumably would not have acquired otherwise). She did not need to point out explicitly that the fact he had in some sense benefited from his time in prison did not imply any sort of defence of his imprisonment, or of Nazism.

was fatal to the person she would otherwise have been, and this was a source of grief; yet her loss is set against a metaphorical birth, far in the past in 1842. The novel's loop back to a moment long before her actual birth, and then back around to the novel's celebrated opening sentences, makes it clear: what is positive in this, though tainted with guilt, is her emergence as a writer, and as a subject of her own writing, a transformation made possible for her (especially as a woman) through a particular colonial education, and/yet associated with a particular kind of freedom.

Memmi's account of his turn to writing is very different in tone and offers another complex reflection on the relationship, in writing and more widely, between authenticity and reinvention, and between the exploration and loss of self. Lacheraf's phrase about his teacher's decision to devote himself to literature as such or per se implies a link between teaching and a certain notion of literature, a topic about which I will have more to say in the Conclusion; but first it has to be said that the idea of 'devoting yourself to literature as such' appears more readily applicable to a writer than a teacher, especially if the teacher is caught up in colonial schooling. Indeed, for Alexandre in *La Statue de sel* the two paths, writing and teaching, diverge. He passes through a moment when he believes he has found within himself a 'vocation' to be a philosophy teacher; he is becoming disillusioned with the bourgeois world he once aspired to join, and he is inspired by his philosophy lessons and his lessons with Marrou to think of teaching – 'le professorat' – as 'la carrière intellectuelle non bourgeoise, indépendante des préjugés et des honoraires' (225, 'an intellectual profession that was not committed to middle-class values and that maintained its independence as far as prejudices and rewards were concerned', 207). Later, however, his disillusionment deepens to touch both philosophy and teaching. He has the horrific experience of a pogrom, and reflects that it was at the lycée that he first discovered 'la souffrance d'être juif' (275, 'how painful it is to be a Jew', 255). In the final paragraph of the chapter where he recounts these experiences of anti-Semitism, he remarks:

Que la philosophie et les édifices rationnels sont futiles et vains comparés au concret sanglant du monde des hommes ! Les philosophes européens construisent les systèmes moraux les plus rigoureux et vertueux et les hommes politiques, *élèves de ces mêmes professeurs*, fomentent des assassinats comme moyen de gouvernement. Au prix de quelles luttes j'avais choisi l'Occident et refusé l'Orient en moi ! Je commençais à

douter de ce qui me paraissait l'essence de l'Occident : sa philosophie. (290, my italics)

How vain and futile are all the theoretical and philosophical constructions of the rational mind when compared to the brutal realities of the world of men! The European philosophers build the most rigorous and virtuous moral codes, and the politicians, *taught by these same professors*, foment murder as a means of government. After how bitter a struggle, and at how great a cost, had I chosen the West, repudiating the East within me! And now I was beginning to doubt what seemed to me the very essence of the West: its philosophy. (269, my italics)

At this point in the novel we have already learned something about how, through his schools, Alexandre has entered the world of writing, which thus emerges as an alternative to philosophy and teaching. The book's first line promises to establish the main temporal plane of narration: '*Ce matin, je me suis levé avant que sonne le réveil*' (11; '*This morning I got up before the alarm clock rang*', ix; this whole section is in italics).<sup>58</sup> We soon find out that when, during his final school exam, which should have been a step towards a career as a teacher, he started writing about himself, he had effectively begun work on the book we are reading. He explains:

*Cet oubli par l'écriture, qui seul me procure quelque calme, me distrait du monde ; je ne sais plus m'entretenir que de moi-même. Peut-être me faut-il d'abord régler mon propre compte [...] La vérité est que je suis ruiné. Il faut déposer mon bilan. [...]*

*[...] [M]a vie tout entière me remontait à la gorge, j'écrivais sans penser de mon cœur à la plume.*

*À la fin de l'épuisante séance, j'emportai une cinquantaine de pages. Peut-être, en ordonnant ce récit, arriverai-je à mieux voir dans mes ténèbres et découvrirai-je quelque issue. (13-14)*

*This forgetting through writing, which is the only thing that gives me some peace of mind, distracts me from the world; I can no longer talk about anything but myself. Perhaps I should begin by closing my own account. [...] The truth is that I am a ruined man, that I ought to declare myself a bankrupt.*

58 I say 'the book's first line' meaning the first part of the novel as such; this opening section/chapter is called 'L'Épreuve', a title it shares with the penultimate chapter. The English translation calls it 'Prologue' instead. In the original French edition it is preceded by Camus's Preface, also printed in italics, which further blurs the text's boundaries.

*[...] [M]y whole life was rising up in my throat again, I was writing without thinking, straight from the heart to the pen.*

*At the close of this exhausting session, I had some fifty pages to carry away with me. Perhaps, as I now straighten out this narrative, I can manage to see more clearly into my own darkness and find a way out.*  
(ix-x)

That is the end of the ‘prologue’; after a break and a title page – ‘PREMIÈRE PARTIE | L’Impasse’ (‘The Blind Alley’) – we start on the first ‘proper’, numbered chapter, also called ‘L’IMPASSE’. Especially because it is repeated, the title may invite a metaphorical reading, but the word refers first to the cul-de-sac where he grew up; the book ‘proper’ thus returns us to a more distant past. We seem to be going back to the beginning.

Alexandre’s writing is a way of taking stock; he is attempting to understand himself, or even to establish a self, and he must begin with his cultural starting point. In some respects his decision to start writing, and to return to his origins, is akin to Feraoun’s decision to start writing about Kabylie – which, as I noted earlier, was inspired both by Camus’s conviction that the daily reality of Algeria was a worthy subject for a writer and by Camus’s failure to give Algerians a substantial presence in his fiction. In this respect, Alexandre’s writing project, or Memmi’s, can be compared to the historical and autobiographical aspects of Djébar’s writing, and her quest to give voice to the silenced or unrepresented. Among other things their writing, like that of many ‘postcolonial’ authors, is an act of self-assertion. In Memmi’s case this is clear in a passage from which I have quoted already, where Alexandre talked about failing (and not being allowed) to ‘integrate’: ‘I could see that I was inevitably cutting myself off from my own background, but that did not mean I was gaining entry to any other group. Straddling two civilizations, I would also end up straddling two social classes; and when you do that, you end up falling between two stools’ (123, E107–08). What follows immediately is this:

*C’est alors que je découvris un terrible et merveilleux secret qui, peut-être, me ferait supporter ma solitude. Pour m’alléger du poids du monde, je le mis sur du papier : je commençai à écrire. Je découvris l’extraordinaire jouissance de maîtriser toute existence en la recréant. Certes ce pouvoir me fut aussi funeste que sauveur : à décrire les êtres, ils me devenaient extérieurs, à contempler le monde je n’en faisais plus partie. Et comme on ne vit pas au spectacle, je ne vivais plus, j’écrivais. (123)*

It was then that I discovered a terrible and marvellous secret which might perhaps make my loneliness bearable. To unburden myself of the weight

of the world, I began to put everything on paper; that is how I began to write and how I discovered the wonderful pleasure of mastering existence by recreating it. Of course, this power was as fatal as it was redeeming. To describe people, I had to be an outsider and I could no longer be part of the world I contemplated. Just as one ceases to live while one watches a play, so did I cease to live, and now merely wrote. (108)<sup>59</sup>

He becomes even more isolated, but embraces this ‘*détachement lucide*’ and its, or his, ‘*étrangeté*’ (‘strangeness’, 123, E108). The next paragraph in its entirety reads:

Alors commença ma bataille à bras-le-corps avec le langage ; précisément parce que je roulais les *r* et confondais les nasales. Obscurément, je sentais que je pénétrerais l’âme de la civilisation en maîtrisant la langue. Sans cesse j’écrivais et jamais je n’étais content, voyant bien que, le plus souvent, je manipulais des écorces vides, que la chair restait non atteinte. Je me posais des devinettes : comment nomme-t-on cet objet ? Les choses m’échappaient, me restaient étrangères, me semblait-il, si je ne pouvais les nommer. Je cherchais longtemps, je questionnais autour de moi. Lorsque je trouvais, je répétais le nom à voix haute, comme une incantation. J’avais saisi l’objet, je pouvais l’invoquer à mon gré, une partie du monde m’était soumise. (123–24)

Thus began my hand-to-hand struggle with language, if only because I rolled my *r*’s and stumbled over nasal vowels. I had the vague feeling that I would penetrate the very soul of civilization by mastering the language. I wrote without pause and was never satisfied because I saw that I nearly always worked on the skin of things and failed to reach the flesh. I sometimes asked myself riddles: what is the right word for such and such a thing? It seemed to me that objects would remain foreign to me until I was able to name them correctly. So I often sought a particular word for a long while, questioning everyone around me. When I had found the word, I would repeat it over and over in a loud voice, like an incantation. I had grasped the ‘thing’ and could invoke it at will: a part of the world was subjected to me. (108–09)

Part of what is expressed here, another motivation for writing, is a compensatory fantasy of control or even dominance. The pressure of Frenchness

59 A possible influence on Memmi at this point was Sartre, who himself was influenced by Memmi. Alexandre’s phrasing is reminiscent of the famous line from *La Nausée*, ‘Il faut choisir : vivre ou raconter’ (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), 64; ‘You have to choose: live or tell stories’, *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 61. Memmi’s *Portrait du colonisé* appeared not long after *La Statue de sel*, in 1957, with a preface by Sartre, ‘Portrait du colonisateur’.

is in play, evidently, as is the normative force of a certain version of spoken French (as discussed evocatively in the context of mainland France by Serres, who was born ten years later). Derrida touched on the issue when he remarked: ‘On n’entraîne pas dans la littérature française qu’en perdant son accent. Je crois n’avoir pas perdu mon accent’ (77, ‘One entered French literature only by losing one’s accent. I believe I have never lost my accent’, 45) – adding, however, that he did not believe that anyone could tell from his writing that he was from Algeria, except when he chose to say so. Another attraction of writing, then, even more for the novelist Memmi than for the philosopher Derrida, and one that was not *only* fantasmatic, was its status as a domain in which he could choose to escape his origins, and reinvent himself.

Of course, when we read in the opening, semi-detached chapter of *La Statue de sel*, ‘*This forgetting through writing, which is the only thing that gives me some peace of mind, distracts me from the world; I can no longer talk about anything but myself*’, there is already a tension between the idea of being distracted or removed from the world, and the idea of returning to oneself, and talking about oneself. The latter idea – which equates to the apparently autobiographical dimension of his writing – may come across more strongly, at this moment and in the novel as a whole. This is partly because of its subject matter, and partly because of the literary-cultural context, starting with Camus’s Preface. Camus encourages the assumption that the text is autobiographical (an assumption challenged strongly in Lia Brozgal’s *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory*); in some ways his Preface is sensitive to the novelistic elements of Memmi’s project, and to his particular investments in writing as a domain of self-reinvention, but it also speaks as if Memmi and his protagonist were one and the same. Biographically this seems to be generally correct, but the novel as such cannot tell us, and has no obligation to tell us, when and where fiction intervenes. And in fact, Memmi makes efforts to discourage or complicate the idea that the novel is truly or simply an autobiography.

For a reader *approaching* the novel as an autobiography, the first important complication arises at the start of the second part. Chapter 7 of Part I is about the protagonist’s success in winning a bursary to support him at the lycée, and contains the passage I quoted at length in Chapter 4, where he talked about the gap between his world and that of the lycée, about his sensation of horror at the idea that without French schooling he might have continued to live in ‘darkness’, and about the fact that, although his education may have led to ‘rifts and frustrations’,

his initial reaction was one of optimism. Memmi's next chapter, the last in Part I, is about Alexandre's meeting with his sponsor, Monsieur Bismuth, a pharmacist who assumed his charge would follow his career path. Alexandre recalls approaching his office via an endless corridor which, it struck him, stifled entirely all outside sound (99–100, E84–85).

Alexandre's ambition at the time was to become a doctor, but he rejected Bismuth as a role model. He was discouraged by Bismuth's 'refus de lui-même' ('rejection of his own identity'), and discomfited (to put it more neutrally than Alexandre does) by Bismuth's physical disability; though in his meetings with Bismuth he kept those feelings to himself. Part I ends with the words: 'si je voulais devenir quoi que ce fût, il me faudrait souvent prendre le couloir silencieux. Si je le prenais, il me faudrait accepter ... ou tricher : je tricherais. Parce qu'on me permettait d'aller au lycée, je croyais déjà être victorieux. Je découvrais que la bagarre ne faisait que commencer' (104, 'If I wanted to become anything worthwhile, I would often have to walk along that silent corridor. If I chose that path, I would have to accept the situation ... or cheat. Because I was being allowed to enter the lycée, I already thought I had won the battle. But I was beginning to find out that the struggle had only just begun', 90).

After that, the start of Part II is marked with another title page: 'DEUXIÈME PARTIE | Alexandre Mordekhaï Benillouche'. The opening words of the second Chapter 1 are: 'Je m'appelle Mordekhaï, Alexandre Benillouche' (107, 'My name is Mordekhaï – Alexandre Benillouche Mordekhaï', 93). The first time I read the book, I thought for a moment that a new character had been introduced and had taken over as narrator. It seemed the story was starting again, in some sense; I thought it might be one of those novels with several strands that are introduced separately then later overlap or converge. It quickly became clear this was the same narrator-cum-protagonist after all; what explains any confusion is that, although we are a hundred pages in, we have never been told his name. And at this moment, when we are told he is not called Albert Memmi, the narrator-protagonist (even if he has the initials A.M.) is unmistakably split apart from the author. In terms of the text's biographical, realist narrative, the sudden emphasis on his name is explained in terms of his abrupt realization, when he arrives at the lycée, that his name marks him out. But the fact that the name is not the one we might have expected, and that we learn it so belatedly, gives it another level of significance. The protagonist, the new name suggests, is at least in part a fictional character, shaped not only by Memmi's

experiences but also by his imagination; and, as we restart, that issue is brought more clearly into view.

Djebar too places herself in this grey area between fiction and autobiography, deliberately creating confusion about where boundaries might lie. We saw earlier that she too felt marked out by her name in her school; she mentioned how, during her literature lesson, she could forget, temporarily, that for her classmates she was stigmatized by the name 'Fatima' and her long family name. 'Assia Djebar', as we are reminded here, is a pen name; perhaps not a fictional character in the same way that Alexandre is, but a persona born through writing nonetheless. It is unusual in her writing for her to mention her real name (Fatima Zohra Imalayène), and perhaps this allusion encourages us to think that this episode in the text was based on a real experience – which it probably was. The allusion does not prove it, however, which means that we cannot simply treat it as autobiography, or history; we cannot assume, for example, that it was truly in listening to this particular, conveniently self-reflexive poem by Baudelaire that she had her epiphany, or indeed that there ever was a single epiphanic moment.

What probably matters more than biographical veracity, for the novelist and for the reader, is the text's capacity to capture and convey the complex intertwining of the real and the imaginary, the body and the intellect, and the dynamics of flight and return. Djebar, as we have seen, is recalling how she was transported by 'L'Invitation au voyage', and/or imagining how she or someone else might have been; and, as we read, we understand that she is, or was, or can be imagined to be, in the classroom and elsewhere, in her own text and elsewhere. Later in the novel she gives the reader further encouragement to treat the novel as literature (as distinct, for some purposes, from autobiography) when she alludes, apparently pejoratively, to autobiography as 'ce succédané « laïcisé » de la confession en littérature d'Occident' (402, 'this supposedly secular substitute for confession in Western literature'), and reflects on the way an earlier self is both captured and lost in her writing:

[D]e cette écriture qui tente de ramener un lointain passé, progressivement remémoré – par là, ressuscitant une société coloniale bifide –, la narratrice en ressort, elle-même à peine éclairée.

[...]

J'en reviens à ce moi d'autrefois, dissipé, qui ressucite dans ma mémoire et qui, s'ouvrant au vent de l'écriture, incite à se dénoncer soi-même, à défaut de se renier, ou d'oublier !

Se dire à soi-même adieu. (404)



The narrator emerges from this writing in which she has recalled, little by little, a distant past, attempting gradually to bring it alive – and so to resurrect colonial society, riven in two – and she is not much the wiser.

[...]

I return to this past self, now dissolved, which is resurrected in my memory and which, carried on the winds of writing, goads the writer to declare her own guilt, impossible as it is to disown herself, or to forget!

Say goodbye to yourself.

In *La Statue de sel* the decision to write, and to invent, comes, as we have seen, both before and after the restart marked by Part II, the introduction of the narrator's name and his arrival at the lycée. If we are talking about Memmi, the decision evidently preceded the entire text. If we are talking about Alexandre, the decision was taken in the exam hall, at the end of his school years, in that opening scene where he resolved to discuss himself rather than J. S. Mill. That cannot, however, be taken simply as one of those gestures that furnish a fictional text with an internal, realistic explanation of where the text came from (as in the preface of an epistolary novel, say). What he wrote in the exam hall was about 50 pages long; a lot – the exam was a classic French academic marathon lasting several hours, and he wrote non-stop – but not enough to fill the 370 pages of the published novel. At the end of 'Examination', when he writes: '*Perhaps, as I now straighten out this narrative, I can manage to see more clearly into my own darkness and find a way out*', we might take it to mean that his exam-hall frenzy produced notes that were later expanded, but any such possible explanation is never fleshed out; and at the very end of the book, after the second version of 'Examination', Alexandre tells us in the final chapter ('Le Départ', 'Departure') that he destroyed the eight volumes of his journal before sailing off into the sunset. Even Alexandre may not be writing autobiography, in other words, let alone Memmi. It is as if, at various points in a text that for the most part may appear simply retrospective and autobiographical, the author figures self-reflexively the decision to leave behind the life he was born into and to launch himself into writing, an arena in which – unlike in his French school – he can imagine himself to be truly free.

When Alexandre/Memmi used that rather Racinian phrase, '*ce pouvoir me fut aussi funeste que sauveur*' ('this power was as fatal as it was redeeming'), it referred primarily to the power – both fantasmatic and real – he discovered in writing. Part of what made that statement itself powerful, however, was the way the 'me' was dissolved and transmuted just as it was named, as it entered the realm of fiction.

Djebar's phrase 'Se dire à soi-même adieu', 'Say goodbye to yourself', has a similar quality. Writing – writing literature – provided Alexandre/Memmi with a kind of escape, and detached him from the world even as it connected him with it in new ways. And the phrase could also be read as a wider statement, or allegory, about his experience of colonial education. School appeared as, among other things, both alibi and instrument of colonial power; and it split him from an earlier self. Like Djebar, with her memories cloaked in her tunic of Nessus, he said goodbye to earlier and other possible selves. That sort of experience, which is always complex and sometimes difficult, was guaranteed by its colonial context to be painful. But in crucial respects it was still positive – educational, in a positive sense – and left them irreversibly transformed in ways they could not measure any more than the reader can, and could not simply regret.<sup>60</sup>

60 Despite his many criticisms of the education he received, and the painfulness of the rupture from his family, Said writes on the penultimate page of his memoir: 'My search for freedom, for the self beneath or obscured by "Edward", could only have begun because of that rupture, so I have come to think of it as fortunate, despite the loneliness and unhappiness I experienced for so long' (*Out of Place*, 294; see also 186).

# Conclusion

## Education's Impact

The values European humanists like to espouse belong just as easily to an African or an Asian who takes them up with enthusiasm as to a European. By that very logic, of course, they do not belong to a European who has not taken the trouble to understand and absorb them. [...] They are only ours if we care about them. A culture of liberty, tolerance, and rational inquiry: that would be a good idea.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'There is No Such Thing as Western Civilization', 2016

[T]here is a mind of society, and it is this mind that we address, tutor, doctor, inform, evaluate, criticize, reform. Our role is highly mediated and subtle, insidious even, but as a class of people our impact on the on-going life of society in its day-to-day and even long-term affairs is very diffuse, hence minimal.

Edward Said on literary critics/teachers of literature, 1976 <sup>1</sup>

This book had several starting points. One was my longstanding interest in literature's relationship to history and politics: its peculiar forms of reference, and also its impact on its readers, its ways of working on the worlds from which, and into which, it emerged. I read Said's *Orientalism* in the 1980s when I was first thinking about those questions. I agreed with a lot of what he said and admired his sense of political purpose, but

<sup>1</sup> Appiah, 'There is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation', *Guardian Weekly*, 18 November 2016, 28–32: 32; Said, interview in *Diacritics* 6:3 (Fall 1976), 30–47: 47.

started to wonder whether his uses of literature, and of the techniques of literary criticism, truly fitted together with his discussions of politics – including, fundamentally, speculations on texts’ political and ethical effects. (I was in this territory in Chapter 1.) As I continued reading other critics and theorists, that sense of a mismatch proved not to be unusual. It struck me that certain groups of people who seemed to need a reliable account of how literary texts and films worked in the world did not always have one. Postcolonial critics, linked in this way to other critics with an interest in ideology, were one example I explored; censors were another.<sup>2</sup> It also struck me that critics, like censors, can find themselves in a paradoxical position. One of the traditional academic assumptions reflected in Steiner’s ‘To Civilize our Gentlemen’ was that literary critics should seek out worthwhile materials and help disseminate them. Some critics today, like censors, find themselves drawn to texts they believe might be harmful; and they end up spending unusual amounts of time in their company, and directing other people’s attention to the very materials whose effects they fear.

Teachers of literature are another group who must have ideas about what literature is, and what it does for people, or to people, and what it can be made to do. They (we) are also active intermediaries in the relationship between texts, readers and the world. That was another starting point: it was primarily as a prospective teacher that I began research on ‘francophone’ literature in the early 1990s, my first aim being simply to bring some of that writing to the attention of students of French. (That sort of impulse, an extension of the traditional critical work of dissemination and valorization, has also been characteristic of postcolonial studies, of course.) When writers such as Djébar and Memmi recalled their initiation into the world of French literature and the ‘other universe’ of writing, they paid homage not only through positive descriptions of the inspiration they gained from their reading, but also by writing themselves into that world. In one sense, that could be seen as a perfect example of ‘integration’, and the quality of their writing as some kind of testament to the success of the colonial education that they received. But putting it like that would be misleading, and not only because their novels work actively against positive views of colonialism. Their writing may challenge and reconfigure ‘Frenchness’ and the very idea of a ‘national literature’ or, indeed, a literary nationality, but the

2 These were the topics of my first two books, *Circles of Censorship* (1995) and *Postcolonial Criticism* (2003).

entwined myths of the ‘national language’ and ‘national literature’, and a wider backdrop of nationalist and colonial attitudes, have continued to carry weight in our era. In this academic and political context the notion of francophone writing has been double-edged, promoting a level of recognition but also acting as one of the obstacles to ‘integration’. The ‘francophone’ category has been fundamentally shaped by assumptions, implicitly racial and ‘postcolonial’, that Frenchness is somehow alien to some writers of French, however elegant and however accentless their prose. In that respect Memmi was right to think that he could never make himself, or his writing, fully French, even if he wanted to.<sup>3</sup>

Another starting point for this project – the one I introduced at the very beginning of the book – was my awareness of, and lack of immunity to, a certain anxiety about the value of literary study, a feeling that is quite widespread even in cultures where literary study is built into educational institutions and well supported. Indeed, as I suggested through the examples of Steiner and Said, it is quite widespread even among those who have put literary study at the centre of their life’s work. On the one hand, I would say that the historical involvement of education in colonialism, especially literary education, is one of the reasons why those anxieties exist, at least for some of us. On the other hand, if even moderately close attention to the history of schooling in colonial Algeria – not necessarily a ‘representative’ colony, but an important one – offers a challenge to some of the commonest assumptions about colonial education, in ways explored in Chapter 2, those views may have formed less under the pressure of colonial history itself than as a projection back into the past of the self-doubts and anxieties of the present.

To say this is certainly not to deny that ‘postcolonial’ societies are still shaped by colonialism (the usage of the ‘francophone’ label is one small example), or to underestimate how painful colonial education could be for those who went through it, and how compromised as an education. My Maghrebi corpus suggested that Said’s hatred of his colonial schools was quite common among ‘colonized’ students, who were alienated from their mother tongue and home culture and faced discrimination from metropolitan and colonial authorities, often in transgression of those authorities’ declared principles. In Algeria, as in other colonies, colonial

3 Rousseau, by contrast, one of Memmi’s outsider heroes, has long held a place in the canon of French literature and as far as I know has never been put on the ‘francophone’ shelves in a bookshop, though he was born in Geneva, and – unlike Jean Amrouche, say, another ‘francophone’ writer – never had French nationality.

education was deeply marked by racism and hypocrisy. That history also raises persistent questions about the nature and self-perception, so to speak, of the French republic, not least in relation to Islam or, perhaps more accurately, 'Muslims'. As we saw in Chapter 4, *laïcité* was strongly associated with colonial education for those Algerians who came across it at all in the colonial era; and, in some respects, *laïcité* was, one might say, secretly 'Christian', at least insofar as it accommodated Christian practices and accepted and perpetuated Christianity as a cultural norm. But if some of the colonized, or formerly colonized, came to embrace the idea of *laïcité* nonetheless, it was not necessarily because they had become 'assimilated' or Frenchified. The particular inconsistencies that marked *laïcité* in colonial Algeria did not in themselves show that the notion was incapable of consistency, and did not mark the limits of its capacity to accommodate different religions.<sup>4</sup> In other words, whatever the historical vagaries of *laïcité*, its *association* with colonialism did not and does not, in the end, tell anyone much about its prospective value as a concept. The point may be clearer because of those same inconsistencies, in fact: republicans who favoured *laïcité* in France did not necessarily favour it in Algeria, and a fair number of pro-colonial commentators believed – and perhaps something in their instincts was right – that colonialism would tend to be undermined by secular education.

One of the wider points of principle to emerge from that dimension of the history is that the 'origin' of an idea, especially if that means something like a 'national' origin, or the fact that it is associated with people or groups of whose views you otherwise disapprove, does not settle the question of its value and does not identify its shortcomings, even if it gives you clues about where to start looking for blind spots or bias. Kwame Anthony Appiah raises that issue in the essay from which I took the first of the epigraphs to this Conclusion. Attacking the very idea of an origin when it comes to something as vague as 'the west', he also makes the argument about 'association' from the other direction; the fact that a person shares, or thinks of him- or herself as sharing, a notional origin with an idea or an aspect of culture does not necessarily mean that she or he understands it or embraces it, still less that he or she owns it. Values such as liberty, tolerance and rational inquiry, Appiah says, 'represent choices to make, not tracks laid down by a

4 *Laïcité* may well hit such limits ultimately, but that issue is outside the scope of this book. My examples come from areas where *laïcité* did a poor job of accommodating Islamic/Islamicate culture or failed entirely to do so.

western destiny. [...] [C]ulture isn't a box to check on the questionnaire of humanity; it is a process you join, a life lived with others'.<sup>5</sup> *Laïcité* is less rousing than 'liberty' and is a tricky example to introduce into Appiah's framework; as a concept it is particularly hard to extricate from its historical baggage, and it may be considered a political mechanism in the service of some higher value such as equality or tolerance rather than a value in its own right. But it helps bring home Appiah's point, both because it is a very French notion that is not embraced by all French people and because someone like Djebbar was impelled, in the end, to embrace it, even as she drew attention to its French origins and colonial contamination. Rabindranath Tagore, who pushed for education in vernacular languages in India but saw some merit in Western culture/education, made the same sort of argument (in Bengali) at Calcutta University in 1937: 'What if the seeds came from foreign parts, did they not fall and sprout on our own soil? That which can grow and flourish in the country no longer remains foreign'.<sup>6</sup>

Teaching has an inbuilt impetus to build or to reinforce some sort of common culture, minimally at the level of the classroom, between teacher and student and among students. Especially in the humanities there is often some expectation that students recognize themselves in the teaching material, and it brings into play the identity or identities of the student body, as well as the question of the origins of the material.

5 Appiah, 'There is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation', 32. His framing of the issue made me think back to Bourdieu and Passeron's arguments in *La Reproduction* about the role of education in consecrating 'inherited cultural capital'; those arguments have some force, but if they are sometimes excessively mechanistic and pessimistic it is partly because they take inadequate account of the metaphorical foundation and implications of the very notions of 'cultural capital' and 'inheritance' in this context. One does not really 'inherit' cultural capital; and Bourdieu's line of analysis tends to evacuate the contents of the culture. On a related point see Jeremy Lane, 'Pierre Bourdieu's Forgotten Aesthetic: The Politics and Poetics of Practice', *Paragraph* 27:3 (2004), 82–99. See also M. Martin Guiney, *Literature, Pedagogy, and Curriculum in Secondary Education: Examples from France* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), which offers provocative discussion of the issue of high-cultural inheritance, among other things (literary culture in France is rather like Catholicism, Guiney suggests (113): quite a lot of people identify with it, without really practising it).

6 Tagore cited by Seth, *Subject Lessons*, 179. On these debates in India see also Kumar, *Political Agenda Of Education*, and Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

The label ‘humanities’ promises study of ‘the human’, but what is on offer – and what is in some sense imposed – must always be something more culturally specific. Taos Amrouche’s epiphany about Kabyle culture was a positive example, from her perspective: ‘I learned from Mme Gasquin that our land had a name ...’. Conversely, the problems of ‘non-adaptation’ emblemized by the myth of ‘nos ancêtres les Gaulois’ were glaring. It is scarcely surprising that the Frenchness of some of the material in colonial schools in Algeria was alienating for many students, and led them to react not just against the teaching material as such but against the schools, and in some cases against colonialism.

The definition of a particular norm is not the only problem here, however. There are more fundamental issues around recognition, common ground and origins, which are trickier and more pressing for the humanities, and perhaps the social sciences, than other academic areas. Perhaps mathematics is at the other end of this spectrum, if in mathematics the origins of ideas and of the students studying them are irrelevant in fundamental respects. Things are different in fields where sensitivity to the origins of ideas and the identities of students seem vital, in ways that suggest that ‘adaptation’ is vital too, and indeed that ‘adaptation’ is the wrong word, implying too strongly an agreed norm from which to depart. Yet the logic of ‘adaptation’ could imply ultimately that all teaching materials should be individual, a position that seems not just impractical but wrong in theory, not least in relation to the very notion of *teaching*. I have suggested that if one steps back from the colonial situation, education may legitimately have a role in creating, up to a point, some kind of shared culture, which among other things may mean a shared language (in the literal sense).<sup>7</sup> The risk is evident, however, that any urge to create a common culture can discourage critical scrutiny of what is and should be shared, and what is not; and in such ways education can work to reinforce a hegemonic culture – not least in terms of the ascendancy of a particular language – and to marginalize those who do not recognize themselves in it, or are refused full recognition by it.

7 Gramsci wrote about this issue in a fraught Italian context, insisting that peasants needed to learn ‘standard’ Italian as a national language even though he saw clearly that the very notion of a national language reflected a privileged group’s hegemony. See Peter Mayo, ‘Gramsci and the Politics of Education’, *Capital and Class* 38: 2 (2014), 385–98.



Memmi's *La Statue de sel* made it clear that if Memmi and/or Alexandre found his schooling alienating for such reasons, it was a matter of class as well as religion and ethnicity. In some respects his experience could be described as one of social mobility. On the one hand, his story's sense of painful dislocation could be seen as an ironic substantiation of arguments expressed by colonial opponents of the education of 'native' children – not, that is, those who thought colonial education could not work, but those who feared that it would. For teachers such as Djébar's father, on the other hand, the possibility of the upward social mobility of gifted students was a source of motivation, as it may be for many teachers today. All the same, education's capacity for social transformation – and perhaps also for creating social cohesion – is easily overstated, as Serres noted, and as Camus suggested too when he remarked, in his essay about education, 'I am under no illusions about the powers of education'. Perhaps one of the ultimate lessons from colonial education is that some educational problems, or problems that get focused through debate about education, are primarily social and political problems: discrimination, inequality, injustice, failures of political representation.

Those phenomena all marked educational institutions in the colonies, and not only because of poor levels of access to education: as we have seen, social divisions and hierarchies were repeatedly made manifest *within* schools in the distribution of desks and books, or in the playground, or in the refectory, and in social interactions among students. (Another point that has come home to me during this project is how much of the 'education' a school offers, in the broadest sense of education, takes place outside the curriculum.) But schools were not at the root of the wider social and political constraints afflicting someone like Memmi, or Said; and in that context, something like the adaptation or non-adaptation of teaching materials was a side issue. As I suggested in Chapter 3, it must have been apparent to educated, relatively privileged 'natives' such as Feraoun that the social mobility of the few, aided by schools, need not imply that mobility is possible for the majority, even in terms of greater material comfort, let alone anything like 'emancipation' or equality. This is one of those areas in which the peculiar status of the more academically successful colonial students, who in many respects were highly unusual, may have made them exemplary, helping us see something that is often obscured in discussions of the social role of education. In debates around schools and universities today, social mobility and social equality are sometimes equated, or seen as positively

linked by a form of ‘meritocracy’ of which education is the putative mechanism or even guarantor. Yet the notion of meritocracy, applied to education or more generally, may also serve to justify social hierarchy and disparity.<sup>8</sup>

The notion of a ‘common culture’ that might be reflected or built through education may have some value as a goal, then, but may also be a kind of myth; and perhaps nowhere more so than in relation to the notion of a national identity. One can concede that the real and imagined boundaries of the nation-state may legitimately be a factor in deciding what to teach, especially in a ‘national education system’, without conceding simply that the geography and history syllabus for French children should focus on French history and geography, or for Algerian children on Algerian history and geography, and so on. Viewed from that perspective, ‘France’ or any other country is almost bound to appear more self-contained, more homogeneous and stable, and more self-creating than it has ever been in reality. In the historical context of colonial Algeria, of course, the focus on metropolitan France was a still greater distortion; even someone who believed that education should explore and perhaps even foster some kind of ‘national identity’ could not seriously argue that there were justifications, when Algeria was part of France, or was supposed to be, for ignoring or marginalizing the history and geography of Algeria within the French system – requiring children to learn the names of rivers in mainland France but not the

8 One of the things that got me thinking again about meritocracy was a letter from John Salter to the *Guardian Weekly* (1 June 2012, 23) in which he criticized George Monbiot for ‘the all-too-common error of equating social mobility with social justice. Equality of opportunity, which certainly enables individuals to rise in the social hierarchy, does not have much effect on injustices within society as a whole. In fact, it renders them more respectable and thus actually reinforces the profoundly inegalitarian status quo’. The issue is treated at length in a recent book which sees ‘meritocracy’ as a smokescreen for inequality: Jo Littler, *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and the Myths of Mobility* (London: Routledge 2017). Danielle Allen touches on this issue several times, in a different register, in *Education and Equality* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2016); she argues that ‘education’s true egalitarian potential’ lies in its ability to supply ‘the basis for forms of participatory democracy that might contest the labor market rules that deliver insupportable forms of income inequality’ (31); and she links this to the work of the humanities ‘in its development of us as language-using creatures’ (48; see 43–49 and 115–16). In relation to the teaching of French/literature more specifically, see Cardon-Quint’s informative historical survey ‘L’Enseignement du français à l’épreuve de la démocratisation (1959–2001)’.

rivers around which Algerian landscapes and cultures were formed. In the case of ‘nos ancêtres les Gaulois’ the problems went deeper still, and seem to have been more apparent to many teachers at the time; the idea did not belong on any serious history course, unless studied as a kind of myth. This is a crude and notorious example, itself somewhat mythified, as I noted in Chapter 2, but it raises general questions about the politicization of the curriculum, and about the place in education of nationalism. It seems almost impossible for a ‘national’ perspective on history, say, or literature, not to become distorted by nationalism, as Steiner implied. French political/educational commentators who are wary of *communautarisme* often seem to forget that nationalism has repeatedly proved the most dangerous ‘communitarianism’ of all.

In this area too, then, colonial schools are an obvious and extreme example of a wider phenomenon. Said touched on this in the Introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, where he wrote:

Defensive, reactive, and even paranoid nationalism is, alas, frequently woven into the very fabric of education, where children as well as older students are taught to venerate and celebrate the uniqueness of *their* tradition (usually and invidiously at the expense of others). It is to such uncritical and unthinking forms of education and thought that this book is addressed – as a corrective, as a patient alternative, as a frankly exploratory possibility.<sup>9</sup>

The issue also arose for him when he was involved in a project to establish a humanities curriculum for a Palestinian open university. In an interview of 1997 he explained: ‘The general consensus was that education for us [Palestinians] had to be a form of national self-affirmation, which I found antithetical to my interests’.<sup>10</sup> The authorities’ desire to harness education to immediate political ends was unacceptable to Said, but it was far from unusual, as he recognized. One sees a similar impulse in an ordinance of 1976 regarding Algerian post-independence education; it declared one of the aims of education to be: ‘l’éveil des consciences à l’amour de la patrie’ (‘awakening in students’ consciousness a love of the fatherland’).<sup>11</sup>

9 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxvi. Similar points are made on 20 and 331.

10 Said was involved from 1977 to 1982. See Said, ‘I’ve Always Learnt during the Class’, 282. A more recent example is the obligation placed on schools in the UK since 2014 to promote ‘British values’.

11 ‘Ordonnance du 16 avril 1976 portant organisation de l’éducation et de la formation’, reproduced by Kateb, *École, population et société en Algérie*, 211–20: 211. That ruling was succeeded by another in 2008. See the website

This approach could perhaps itself be seen, ironically, as an inheritance from colonial/European education; another declared aim was ‘liquider les séquelles du système colonial’ (‘eliminating the after-effects of the colonial system’). In any case, there is something authoritarian about the idea of instilling ‘love’ of one’s country, especially if it is presented as a matter of raising or awakening consciousness – as if that love were a given, and should be constant.<sup>12</sup>

Even if students recognize or embrace as their ‘own’ the culture framed or embodied by their school, the education that transmits the culture is supposed to change them in some way; it is the change, associated with a moment of disorientation, more than the basis or moment of recognition, that defines the experience as educational. We may think back to the remark from Ruskin that I quoted in the Introduction: ‘You do not educate a man by telling him what he knew not, but by making him what he was not’. Durkheim, one of the founders of modern social science, had a similar idea, describing the desired effect of education as ‘dépayser’ – a kind of positive disorientation.<sup>13</sup> As I noted earlier, this historical rhetoric of difficult transformation is liable to sound sinister

*L’Aménagement linguistique dans le monde*, [http://www.axl.cefano.ulaval.ca/afrique/algerie\\_ordonnance-76-35-1976.htm](http://www.axl.cefano.ulaval.ca/afrique/algerie_ordonnance-76-35-1976.htm), consulted 29 December 2018.

<sup>12</sup> I am not distinguishing nationalism from patriotism, although some commentators would wish to do so. Veit Bader’s fine review essay ‘For Love of Country’ (*Political Theory* 27:3 (June 1999), 379–97), which discusses *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* by Martha Nussbaum and respondents, edited by Joshua Cohen (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), and Maurizio Viroli’s *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), is astute on this issue, and I share his scepticism about the feasibility of separating the two notions.

<sup>13</sup> Durkheim, *L’Évolution pédagogique en France*, 380, cited by Sachs, *The Pedagogical Imagination*, 35. The English translation of Durkheim’s work gives a very literal version (331–32): ‘it is essential to take the pupil out of his own country’. In general the term ‘dépayement’ is probably best translated as disorientate, with slightly negative connotations, but its root idea is indeed that of removing someone from his or her ‘pays’ – their country, or their home environment – and it sometimes has positive connotations, meaning something like a ‘change of scene’. Sachs quotes other figures making arguments similar to Durkheim’s, including Alain Finkielkraut (134); and Stefan Collini makes a comparable argument in ‘From Robbins to McKinsey’ (*London Review of Books*, 25 August 2011, 12): ‘The paradox of real learning is that you don’t get what you “want” – and you certainly can’t buy it. The really vital aspects of the experience of studying something (a condition very different from “the student experience”) are bafflement and effort’.

today, especially when linked with class, religion and so on. If, however, some sort of commitment to transformation is constitutive of education, then another of the questions brought into focus by colonial education is when and why that project or process of transformation becomes excessively threatening and painful, and/or is undermined by scepticism among prospective students and their families about where a particular education may lead.

A first answer, to reiterate an obvious point, is precisely when education is associated with colonialism or some other form of illegitimate domination. That association does not always have any particular connection to what exactly is taught; it can also come – and this is another part of the answer – from the gap between, on the one hand, the promise or even the fact of intellectual access to the hegemonic culture and, on the other hand, the society's refusal or vitiation of access to that culture in other respects: political, socio-economic and so on. A point made scathingly by Mustapha in Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, in the essay that got him suspended from school (and that I quoted in Chapter 2), was that opportunities for 'privilégiés' were limited, however well educated they were: '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' (222, 'Everyone knows that a Muslim accepted into the airforce sweeps up the pilots' cigarettes, and if he's an officer, even from the Polytechnic, the best he can expect is to reach the rank of colonel and spend his time sending his compatriots to the recruiting office', 297). This reinforces a point made just now: educational institutions do not always have the power to correct socio-political inequalities.

Another issue to emerge through the example of nationalist indoctrination concerns the relationship of the student to the authority of the teaching material, and of the teacher. In Dib's 'patrie' episode the syllabus smacked of propaganda, above all through its implicit demand for allegiance from the students and the teacher, but also because of the emphasis on repetition and rote learning. 'Rote learning' – or learning by heart – may have its uses in education, in general and in particular cultures, and may be essential in some respects.<sup>14</sup> But Dib conveys how

14 I say this partly as someone who teaches French as a foreign language. Seth discusses rote learning as part of a wider attempt to revalorize what he calls 'the traditional or indigenous knowledges of India' (*Subject Lessons*, 167) in the face of the hegemony of what he calls 'modern western knowledge'. He acknowledges that

deadening that approach can be, for students and also for teachers, and how it may imply a rigid model of authority. Quranic schools also came in for criticism from that perspective in many of the texts I have discussed: we saw examples earlier from Lacheraf, Djebar ('at the Quranic school [...] you learn the Quran by heart, so without really understanding it'), and Harbi, who criticized his Quranic school for teaching 'l'obéissance passive et la soumission' ('passive obedience and submission'). Harbi went so far as to praise his French school, along with his father, for encouraging him to 'rompre avec l'esprit de soumission' ('break free from the spirit of submission').<sup>15</sup> It is possible these remarks were meant to play on the meaning of the word Islam, often translated as submission; nonetheless, both Harbi and Lacheraf also praised the intellectual stimulation offered by the *médersa*, which indicates that what they objected to was not Islamic or Islamicate education, but particular teaching methods. Examinations could and can be a significant part of this problem, incidentally. Kumar's *Political Agenda Of Education* is enlightening on this point, and it comes up in passing in Hadjerès's 'Quatre générations, deux cultures' of 1960, where he praises a particular French teacher (and distinguishes firmly between the study of literature and the study of literary history), remembering how the class took delight in Racine and Baudelaire: 'Pas de bachotage : nous n'eûmes jamais à ouvrir avec lui un livre d'histoire littéraire. L'étude des textes remplissait toutes nos heures' (45, 'no cramming for exams: we never had to read books about literary history. Studying texts took up all our time'). One thing that is clear in the 'patrie' episode, in a system where children were condemned to repeat a year if they failed exams, was that the pupils had been taught, in practice, to trot out the answers that they knew were expected of them, without necessarily believing them to be true. Not only did this ethos not require reflection or real comprehension; it actively discouraged it.

All the same, the lesson on 'patrie' proved a stimulating one for Omar in the end, as we saw in Chapter 5. Various factors made this possible,

his own line of reasoning often relies on the norms of 'modern western knowledge', which at important points in his argument I would see as a contradiction rather than as an acceptable paradox.

15 Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 26, 30. In relation to my point about lack of social/political opportunity it is striking that Harbi, like Lacheraf, in looking back on a life full of opportunity as an influential participant in the public and political realm, could think of the outcomes of his education, where others might have emphasized internal division, in terms of cultural enrichment, or 'biculturalism'.

despite the restrictive bias of the curriculum, despite its propagandistic aspects and despite the fact that repetition and rote learning did little to encourage independent thought. One factor was a degree of abstraction in the notion of 'patrie', and in other concepts and vocabularies that formed the curriculum. Another was the sense of contradiction or mismatch between the rhetoric of students' school books and the reality of their lives. It was clear that those students were very used to feeling detached from 'non-adapted' teaching materials that were alienating less (to repeat the argument I made just now) because they dealt with an unfamiliar world than because they sought to enforce allegiance to a distorted norm that was in practical terms unattainable. Still, that material offered the chance to move between and compare the familiar and the unfamiliar, the general and the particular – a movement that colonial education could not prevent and that, in some ways, positively if not always deliberately, it encouraged. The sudden Arabic-language interjection from the teacher also helped, in Omar's case: his comments were thought-provoking, even though the children did not trust what he said, partly because they produced another contradiction. To put it another way, in departing from and transgressing the norm, he showed that more than one view was possible and he raised the possibility of a different norm, challenging the authority of the textbook and of the authorities that lay behind it ('It's not true', he said, 'if people tell you that France is your fatherland'). And if all this introduced a kind of electricity into the room it was also because the students could feel that the material really meant something to their teacher, that he thought that something important, something worth thinking about, was at stake.

One way of describing the ultimate outcome of the 'patrie' lesson is in terms of politicization, a step on the journey towards a self-consciously anti-colonial perspective, associated in Dib's trilogy with clarity of vision and political and intellectual progress. That brings us back to the question of what might have been objectionable about the prescribed lesson on 'patrie', before it went off the rails. I am reminded of an inadvertently provocative comment made by Elsa Harik towards the end of her survey of the history of education in colonial Algeria, in language far from the rhetoric of *dépaysement*: the general purpose of education, she says, 'must surely be the formation of useful, loyal, and reasonably satisfied citizens'.<sup>16</sup> If we share Dib's view that the outcomes of the 'patrie' lesson

<sup>16</sup> Harik and Schilling, *The Politics of Education in Colonial Algeria*, 37. Christian Nique and Claude Lelièvre's book *La République n'éduquera plus: la*

– and some other aspects of colonial education – were positive, it is on the basis of assumptions that are almost the opposite of those made by Harik. This is partly a matter of the historical context, which makes ‘loyalty’ sound a particularly repressive goal, and ‘useful’ not much better. But as far as education more generally is concerned – and among other examples one might think again of Said’s reaction to the prospective Palestinian curriculum – I do not think the ultimate implication of Dib’s story is that ideally something like a colonial and nationalist form of politicization of the curriculum should be replaced with its anti-colonial and nationalist opposite. Perhaps, then, if we want to avoid that crude inversion, another way of describing positively what happened in Omar’s case is to say that he started thinking for himself. That notion is also problematic, of course; thinking for yourself could include thinking incoherently, or grasping an idea imperfectly – which, as it happens, is how Omar reacted to what his teacher said in Arabic. All the same, ‘thinking for yourself’ seems to be one of the foundational commitments of secular education, evoking a process that goes beyond rote learning and is associated with a kind of scepticism, a kind of measured and careful investigation both of others’ ideas and instincts and of one’s own. This too has something to do with ‘emancipation’, as we saw earlier, and so with the political aspects of education, but at a more abstract level, and in more indirect ways.

Jacques Rancière offers an axiom in *Le Maître ignorant*: ‘l’instruction est comme la liberté : cela ne se donne pas, cela se prend’ (177, ‘education is like liberty: it isn’t given; it’s taken’, 107). If *teaching* people to ‘think for themselves’ appears paradoxical, the paradox points in two directions. First, it is a reminder of the need to be clear about the norms we are willing to promote, which may include liberty, tolerance, and rational inquiry. Second, it points to the strengths of an educational and intellectual framework that permits criticism from within, and that discourages people from accepting immediately the views of consecrated authorities.<sup>17</sup> On that basis teachers have good reasons to avoid imposing

*fin du mythe Ferry* (Paris: Plon, 1993) attacks Ferry’s vision of education partly on grounds similar to those on which I am criticizing Harik here.

17 An ignorant teacher of the sort described by Rancière does not, however, look like a general model that can be replicated, even by those, including me, to whom it appeals. Jack Halberstam writes in *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, 14): ‘*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* advocates in an antidisciplinary way for emancipatory forms of knowledge that do not depend upon an overtrained pied piper leading obedient children out of the darkness and



their own opinions too quickly, from their own position of authority. Self-scrutiny is a value that we should foster, then, as well as a condition that can make it hard to believe in our own work, especially in times of crisis. I took the story of Feraoun's wartime educational commitment to illustrate this both because he was afflicted by guilt and doubt and because he continued to conceive of the classroom in terms of a partial neutrality that could accommodate diverse opinions and unresolved differences.

In Chapter 3 I noted that Feraoun was criticized by some nationalists for his apparently apolitical conception not only of the classroom but also of writing. But we saw too that his conception of the classroom and his practice as a novelist cannot be explained away simply by suggesting that as an individual or a writer he lacked political insight, engagement or courage, since he displayed all those qualities in the *Journal*. This returns us to an idea that first arose briefly through my discussion of Said, that in some senses has underpinned this whole project, and that I want to pursue a little further in what remains of this Conclusion: that of parallels, or links, between a certain idea of education and a certain idea of the literary; the idea that the literary text and the classroom may have something in common as 'spaces' where a kind of suspension of politics may be justifiable and may have value.

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When Djébar, Memmi and others described their early literary encounters they offered glimpses into the way literature was taught in French

into the light. Jacotot [Rancière's protagonist] summarizes his pedagogy thus: "I must teach you that I have nothing to teach you" (15). In this way he allows others to teach themselves and to learn without learning and internalizing a system of superior and inferior knowledges, superior and inferior intelligences. Like Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which argues against a "banking" system of teaching and for a dialogic mode of learning that enacts a practice of freedom, Jacotot and then Rancière see education and social transformation as mutually dependent. When we are taught that we cannot know things unless we are taught by great minds, we submit to a whole suite of unfree practices that take on the form of a colonial relation (Freire 2000).<sup>7</sup> This seems to me to underestimate how far the very idea of 'instruction' implies some kind of hierarchy, uncomfortable though that may be, between the teacher and the student, between knowledge and prejudice, and between the student at the start and the end of the process.

schools in the early to mid-twentieth century. At moments the teaching they received now feels alien, though we can still appreciate why they found their French lessons inspiring. As I implied in the last chapter, the question that Alexandre was asked about Racine's *Andromaque*, 'Which line in this scene is the most Racinian?' (128/E112), is likely to baffle many readers today; and though Alexandre's ability to answer 'correctly' is impressive in its way, it may be hard to understand why a teacher would ask the question in the first place. Pondering what is Racinian about Racine through the lens of a single line of verse seems disconcertingly circular and narrow, and may appear to have encouraged a rather anaemic and apolitical response to Racine's work. Marrou was certainly no anomaly in this respect. A similar circularity can be found in the exercises on Racine in a guide for students published just a decade or so after Memmi's novel, Jean Thoraval's *La Dissertation littéraire au nouveau baccalauréat*: students were invited to apply a critic's remarks about Racine to one of his plays, and the sample essays showed that the expected conclusion was that the master tragedian Racine had perfect mastery of tragic form. There are other signs in the volume, however, that changes were underway in notions of literature and the teaching of literature. The Baudelaire sample essays struck a different note, recognizing his work, with a hint of regret, as a step on the path towards modern poetry, and offering some negative judgements of his private life and the dissolute and dreamy quality of his ideas. 'Avant la publication des *Fleurs du Mal*', the textbook claimed implausibly, 'la poésie était le domaine de la pensée claire exprimée sous une forme transparente' ('Before the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, poetry was the realm of clear thought expressed in a transparent form').<sup>18</sup>

Part of the explanation for Thoraval's enthusiasm for Racine and ambivalent acceptance of/resistance to Baudelaire lies in the French disciplinary history I touched on earlier. French as a modern 'discipline' was supposed to be founded on the classics, with seventeenth-century neo-classicism as its most distinguished modern heir, and an embodiment of a reputedly characteristic French clarity. Within that traditional discipline, exposure to plays such as Racine's, with their elevated casts of characters and their highly refined and controlled poetry, was assumed to be improving for schoolchildren.<sup>19</sup> Something of that status remained,

18 Thoraval, *La Dissertation littéraire au nouveau baccalauréat* (Paris: Bordas, Collection des Guides Pratiques, 1966), 76–79, 161.

19 Durkheim in *L'Évolution pédagogique en France* (311–13/E271–73), written

clearly, by the mid-twentieth century, and remains today, but things had already changed quite considerably by the time Memmi studied with Amrouche, or Thoraval wrote his textbook. Indeed, it is an index of the extent of change that Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, censored when it was first published in 1857, could be studied in schools (though the formerly censored poems were still avoided).

I cannot attempt to analyse or even describe thoroughly here the nature of that historical shift, but will mention a few salient points. In complex and sometimes paradoxical ways, within particular cultures or subcultures, including a certain French literary culture, literature slowly between the nineteenth century and the late twentieth century gained a significant degree of detachment from defined attributes such as regular forms or regulated uses of language, and also from moral and political obligations. Modern literature reached a point where it, unlike neo-classical drama, could be about anything; its language could be indistinguishable from non-literary language; and its authors were not obliged to tell the truth, to offer moral improvement to their readers, to avoid morally repugnant subject matter, or to say what they thought.<sup>20</sup> By comparison with the formalized strictures on neo-classical drama, literature such as Baudelaire's had considerable freedom to deal with topics that were once off limits, either because they were considered transgressive or because they appeared too banal to be worthy of artistic attention. The latter was arguably a more important reason than obscenity for the prosecution, five months earlier than *Les Fleurs du Mal*, of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*; and Flaubert's novel and the basically unsuccessful attempt to censor it can now be seen as a turning point in a process through which it became possible a century later for Feraoun to write something like *Le Fils du pauvre*, with its generally plain language and quotidian subject matter. (As I noted in Chapter 3, the idea that the daily realities of a village in Kabylie were a worthy subject of literature was still not widely accepted in the 1950s.) This

and revised in the same era, had interesting things to say about neo-classical drama, including *Andromaque*. The plays, he wrote, dealt in abstract, idealized types, and (though no doubt less 'universal' than they were imagined to be) encouraged disdain for 'local colour'.

20 In discussing these issues I am influenced by the work of Derrida, especially *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), and Rancière, including *Le Partage du sensible: esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000) and *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (Paris: Galilée, 2004).

does not mean that something like ‘literary freedom’ had simply been won once and for all in French-speaking cultures by that time; legal proceedings were launched against Jean-Jacques Pauvert in 1956 for publishing the complete works of Sade, and in the initial trial he was found guilty of obscenity – ‘outrage aux bonnes mœurs’. His successful appeal was another turning point, but did not mark the last prosecution of a literary work; also important to the French strand of this history was the writing of Pierre Guyotat, especially his novel *Éden, Éden, Éden*, which was banned upon publication in 1970 partly because of its sexual content, partly because in some complicated sense it was about the Algerian war of independence. The ban lasted until 1981. In such ways the law continued to lag behind literature, as did critical practice, especially in schools. Another aspect of this history, however, as Violaine Houdart-Mérot points out, is that from the late nineteenth century onwards there was a growing tendency to reward original and critical thinking in students, and so to diminish the magisterial authority of teachers and texts. Since 1987, she notes, the official instructions for the literary syllabus have stipulated ‘that students must construct their own meaning [from the text that is being studied] and that any textual analysis must highlight a meaning not envisaged by the author’.<sup>21</sup> Approached like this, literature is understood to be heuristic more than didactic.<sup>22</sup>

In French culture, when Feraoun, Djébar or Memmi were at school, or for that matter when they started writing, the conventions I have just sketched out about permissible (and valued) subject matter were less well established than they are today. That may help explain some of the negative reactions to their early work, though of course those must also be understood in relation to the particularities of the cultural and political climate in Algeria or Tunisia. I have mentioned some of

21 Houdart-Mérot, ‘Literary Education in the *Lycée*: Crises, Continuity, and Upheaval since 1880’ in Ralph Albanese and M. Martin Guiney (eds), *French Education: Fifty Years Later*, special issue of *Yale French Studies*, 113 (July 2008), 29–45: 44. Evidently there is something paradoxical about the instruction cited here; it encourages a post-death-of-the-author approach to the text, but asks students nonetheless to make assumptions about what the author envisaged.

22 As I have implied, this shift could also be linked to secularization; the works referenced in Chapter 5, note 46 are relevant here, as is Bruce Robbins’s interesting article ‘Is Literature a Secular Concept? Three Earthquakes’, in Joseph Luzzi and Marshall Brown (eds), *Literary Value*, special issue of *MLQ* 72:3 (September 2011), 293–317.

the criticisms of Feraoun's work from within nationalist quarters, and Djébar's first novels initially had a similar reception, as did Mammeri's *La Colline oubliée* upon publication in 1952. As Harbi explained later, he and his fellow nationalist activists worried about what other readers, especially 'représentants du colonialisme', would draw from a novel of that sort. (As I have already noted, politicized critics have sometimes resembled censors in their preoccupation with how other readers react, or are imagined to react.) Djébar complained later about her treatment at the hands of 'Zhdanovist' critics, no doubt thinking of Lacheraf among others; he was scathing about her writing in an article entitled 'L'Avenir de la culture algérienne' that appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1963, saying she knew only her 'classe petite bourgeoise' ('petty bourgeois class'), did not know the country, and hid her ignorance behind 'une « croûte » poétique' ('a thin crust of poetic language').<sup>23</sup> Harbi recalled that at that time he and other activists, including Lacheraf, tended to consider 'la création artistique et littéraire comme un simple instrument du combat politique' (99, 'artistic and literary creation as no more than an instrument of political struggle') – though some, including Mohammed Arkoun, saw the risk of 'un élément de coercition et de police des idées' (99, 'the coercion and policing of ideas').

Harbi came to regret his own attitudes from that era and rued having pushed an anti-intellectual agenda of which he himself would later be a victim (119). Lacheraf too shifted position, as we can deduce from his praise, in the memoir of 1998, of the French teacher who led him and the rest of his class towards 'a kind of educational and cultural universality', and who had moved away, in his teaching, from his own Basque identity – and so in some senses away from politics – in order to devote himself

23 Lacheraf, 'L'Avenir de la culture algérienne', interview published in *Les Temps Modernes* 209 (October 1963), 720–45: 733–34. Khatibi reproduces part of the article in *Le Roman maghrébin*, 133–37. Djébar referred to Zhdanovism in a talk of 1989, reproduced in *Ces voix qui m'assiègent* (87). Zhdanov was a Soviet theorist who believed art should support the socialist and proletarian ideology of the state. Derrida argued that the writer 'must sometimes demand a certain irresponsibility, at least as regards ideological powers, of a Zhdanovian type for example, which try to call him back to extremely determinate responsibilities before socio-political or ideological bodies' (*Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), 149–50; *Acts of Literature*, 38). These comments were made partly to explain why he signed a petition (despite his misgivings about the petition's description/prescription of literature's 'critical function') in defence of Salman Rushdie in the face of the death sentence pronounced on him from Iran.

to 'la littérature *en soi*'. In Chapter 5 when I quoted those words I noted that the idea of dedicating yourself to 'literature as such' sounded like a possible ambition for a writer, and it led me to discuss what someone like Memmi sought from the experience of writing, as well as from reading. The idea also has important implications for critical practice, the realm in which Lacheraf intervened in 1963. But it was primarily in relation to teaching that Lacheraf used the phrase, and I want to suggest now that some of the principles it brings into play may be more evidently fundamental to teaching, as I and many others understand it and practise it today, than to criticism. In that way, teaching may have a kind of conceptual priority over criticism.

Teachers of literature tend to work more directly and more constantly than do critics (which may mean the same people, at a different moment and in a different role) to sustain literary freedom and distinctive notions of literary value, of a sort associated with the shifting literary history I have briefly evoked. They do so for their student readers, and for the community and culture they help form; and they do so in at least two ways. One is curatorial. It sometimes seems that the question of literary value has receded as the syllabus has expanded, especially for those interested in pursuing political and historical themes through literature. But from a conceptual point of view the question of literary value has become more acute for critics as they have turned away from a traditional canon (even if in practice, on the page, they have also turned away from explicit consideration of literary value), as they have also moved away from traditional justifications for spending time on literature at all. Some critics in fields including postcolonial studies, rather than just extending the geographical and cultural range of reading lists, have stopped discussing literature and have turned their attention to political or historical topics that feel more urgent. That decision, like Said's advocacy of activism, leaves open the question of what value, if any, remains in teaching literature (or film, say), an activity to which they may still be attached as teachers, or perhaps through a departmental or disciplinary affiliation, if not as writers.

For those teacher-critics who *are* still spending time on literature, the curatorial function of teaching and criticism has become more obviously important (though also perhaps more embarrassingly conservative-sounding or hierarchical) in a context where it is impossible to think of the canon as self-selecting and possible to reject any idea of a canon, and where the teacher-critic must consequently act more self-consciously to give certain texts an afterlife in a given culture. In literary studies

the criteria by which teacher–critics make choices are always, it seems to me, mixed, involving a text’s form, or aesthetics, as well as content; and, as any critic would tell you, in the text, and in the teaching of the text, the different dimensions are inextricable. In selecting texts, the weight the teacher places on aesthetics or ‘the literary’ may vary, and the choices made may be partly political, and may include considerations of authorial origin that in one sense fall outside ‘literature itself’ or ‘in itself’. (We saw how much emphasis Said put on authorial origin in *Orientalism*, and it is hard to imagine postcolonial studies without that emphasis.) Yet if one’s ultimate interest is in, say, anti-Islamic prejudice, one needs to find good reasons for dwelling on, and addressing that issue through, literary texts that by definition may not express the political views of the author or anyone in particular, whose ideological contribution to prejudice thus often appears equivocal, and of whose impact one has no measure. One needs, in other words, to have some commitment to the idea that literary texts – ‘in themselves’, in the sense evoked by Lacheraf – offer something distinctive and worthwhile to their readers.

This ‘curatorial’ function is clearer and more important in teaching than in criticism because critics have less direct influence over what others do and what lives on in others’ minds. Teachers make choices for other people about what they will read (or watch, if they teach film; and so on) – instead of something else, or instead of not reading at all. I wrote in Chapter 3 about the different temporalities of teaching and of political action, in relation to Feraoun’s decision to spend his time writing novels and working in a primary school, at some distance from the realm of anti-colonial struggle, and moving to a different rhythm. All teachers (or teaching authorities, in cases where they write the programme) face a significant responsibility in choosing how students spend *their* time, and exert significant influence in that way. I noted in the Introduction that I and other teachers, rather like French teachers in colonial Algeria, oblige diverse students to read texts that they might never otherwise read. I would add that in choosing to spend their time in that way, I must rely on the texts themselves to draw students deeply into cultural and intellectual worlds with which they (or most of them) were previously unfamiliar. It may be university critic–teachers more than school teachers who now tend to worry about the validity of literary study, but those of us still teaching literature in universities are also more clearly obliged, in terms of the structure of teaching, to place some sort of faith in the educational capacities of literary

texts themselves. University students in literary subjects do most of their work away from the teacher and without any rigid textbook-type guidance on what to look for, often alone with the texts they are studying. This way of discussing texts' 'educational capacities' and this educational practice may look to some like a throw-back to an era – conjured up by Steiner, and in a different way by Said, or by the novels of Djébar and Memmi – in which it was more confidently assumed that literature was a 'civilizing' force. But if we are to continue teaching literature at all, I think we need to have a certain confidence in the continuing value of our primary materials; we undercut our own work if we talk or act as if literary texts waited mutely for critics and teachers to come along and put them in context or allow them to speak, invidiously or otherwise. We are obliged to work on the assumption that in some important senses they speak for themselves; and that, in animating readers' feelings and in various other ways, they have their own positive capacity to make their readers think.<sup>24</sup>

All the same, another way teachers help promulgate the conventions and assumptions of 'literary' culture is if and when they advocate, explicitly or implicitly, modes of reading that stand in a creative, dialectical relationship to the hermeneutic and affective richness, as they understand it, of their objects. Critics do not always need to discuss texts in that mode, even if in some sense they may still be working on that basis. Teachers of literature, however, as I am trying to describe the role, have work to do in passing on to their students not only particular texts but also a particular relationship to literary texts. Indeed, it is this relationship that makes them 'literary', insofar as literariness can no longer be understood to inhere in literary form or language 'as such'. This is another element of the literary and pedagogical framework evoked, albeit paradoxically, by Lacheraf's phrase *la littérature en soi*; and it brings me back to the discussion of Said initiated earlier.

24 David Bromwich makes a comparable point in response to Steiner among others: 'We are surprised by the SS man who reads Goethe, because we continue to think him an exception, and not because he overturns all our previous assumptions. We feel, in short, that culture tends to discourage this kind of subhuman behavior – if only because it is a mode of knowledge and knowledge tends to reduce prejudice, just as ignorance tends to increase it. This Enlightenment belief I freely confess my own. Unless one holds some version of it, I cannot see the logic by which one consents to work as an educator'. 'Comment: Without Admonition', in Robert von Hallberg (ed.), *Politics and Poetic Value* (Chicago, IL, and London: Chicago University Press, 1987), 323–30: 326.



I mentioned in Chapter 1 that when Edward Said was asked in an interview of 1997 which role he found most comfortable, that of writer, activist or teacher, he replied, ‘that of a teacher’, and went on: ‘I’ve never used my classes to talk about political activism of the kind that I’ve done. I’ve stuck pretty carefully to the notion that the classroom is sacrosanct to a certain degree’.<sup>25</sup> Along the same lines, in an essay of 1996 he wrote:

the role of the member of the academy, the teacher, the scholar, the professor, is principally to [sic] his or her own field. That is to say, I think that there’s no getting away from the fact that, speaking now as a teacher, my principal constituency is made up of my students; and therefore, there is no substitute, no amount of good work on the outside, no amount of involvement, that is a substitute for commitment not only to one’s students, but also to the rigors of the discipline in which one finds oneself.<sup>26</sup>

And in another interview, published in 1994, he stated:

I don’t advocate, and I’m very much against, the teaching of literature as a form of politics. I think there’s a distinction between pamphlets and novels. I don’t think the classroom should become a place to advocate political ideas. I’ve never taught political ideas in a classroom. I believe that what I’m there to teach is the interpretation and reading of literary texts.<sup>27</sup>

My supposition has been that readers of Said familiar only with *Orientalism* may be surprised by these expressions of commitment not only to teaching but to literature, and to the disciplines in which

25 Said, ‘I’ve Always Learnt during the Class’, 280–81.

26 As was pointed out to me in a seminar at Durham University, ‘constituency’ is a slightly paradoxical choice of word here. Said, ‘On Defiance and Taking Positions’ [1996], in *Reflections on Exile*, 500–506: 500–501. This was originally published as an ACLS occasional paper in a collection called *Beyond the Academy: A Scholar’s Obligations*.

27 Said, *The Pen and the Sword: Conversations with David Barsamian* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1994), 77–78. Said makes a similar point in *Representations*, 88. Tim Brennan in his essay ‘Resolution’ (in Homi Bhabha and W. J. T. Mitchell (eds), *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2005), 43–55), recalling his first encounter with Said in 1980, writes: ‘You took your undergrad teaching with a seriousness I found surprising, applying yourself with the diligence of an untenured professor even after fame came your way’ (45); but he notes that in later years Said drifted away from teaching, apparently frustrated with younger generations of students who were ‘unwilling to take a stand’ (46).

literature is taught. A central premise and implication of *Orientalism*, his most influential book, was that in crucial respects the ‘distinction between pamphlets and novels’ – a distinction reasserted in that last quotation – may be spurious, or a diversion from the vital issue of texts’ political impact on the world. Those familiar with Said’s role as an intellectual outside the academy and his way of advocating that role may also be surprised: as is well known, he was an eloquent advocate of the idea that it was desirable and even necessary for the critic/intellectual to break out of disciplinary and academic ‘ghettos’ and to do ‘good work on the outside’, becoming involved in ‘an ongoing political and social praxis’ (a phrase I quoted in Chapter 1).

Discussing the work of the critic–teacher in 1976, Said made the remarks from which I drew the second epigraph at the head of this Conclusion:

[A] literary professional whose main base of operation is the university must realize that he exists in a condition of institutionalized marginality, so far as the system of political power is concerned. Of course we cannot deny that as teachers of literature, as disseminators of high culture, as transmitters of civilization (pick your favourite function) we do introduce and keep alive irrefutable things in the life of society. As Lionel Trilling once said, there is a mind of society, and it is this mind that we address, tutor, doctor, inform, evaluate, criticize, reform. Our role is highly mediated and subtle, insidious even, but as a class of people our impact on the on-going life of society in its day-to-day and even long-term affairs is very diffuse, hence minimal. Unlike social scientists, we cannot play – and there is no machinery for us to employ if we wanted to play – the role of consultants to business, industry, or government. No member of our profession has achieved political prominence. To some extent we are technicians doing a very specialized job; to a certain degree also we are keepers of, kept by, and tutors to the middle and upper classes, although a great deal of what we are interested in as students of literature is necessarily subversive of middle-class values. The point is that institutionally, university literary critics / scholars are de-fused, and held nicely in check.<sup>28</sup>

Here we see again some of the tensions running through Said’s accounts of the work of the ‘literary professional’ in the university. He endorses the critic–teacher’s curatorial role, and although in some respects he views that role as a politically conservative one, in others he

28 Said, Interview in *Diacritics* 6:3 (Fall 1976), 47.

associates literature with subversion, and shows confidence in literature's distinctive powers. One reason he has mixed feelings about teaching literature is that universities, especially in the humanities, tend to cater to a privileged stratum of society (the constitution of the student body is one of the problems disguised by the phrase 'the mind of society', as Said suggests by switching his attention to issues of class); another is his perception that the direct impact of teachers of literature on society is 'very diffuse, hence minimal'. ('Impact', a word I used in the title of this Conclusion partly for its resonance in relation to governmental 'research assessment' in the UK, is Said's word on this occasion.) His strongest claims for teaching – 'we do introduce and keep alive irrefutable things in the life of society [...] [T]here is a mind of society, and it is this mind that we address, tutor, doctor, inform, evaluate, criticize, reform' – are offered, oddly, as a kind of concession ('Of course we cannot deny ...'), and are quickly undermined. It is hard to see exactly what is meant by the word 'insidious', especially coupled with 'but', but it can't be good; and the allusion to a disembodied 'mind of society' allows Said's emphasis to shift away from education and towards the extra-academic world. That leads to the claim that the impact of critics/teachers of literature is minimal; and the last sentence, like the first, implies that the lack of demand for literature specialists to serve as consultants to governments and businesses is a regrettable side-effect of 'institutional' arrangements.

The occasional literary critic may of course succeed in reaching positions of influence of the sort evoked here, as did Said himself, but as I argued in my earlier discussion of Said and the intellectual, there is no real basis on which such individuals can serve as generalizable examples for critics and teachers of literature, unless as part of an argument for dismantling their disciplines. This is not to say, however, that the work of critics and teachers of literature has no impact. If criticism flows into teaching, not least by keeping alive and renewing critics' investments in their material,<sup>29</sup> and if teaching is thought of not abstractly in terms

29 In Chapter 1 I quoted Said's remark about 'esoteric and barbaric prose that is meant mainly for academic advancement and not for social change', asking how well this captured academics' range of ambitions for their academic writing. Academic research/criticism shapes critics' own teaching and prospectively that of fellow academics not only through its content but also through the commitment to scholarship, accuracy, logic, evidence and, as I implied earlier, a degree of expertise. Literary teaching, as noted earlier, has also come to share with research

of a societal ‘mind’ but in terms of its effects on the students whom we ‘address, tutor, doctor, inform, evaluate, criticize, reform’ (most of whom then move on out of the academy), the potential influence or impact exerted by teacher–critics sounds quite significant; and our institutions and disciplines – and even the ‘system of political power’, if it supports those institutions and disciplines – no longer seem to be de-fusing us.<sup>30</sup> All of this suggests that teaching should be thought of as a – or the – fundamental form of ‘social and political praxis’ through which critics reach a significant audience and disseminate their ideas, and the primary arena in which ‘impact’ is systematically achieved in the humanities – notwithstanding our inability to measure impact of that sort. That role for teaching, and its link to criticism, is neglected or underestimated in many of Said’s arguments about the work of the critic–intellectual.

The points I have been making over the last few pages about literature’s ability to make us think (differently) and about teaching as a form of ‘social and political praxis’ seem in combination to lead towards the view that literature and the teaching of literature have something inherently political about them. One way to discuss this is in terms of the *dépaysement* that I described earlier as integral to the experience of education, and that is also closely associated with the notion of literature I have been discussing. (Kafka’s ice axe was a bold version of that idea,

a commitment to some notion of originality, which is valorized in students as well as in primary texts and in criticism itself, and helps keep criticism and teaching remain ‘on the move’ (to echo a phrase used by Said in describing intellectuals). Collini argues that this relationship between writing, teaching and thought in the humanities is misunderstood in the science-inspired framework of ‘research’ and ever-expanding knowledge; the humanities, he says, are ‘conversational’ subjects, and adds: ‘this is one reason why the close connection with teaching is not simply a historical contingency’ (‘Against Prodspeak: “Research” in the Humanities’, in *English Past: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 237–38).

30 The bracketed phrase about students leaving the academy is intended as a reminder, if one is needed, that what happens ‘in the classroom’ is never confined to the classroom. As Kamuf remarks in *The Division of Literature* (147): ‘If [...] “the public” is where one already is, how does one “move in the direction of” it?’. She argues that the idea of reaching ‘the public’ is reductive because it implies a unified address and a correct destination, and she asks: ‘Are there not forms of reception that transform the “message”? And likewise forms of address that transform the conditions of reception? Is this not even what we mean or would like to mean by teaching? And above all perhaps by teaching “literature”?’ (160).

elsewhere formalized in something like Brecht's 'alienation effect' or Shklovsky's 'defamiliarization', though there are distinctions between these theories.) Leon Sachs pursues the link in his recent book *The Pedagogical Imagination*, seeing in the notion of estrangement 'a common imperative shared by republican pedagogy and formalist reading'.<sup>31</sup> In that respect the literary-educational experiences of 'francophone' writers may again be an exemplary case as well as an extreme one; and in many respects I think Sachs and I are making similar arguments.<sup>32</sup> However, I have emphasized too that even this rather literary notion of socio-political impact does not always capture what the writers I have studied gained or wanted from literature. For one thing, even if Djébar, Memmi and their fictional avatars were sometimes shaken up by their early experiences of reading French literature, its value for them sometimes – for example in Djébar's encounter with Baudelaire – lay primarily in a sense of repose, or flight, or beauty, or something else. For another, there is a risk of falling back on over-general assumptions about different readers and their complex and varied reactions; the positive connotation of estrangement seems to assume that the default position of the imagined readership or audience is at-homeness (or even complacency), which was not the case for colonized students. There is also a risk, then, of relying on falsely homogenizing assumptions about different literary texts and their complex and varied effects in different contexts; some texts, when they provoke *dépaysement*, may call into question not the complacent views of reactionaries but the most progressive views of critics. Literature teaching still looks political from that perspective, but resistant to alignment with a particular political programme or direction of travel.

Said's sceptical approach to the great bulk of the primary material in *Orientalism* could be viewed as criticism in the mode of *dépaysement*,

<sup>31</sup> Sachs, *The Pedagogical Imagination*, 184. See also Quiara Alegría Hudes, 'A World of Cousins', in Allen, *Education and Equality*, 89–98.

<sup>32</sup> Comparable points about the exemplarity of 'francophone' authors are made in relation to intellectuals by Hiddleston in *Decolonising the Intellectual*, as noted in Chapter 3, and in relation to modernism by Keith L. Walker: 'the feelings of fragmentation and isolation, and the immobility of one's treadmill existence in a society of speed, technology, rapid communication, and unprecedented mobility; the disconnectedness from one's past and traditions, the solitude amid the urban crowd [...] – these are not merely modernist commonplaces but rather constitute the poetry of powerlessness' (*Countermodernism and Francophone Literary Culture: The Game of Slipknot* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 54).

typical of ‘the hermeneutics of suspicion’,<sup>33</sup> which has arguably been the principal framework of much academic critical activity, at least in the anglophone world, for the last 50 years or more (that is, from around the post-war, anti-colonial era, and from around the time that an ‘autonomized’<sup>34</sup> notion of literature gained real purchase in the law). Probably the greatest impact of Said’s own work, besides making colonial cultures a more central concern for the humanities, was in promoting that approach. Yet, as I suggested earlier, elements of an alternative approach could be glimpsed between the lines of *Orientalism*, as Said struggled with his apparent intuition that literary works by Nerval and Flaubert may not simply have fuelled Orientalism, and that their writing might have value whether or not on balance, in its context or later, it did fuel Orientalism – something one has no way of establishing for sure. Even in *Orientalism* it is clear that Said felt he had a duty, as critic and teacher, to do justice to their writing on something like its own terms, or ‘en soi’ – however problematic that notion. In Chapter 1 I analysed Said’s hesitation in terms of a struggle to reconcile incommensurable methodologies, which I termed literary-critical and socio-political. Another way of putting it – more plainly,

33 As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out (*Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 124), the hermeneutics of suspicion was originally proposed by Paul Ricœur as part of a taxonomy of possible approaches to texts and to interpretation; and various critics in recent years, Rita Felski prominent among them, have sought to recentre or diversify critics’ mode of response, in her case discussing and valorizing literary reading in terms of categories such as recognition, enchantment, knowledge and shock. I am attempting something similar here, though my emphasis is more on teaching than on criticism. Felski’s aim is to give due weight to both cognitive and affective aspects of reading; ‘to honor our implication and involvement in the works we read, rather than serving as shame-faced bystanders to our own aesthetic response’ (*The Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 14, 20 and passim). Cécile Bishop’s book *Postcolonial Criticism and Representations of African Dictatorship: The Aesthetics of Tyranny* (London: MHRA and Legenda, 2014) makes comparable arguments with regard to both literature and film, ‘high’ culture and ‘low’, emphasizing ‘the importance of aesthetic experience to the work of criticism, even when it is concerned with a topic as obviously political as dictatorship’ (5); the implication is that if we assume that political implications and literary/‘aesthetic’ framing can be divorced, we are not giving due weight to the constitution and reception of the literary texts or films as such.

34 Guiney, drawing on Bourdieu in *Teaching the Cult of Literature* (215), is among those to use the notion of ‘autonomization’.

and perhaps, I am arguing now, more persuasively, because it taps into something more fundamental – is that he hesitated because of the particular place that literary texts had in his own teaching. That issue, I have suggested, remains subterranean in much of Said's work, but I think the tentative reassertion of some kind of 'aesthetic independence' or literary value emerges when his attention turns to texts that he, as a specialist in comparative literature, taught or might teach. These were texts on which the views of Said and his students were likely to be slowly formed, mixed and mutable; texts that could be ambivalent and sometimes retrograde politically, but that inspired complex reactions and a kind of affection; texts, in other words, that he was not simply passing through on the way to a political point.

This argument is not ultimately about Said's own practice as a teacher, but about wider principles and methods of interpretation and of pedagogy. Some critics have viewed Said's attachment to high-cultural figures such as Flaubert and Nerval as an unfortunate residue of his own privileged education, and of the pre-postcolonial age in which he was raised.<sup>35</sup> I have wanted to show that his critical affections went deeper and were intimately involved with a particular conception of teaching in the humanities, a conception supported by the overlapping institutionalization of literature and literary education in specific forms. In that framework, literature and the classroom alike are valued as 'roomy place[s] full of possibility', to appropriate a phrase Said used in a different context.<sup>36</sup> When, in his late work *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, a text that I would suggest should be read as an essay on teaching as much as on criticism, he remarks with regard to literary texts that 'the presence of the aesthetic demands [...] an exceptional kind of close reading and reception' (64), it implies that 'close reading' is not just one approach among others, for critics or teachers, but a mode of attention that helps maintain literature within the 'aesthetic project', and that makes the 'aesthetic project' what it is, giving it distinctive life.

35 Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia write in *Edward Said: The Paradox of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999): 'One of the great paradoxes of Edward Said's career has been the apparent conflict between his role as cultural critic and those preferences that seem to locate him as cultural élitist' (9). Aijaz Ahmad (in the same critical spirit, I would say) comments that in *Orientalism* Said can be found 'alternately debunking and praising to the skies and again debunking the same book, as if he had been betrayed by the objects of his passion' (*In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), 168).

36 Said, *Orientalism*, 181; quoted above, 31.

In this book, as a critic, I have sometimes put literary texts to work in the service of particular arguments, reflecting on education's relationship to politics and history and also on literature as a cultural and educational phenomenon. But when I teach those texts, I do not expect students simply to reiterate my arguments, or to read the texts through the same thematic lens that I have deployed here. I hope they gain some knowledge and ideas from me, of course, but first from the texts; indeed, as I have just argued, I think this expectation is built into the structure of our teaching, in terms of students' use of their time, even if 'knowledge' seems over-simple as a way of describing what we as teacher-critics believe literature can offer them.<sup>37</sup> I would agree with Said – the Said I quoted just now – that my fundamental task is to teach students skills of interpretation and argument, and, as he implied, to draw students into texts that offer a rich range of possibility, and accordingly to encourage students to articulate and analyse responses that are sometimes different from my own. As Said's discussions of Nerval or Flaubert implied, texts studied as literature are imagined or understood to remain ahead of the teacher in some sense, or unmastered; they are texts that are worth rereading, that are not 'exhausted' by you or for you when you teach, that retain an ability to produce new thoughts and reactions in you and your students; texts that know things you don't know, or that think differently, in ways you cannot simply dismiss; texts that somehow challenge or stimulate or expand your emotional responses, and so on. They may achieve some or all of this in many different ways, including aesthetic form and cultural and historical distance. This is part of what keeps the teacher's own relationship to the material alive, and part of what avoids the teaching being reduced to rote learning or the simple transmission of knowledge or opinion or ideology from a position of authority.

37 When I say 'the structure of our teaching' I have in mind 'contact' hours but also the many hours that literature students are expected to read on their own, as mentioned just now. This pattern of study also puts students of literature at a distance from academic literary critics (though they/we are students of literature too), in that a much higher proportion of critics' time tends to go on 'secondary' materials of all sorts. As for 'what literature can offer them' and us, Michael Wood in *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) argues that one should resist any idea that the humanities offer only the critique of knowledge, and 'infinite doubt' (52); literature, he suggests, offers something 'harder' (in the sense of 'hard science') than understanding, but 'softer than what we often imagine knowledge to be'.



I think it was for good reasons, then, that in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* and other later texts Said went much further than did *Orientalism* in valorizing the aesthetic, and in tying it to his practice as a teacher of ‘the interpretation and reading of literary texts’. Something of this alternative emphasis was even incorporated into the 25th-anniversary edition of *Orientalism* that appeared in 2003, for which he provided a new preface. He wrote:

this book and, for that matter, my intellectual work generally have really been enabled by my life as a university academic. For all its often noted defects and problems, the American university – and mine, Columbia, in particular – is still one of the few remaining places in the United States where reflection and study can take place in an almost-utopian fashion. I have never taught *anything* about the Middle East, being by training and practice a teacher of the mainly European and American humanities, a specialist in modern comparative literature. The university and my pedagogic work with two generations of first-class students and excellent colleagues has made possible the kind of deliberately meditated and analyzed study that this book contains, which for all its urgent worldly references is still a book about culture, ideas, history, and power, rather than Middle Eastern politics *tout court*. That was my notion from the beginning, and it is very evident and a good deal clearer to me today. (xvi–xvii)

In several respects these comments form quite a contrast to those I quoted from ‘Orientalism Now’ (which of course also remained part of the new edition of *Orientalism*). When the Said of 2003 said the nature of his work was ‘a good deal clearer to me today’ he acknowledged his change of perspective. Perhaps the most obvious change concerned his relation to the university institution; and although Said’s special affection for his own university is understandable, I do not think the contrast he wished to draw was between an almost-utopian Columbia and the dystopias of UCLA, Harvard and Oxford, the universities associated in *Orientalism* with the reproduction of Orientalist clichés. His more profound tribute was to the sort of academic and intellectual freedom he found, and wanted to see sustained, in many universities around the world, including freedom from governments’ immediate political agendas – whether or not they were meant to serve a cause with which he identified in other respects, as we saw in relation to Palestinian nationalism.

Said pursued that sort of idea further in a couple of his less well-known texts. In ‘Identity, Authority and Freedom: The Potentate and the

Traveler', he wrote (403–04): 'Our model for academic freedom should [...] be the migrant or traveler: for if, in the real world outside the academy, we must needs be ourselves and only ourselves, inside the academy we should be able to discover and travel among other selves, other identities, other varieties of the human adventure'. The teacher should not be a 'potentate' trying to 'reign and hold sway'; rather, like the traveller, she or he should seek not power but 'motion', and should display and encourage 'a willingness to go into different worlds, use different idioms, and understand a variety of disguises, masks and rhetorics'. To me this argument against any crude notion of pedagogical influence also sounds like an argument in favour of the teaching of literature, particularly 'foreign' literature, or literature from the past. And he took up that theme more explicitly in the essay 'The Book, Critical Performance, and the Future of Education': 'the activation rather than the stuffing of the mind is [...] the main business of education', he wrote; and the 'activation' of the mind can come from 'a sustained encounter with the actualities of reading and interpretation', in which the study of literature can play a privileged role.<sup>38</sup>

I think it is not just coincidence, then, if the other, more subtle shift of emphasis in the 2003 Preface concerns Said's attitude towards his disciplinary affiliation, and the teaching that was part of it. Naturally, he still hoped to have an impact on the way people thought, including how

38 Said, 'The Book, Critical Performance, and the Future of Education', *Pretexsts: Literary and Cultural Studies* 10:1 (July 2001), 9–19: 14. Having agreed to discuss 'the future of education', Said felt impelled in that essay to comment: 'I should first dispel any thought here that I am an expert on education: I am not although I have been a teacher for almost 40 years' – another sign that academic critics can show a peculiar reticence about their role as teachers. He went on to quote extensively from Richard Poirier, the last quotation ending: "None [other than literature] can teach us so much about what words do to us and how, in turn, we might try to do something to them which will perhaps modify the order of things on which they depend for their meaning. To Literature is left the distinction that it invites the reader to a dialectical relationship to words that is allowable nowhere else" (Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), 133–34). To this Said adds (15): 'And of course it is in the teaching of literature, a unique situation purposely removed both from the bustle of everyday life as well as the direct political impingements of society, that such a relationship described by Poirier can occur. Dialectical because in tension not only with the inquiring mind of the student and teacher but with socio-political values imposed by a party, a political agenda, or a worldly authority'. Although I have focused on literature in this book I have tried to raise wider issues about the humanities; I

they thought politically; but he appeared more willing to accept that his influence would probably be primarily in the academic and cultural area, and that his ideas would feed into – and had emerged from – a kind of dialogue both with other specialists and with his students. When he wrote that he was ‘by training and practice a teacher of the mainly European and American humanities, a specialist in modern comparative literature’, and that ‘for all its urgent worldly references [*Orientalism*] is still a book about culture, ideas, history and power, rather than Middle Eastern politics *tout court*’, his point was not that he was incompetent to talk about Middle Eastern politics, or that only specialists in politics or in the history of that region should do so. Nor was he asserting that literary texts are divorced from politics, or denying that the teaching of comparative literature may be politicizing in various senses. Rather, he was insisting that he was engaged in a cultural and academic exercise whose value was associated inextricably with a certain distance from politics, a distance helping to create the exploratory space in which literary texts, his critical work and his students met.

In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* Said stated categorically: ‘I do not believe that, like the social sciences, the humanities must address or somehow solve the problems of the contemporary world’, adding later: ‘[I]n the main, I would agree with Adorno that there is a fundamental irreconcilability between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic that we must sustain as a necessary condition of our work as humanists’.<sup>39</sup> Such descriptions of literature and the aesthetic will sound reactionary to many critics today, notably in the whole area of postcolonial studies influenced by *Orientalism*, just as some of Said’s rhetoric about teaching may sound old-fashioned. The same goes for some of the attempts by figures such as Feraoun – writing much closer in time to the first publication of *Orientalism* than we are now – to describe what their teaching offered; terms such as *épanouissement* now look theoretically thin, and a little naive in their ‘humanism’. *Orientalism* both drew on and fuelled the wider crisis of critical confidence in the value of high culture, in itself and in education, that Steiner had already alluded to in ‘To Civilize our

think that both Said and Poirier overstate the specificity of literature’s educational capacities.

39 Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York, NY: Columbia, 2004), 53, 62–63. In the last quotation Said is, I presume, using the notion of academic ‘work’ as I have tried to use it throughout this book, to encompass teaching as well as criticism.

Gentlemen'. Along with a good proportion of critical and theoretical writing since the Second World War, Said's book gave expression – if very ambivalently, as we have seen – to the fear that the West's most celebrated works of literature were complicit in its most murderous ideologies, and that any defence of the partial or utter 'independence' of those works, recirculated in schools, universities and the world at large, made their treacherous ideological subcurrents less visible and more pernicious. When, in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said spoke of 'the enlightening and, yes, emancipatory possibilities of close reading' (67), the political spark could still be seen, but to some it will have seemed disappointingly faint; and to others it will have seemed like an attempt to ground politically an activity that might better be described in other terms. Still, a good number of us resemble Said in that we remain committed, by our work in the classroom if not by all our pronouncements as critics, to the value of literature as something to study and to teach. Perhaps, in our socio-political context, we need to renew our vocabularies around teaching and the aesthetic. If so, asserting the constitutive and necessary distance of humanities education from certain socio-political demands seems a necessary, if paradoxical, first step.

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